

SFPT Report for Fromus Meadows, April 2017

Spring in the meadows

April 15th at our Fromus Meadows nature reserve, and with no sign of the end of the mini drought, the river Fromus is almost at a standstill. Blackthorn in the thick old hedgerows has been flowering for some time, but the clouds of snowy blossoms have now lost their sparkle. The cattle have made a great impact on the reserve now they are a permanent fixture, and it will be very instructive to see what effect they are making on the flora of the meadows, and the soft areas around the ponds and the river. At first glance, it seems nothing could survive in the quagmire-like conditions created from repeated trampling by the heavy cattle, and today – weeks after it last rained – things look even worse, because the bare mud has dried and turned rock hard. However, it is very likely we will be pleasantly surprised, because disturbance like this can be beneficial to flora in the long term. In a few places, wet soil is dotted with new young plants that it will be interesting to identify later on. I photograph a plant of lords and ladies, with heavily spotted, glossy leaves.



This is the very best time of the year to wander in the Gorge. The April sun strikes through the bright green unfurling leaves of the tall trees, and illuminates the ground flora of dog's mercury, primrose, lesser celandine, dandelion and ground ivy. Small lawns of new grass on the steep slopes of the Bigod's earth dam are dotted with sweet violet, and on the steepest slopes are a few plants of wood goldilocks buttercup. This strange little flower is interesting: it has replaced normal sexual reproduction with asexual reproduction – without fertilisation. A probable consequence of its lack of need to attract pollinating insects is that it is losing its yellow petals. On the same plant, you will find some flowers with one petal, some with two, or three or four. Wood goldilocks is found in old, undisturbed places – just like this ancient medieval earthwork in fact. Down the A12 at Kelsale, the largest colony I know of flourishes in the churchyard of St Mary and St Peter, which probably dates back to the 11th century.



There are several plants of ramsons garlic on the banks of the river in the Gorge. It is a handsome plant in flower, but it can swiftly come to dominate swathes of ground if the habitat is right, and possibly it will come to love the shaded depths of the Gorge, where it could smother other native plants. Beside the faltering river Fromus in its deep cutting, I am being closely watched by one of the British White cattle. I look at her, and she looks at me.



Laurie Forsyth