

Report for Orchid Glade : April 2017

Sunny, chilly and very dry

April 13th in the Orchid Glade. The reserve is a vision in green, and since I was last here several new shades have added to the effect because different species of trees and shrubs have unfurled their brand-new leaves. The ever-hungry fallow deer at last have something fresh and tasty to eat, and looking around, I can trace their browsing line all around the reserve. Prolonged dry, cold spring weather is well known in Suffolk, and traditional April showers have not been reliable for years. In this dry spell, the pond water level remains high, although mud patches churned by the deer in the winter are now dry and hard.



I hear bird song – chiffchaff, blackcap, robin. Myriad plants just an inch or so high carpet the reserve, but the only flowers I find are ground ivy, dandelion, wood sedge and glaucous sedge. All the others are busy developing new leaves, and a multitude of flattened leaf rosettes pressed close to the ground demonstrate the success of this particular adaptation to the intense pressures from incessant grazing and browsing that goes on in the reserve every day of the year. Among them are the sharp, bright green leaves of many southern marsh orchids. One of the plants that survives without the need for foliage pressed close to the ground is hairy St John's wort: I photograph some with new leaves and stems six inches high. A single young cherry tree is a mass of blossom, but the flower buds on hawthorn trees won't open for a fortnight.



There are many hundreds – thousands? – of newly hatched tadpoles in the shallow water at the edge of the pond. On my last visit, there was lots of frogspawn, and also toad spawn, which – luckily – is totally different in appearance, like black bootlaces. A feather preened out by a heron is floating in the pond. The small island in the pond is intended for nesting birds, and today I have spotted a cluster of loose, downy feathers that look interesting. I can't reach the inaccessible island, but through binoculars I can see the striated back plumage of a mallard duck on what is plainly her nest. To reduce her profile, she has lowered her head and is craning her neck forward.



Laurie Forsyth