

SFPT Fromus Meadows report for June 2017

Cattle in the meadows

Early June in our Fromus reserve. It's a sunny, breezy day, and there's a bright golden haze in the meadows — or some of them. My first encounter has been a stealthy black cat, up to no good. And then I met the fox. He was moving through the meadow by the Long Pond, nose to ground, his brush at half-mast. He sensed me, spun in his tracks and was suddenly not there any more. Tufted forget-me-not is flowering in the shallow water, with thread-leaved water crowfoot and woody nightshade. In dry grassland nearby, lots of common birdsfoot trefoil is attracting bumblebees.

For an unknown reason, there is a deep circular hole in the riverbed of the Fromus, a few yards from the Long Pond. The river itself is dry, but the hole is full of water. Whirligig beetles are whizzing madly across the surface of the little pond, and watercress is pushing its white flowers through a bed of brooklime with its very small, blue, speedwell-type flowers. A four-spotted chaser dragonfly is perched on a dead twig, lord of his watery domain.

A blackcap is loudly singing in the depths of a hawthorn, and a swallow has just zipped low across the golden buttercups. I have seen several grasses in flower: meadow foxtail, Yorkshire fog, false oat grass, wood false brome, barren brome, cocksfoot, rough meadow grass and red fescue. June is the month for roses, and I have seen some fine dog roses — some white, and some a quite strong pink. Little shiny-green thick-kneed flower beetles are busy munching the rose pollen. Reaching for the sky, small white stars amongst the taller grasses are lesser stitchwort, and mixed with them are their look-alikes, common mouse ear.

Protected by a fence from the appetites and the heavy hooves of the resident British White cattle, the orchid colony is looking very good today. I have counted about thirty southern marsh orchids and three common spotted orchids. Surrounding them are meadow buttercups, dancing on their slender flower stalks above the grasses and blue birds eye speedwell.

The Circular Pond is looking deflated today: it's the best word to describe its appearance. Before the cattle arrived, the summer pond was fringed with grasses, rushes and sedges, cupping a circle of reedy water that reflected the clouds: it was beautiful. Hopefully, everything will regrow to how it was. It is a fine pond, teeming with life. Ragged robin is in flower in the very damp, sloping buttercup meadow hidden behind the statuesque oak. I can see sheets of greater birdsfoot trefoil that will soon rival the buttercups in their colour.

Laurie Forsyth