

## **SFPT Orchid Glade report for July 2017-07-06**

### **High summer in our Orchid Glade**

**It's the first week in July, and it's hot and humid in our reserve at Hasketon. The date and the weather are perfect for clegs, and I have just given blood to bring you this report. Clegs are a type of horse fly, and the female needs blood if she is to lay eggs. Silent in flight and stealthy of manner, she homes in on our body warmth and does the deed, and pretty painful it is, too. We are very selective when we think of 'wildlife', and don't really consider clegs, mosquitoes and all the other nasties to be proper wildlife, although they are all as much a part of the nature reserve as the orchids.**

**Over by the pond, a trampled mud edge shows where the fallow deer gathered last night to drink. Usually, the surface of the pond is bare of floating vegetation: since spring though, I have seen the pointed oval leaves of broad-leaved pondweed. This is a new record for the reserve, but much more important, the floating leaves are exactly what is needed by dragonflies. I have counted four female Emperor dragonflies gripping the leaves whilst their abdomens are dipping below the surface to lay eggs into the stems of the pondweed. A pair of broad-bodied chaser dragonflies are zipping around the pond with amazing speed and agility, and many damselflies are patrolling and egg laying around the edges.**

**I think I can honestly say the flora today is the best that I have seen in the Orchid Glade since I began recording here. After what was perhaps our best-ever orchid season in the spring and early summer (four species), I believe that, right now, five species are simultaneously putting on their best show in my experience: common centaury, red bartsia, common agrimony, white clover and marsh woundwort. The last is particularly satisfying, because it is as handsome as any orchid, and because it has increased from a single colony to at least five. I have not seen a single plant of common fleabane in flower: soon though, a sea of yellow will wash through the reserve. Numerically, fleabane is our biggest hitter, and could outnumber all the other species twice over. There is a photogenic clump of square-stemmed St John's wort near the pond: a patch of centaury is also obliging, on the opposite side.**

Bumblebees love clover, and it is good to see so many ploughing through the massed white flowers. Ringlets — dark brown and mint-fresh — are jinking among the grasses and bramble flowers. They seem to keep flying forever without settling, which makes it a real job to get a photograph. Meadow browns are also on the wing, but they are few, and looking very worn, in contrast to the newly emerged gatekeepers. At last — I get an easy butterfly photograph: a pair of small skippers together on the flower cluster of a tall marsh thistle. If this weather continues, the butterfly populations may be able to recover a little from the disasters of the last few years. It appears to be a fact that milder winters are very bad indeed for many species, and there is nothing we can do about that. Two new plant species today — broad-leaved pondweed and field bindweed. Despite the management difficulties in maintaining the health of this outstanding reserve, I am feeling upbeat as I leave.

*Laurie Forsyth*