

SFPT Orchid Glade report for September

A last taste of summer

A beautiful 9th September at the Orchid Glade, and speckled wood and small white butterflies are jinking through the flowers. Most of the flora is yellow at the moment, but the colour is solely from the large population of hoary ragwort. The common fleabane – possibly the most abundant species in the reserve – is now a sea of brown seeding heads. The flora has had a superb year; the mixture of rain and sun creating a dense cover of vegetation that is not easy to walk through.

Although the rain has been frequent at times, the level of the pond is falling. Common pondweed — a recent newcomer in the pond — looks as though it is here to stay. The single patch I saw earlier in the year has increased to six — which is good news for the dragonfly and damselfly larvae that need floating and emergent plants so they can climb up from the water and metamorphose into adults. Right now, a pair of emperor dragonflies are zipping around the pond. Suddenly, they clasp each other in the mating embrace, and as one they zoom vertically up above the tallest trees and are gone.

A hornet is on patrol, low, near the ground. It has a steady, purposeful air, and may be on the hunt. Hornets are carnivorous, and will seize flies, damselflies and even butterflies if they can. Orange hips are glowing at the tips of arching dog roses, and apples dangle just within reach on twigs that were a mass of blossom in May. A noisy green woodpecker just landed in a tree beside the pond, saw me, and flew. Small, pale toadstools have pushed up overnight through the grass. The carcass of the young badger that I moved ten metres to the edge of the reserve early in August has mysteriously moved back to its original position. Close to the pond, corn mint is abundant and in full flower, and I have found the small pink stars of common centaury: red bartsia is still flowering, but I have not found the small patch of blue fleabane discovered in 2015. In mud beside the pond are several plants of gypsywort, which is like a white-flowered mint, with serrated, nettle-like leaves. Damp ground, pond edges and marshes are its place, and it is good to see it beside our pond. Deer tracks in the mud suggest that buried seed may have been revealed, and they have germinated. Not so with Canadian fleabane, which I just found near the gypsywort. Its scores of small flowers develop into dandelion-like clocks that waft seed for miles. Canadian fleabane and gypsywort are both new records for the Orchid Glade.

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