

Autumn comes to Orchid Glade, October 2017

Yesterday, Orchid Glade received a terrific soaking, and looking around today, I have to admit that 'bedraggled' is an apt word to describe what I see. Nevertheless, rain is good, and particularly so for this reserve, which sits on Boulder Clay and has a flora that is well adapted to showers, deluges and even localised flooding at times. As expected, there are few insects visible, apart from a single hornet inspecting dangling yellow apples, and several small crane fly-like flies. The flowers are even fewer, and widely scattered. I have found common centaury, with its pink flowers closed, plus one bristly ox-tongue (yellow), one hoary ragwort (yellow), and several marsh thistles (purple). At the back of the pond, a large willow tree has split.

Many plants look quite attractive in the autumn and winter, but nobody has ever said that about common fleabane in October. Arguably the most abundant plant in the Orchid Glade, and most definitely the greatest contributor of colour in August, fleabane is now black from top to toe. Regiments of black plants swathe areas of the reserve, so it is the trees and shrubs that splash colour wherever they are. Hazel, field maple, hornbeam, ash and hawthorn are looking wonderful, but oak has yet to show much colour. Alder is still summer-green, and its myriad shoots of regrowth from cut stumps are still vigorously growing, which is inevitable but unwelcome.

So far, birds have been scarce. I have seen jay, blue tit, blackbird and robin, and a buzzard just sailed over the reserve. A solitary fallow doe just made herself scarce as I approached: I think a small herd browse across the reserve after dark, and the pond is heavily trampled around its perimeter. A small dragonfly — a darter? — is zooming around the pond, and the shiny floating leaves of common pondweed show that the plant is now well established in the shallow water — a definite plus for invertebrates in the pond.

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