

Members Spring Walk on Saturday 27th April by Bob Johnson

Luckily the weather forecast was dry and remained so, even though it was fairly wet and muddy under foot in places for the seventeen of us who attended the walk. At 9am a short introductory talk on the morning events was given, which included some details about the heronry and young Grey Herons and Cormorants to be seen. We then had a quick look over the water from the car park. A pair of Common Terns and Black Headed Gulls were showing on the nesting rafts, a pair of Great Crested Grebes were displaying and a few Swallows were evident. A kingfisher was seen by some.

As we started the walk, we soon saw a flying female Mandarin as it come out of a nearby nest box. A talking point was a piece of blue green coloured wood. The colour was due to it being covered in Green Elf-cup fungus which is locally common and stains the wood. This wood had local commercial use back in the 18th and 19th centuries, being used as part of intricate inlay work such as jewellery boxes and tea caddies and known as Tunbridge Ware. Also here we heard beautiful bird song from a Blackcap and a Song Thrush.

The woodland spring flowers were now becoming very evident, including Garlic Mustard, a food plant of the Orange Tip butterfly. As we approached what we call the Iron Bog, a rarer small white flowering plant was pointed out, Three Nerved Sandwort (See Pic bottom of report), considered an ancient woodland indicator, although it can be found in later woods. The Iron Bog is a feature kept permanently wet/boggy by an underground spring, an area we are trying to manage so it is a little more open and attractive to dragonflies and wildlife generally.

As we walked along, Blue and Great Tits, Robin, Blackbird and Wren could be heard or seen. A little further on we stopped and looked at the pondlet and had another listen for birds with more Blackcap song, before moving into our Common Spotted Orchid area. There were plenty of plants, but it was too early for any to be in flower. However, we now pointed out some Adderstongue Ferns, tiny single leaf plants with a thin pointed spadix which carries spores rather than flowers, a fairly uncommon plant away from chalky areas.



We have many small nest boxes that are used by tits in the area which included a breeding Marsh Tit pair, and we briefly looked into a tit box that held small young.

Pic Left – Great Tit young.

The next part of the walk was into semi-ancient woodland where the ground was covered in Bluebells and holds some scarcer White Bluebells.

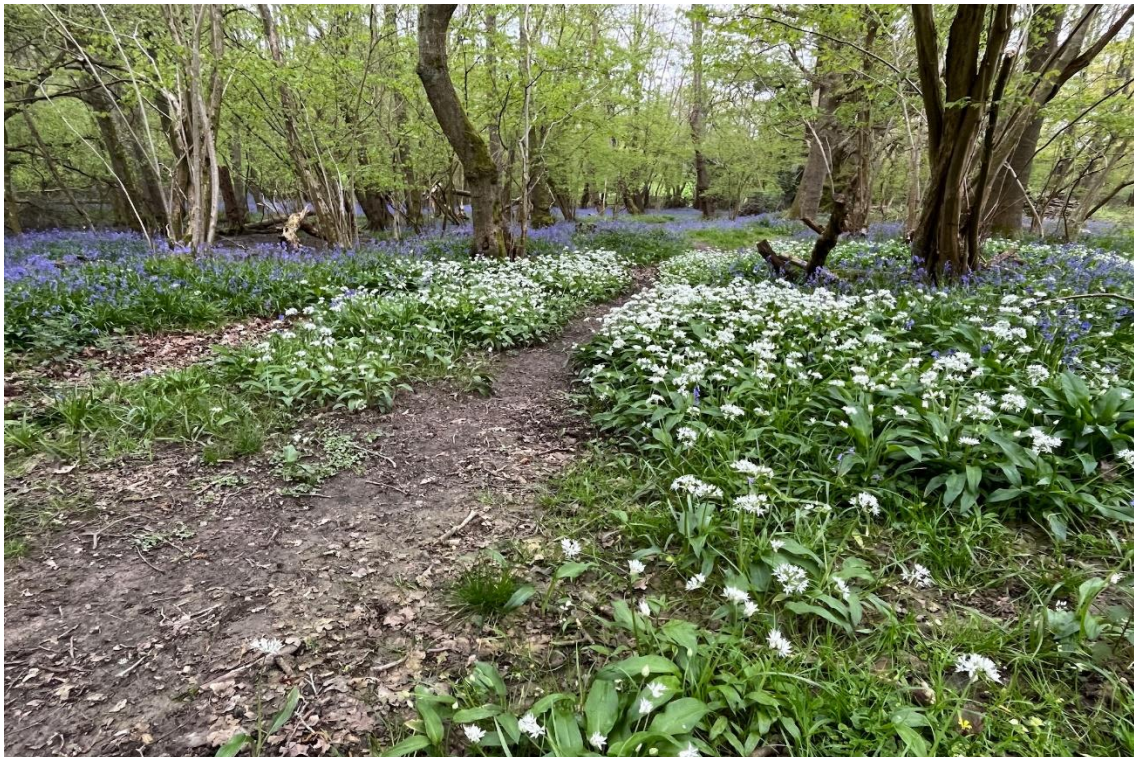
We had been worried that as the Bluebells had started flowering weeks ago they could have gone over by now

Luckily, the recent cold weather held them back and they were still at their best.

Pics below – some members within Bluebell area & White flowers of wild garlic.



The Bluebells were interspersed with Wild Garlic, Dogs Mercury, Yellow Archangel, Opposite Leaved Golden Saxifrage, Lesser Celandine and less so Herb Robert, Ground Ivy, Ivy leaved Speedwell, Wood Sorrel & Wood Anemone.



We had moved into an area of Alder Carr and stopped by a boggy area which held a nice showing of Marsh Marigold and some wild Redcurrant bushes, plus a few of the white flowering small and rarer Marsh Valerian plants.



A nearby nest box held a Stock Dove which our bird ringer Phil kindly showed us in the hand as many people do not usually see this species closely, he then ringed the bird and released it. We then moved on, so the bird could go back to its nest. (Pic above – Phil holding Stock Dove)

We reached Pintail bank where we pointed out one of our Black Poplar trees, an uncommon tree in Sussex. Some refugia tins were also looked under showing quite a few Toads.

Phil checked a Barn Owl box and we were treated to a Barn Owl flying out of the box, which Phil confirmed had been sitting on 4 eggs. We then moved off and started walking back so the owl could return to the box. On the way back Phil also checked a Tawny Owl box which held 2 young.

A male mandarin was also noted on the water near the car park.

We had a short break for 10 minutes before starting the second part of the walk over to Whillet's. Along the road we stopped at the heronry for closer views and to see and hear the young Herons and Cormorants.

In the first meadow, a Southern Marsh Orchid and a Common Spotted Orchid under protective mesh were pointed out, Field Woodrush and Bugle were flowering, plus Cuckoo flower (another Orange Tip butterfly food plant). We went on to the reed-bed viewing platform to look over the reeds. Two recently arrived Reed Warblers were heard singing.



Moving to the second meadow, Cowslips and a False Oxlip plant, which is a hybrid between a Cowslip and a Primrose, were pointed out, also a Whitethroat was seen.

Pic Left – False Oxlip

Pic Below – Cowslip



The beehives were seen, plus a plastic trap hanging from a tree. Traps are now required to be hung near active beehives to control the newly arrived invasive alien Asian Hornet which will attack and kill bee colonies.

Some more refugia tins were investigated, a Field Vole and more Toads noted. A male Orange Tip and 2 Peacock butterflies appeared on the wing during a short moment of brighter weather.



At meadow pond our new seat and table and dipping platform were approved. There were more birds singing, with Blackcap, another Whitethroat and a Garden Warbler both heard & seen. All are summer migrants but the Garden Warblers are only just arriving from their wintering grounds in Africa.

With time now nearing lunchtime, we had a quick look into the third meadow before walking back to the car park.

(Pic Left – Three Nerved Sandwort)