

Ashlawn Cutting Nature Reserve LWS

2016 Species Summary

Contributors include:

Steve Batt (SB), Steve Wright (SW), Phil Parr (PP), Elaine Box (EB), David Brown (DB), David Champion (DC), Paul Nicholas (PN), Martin Kennard (MK). Report collated by Phil Parr, 23-5-17.

We were helped with the management of the reserve by the Trusts, Nature-Force Groups.

They cut Station Grasslands (near Benn St) and Tower Bank (D14w). They also cleared willow regrowth from Pytchley Marsh (D13e) and started coppicing Willow in Station Marsh.

Pete Thorne from the Trust helped with a chain saw to trim down some of the larger stumps left a bit high, coppice some of the bigger trees in the new scallops in Section E, and help with tidying Onley Glade after the Community Payback Groups had finished there for the year. Students from Rugby School under the guidance of Steve Wright created another scallop in Section E, and our group another, so now there are six, all at different stages of regrowth. The scallops are part of a woodland regeneration scheme to provide greater diversity, the resulting young scrub providing more nest sites for small birds.

Our Rugby Group worked very hard, and we were very pleased to get all the key grasslands cut by Christmas. We thank all the groups and individuals who have contributed to making the reserve such a success.

This report picks out some of the less common species on the reserve, and some others of significance.

For the section codes shown after the species name, see the reserves management maps



Jolly's Meadow 31st Oct (PP D14e)



Coltsfoot 25th Mar (SW D14e), May Blossom 3rd Jun (PP D14e) Violets, Tower Bank, 13th April (PP D14w) Res. Pond, King-cups 13th Apl (PP D14e)



Brimstone on Knapweed 13th Aug (PP F3e)



Carrot & Knapweed 13th Aug (PP F3e)



Brown Argus 12th Aug (PP F3e)

Flora 2016 was another year of amazing plant growth, lots of berries & fruit and lush vegetation to challenge our grass management team later in the year.

Healthy Living Walk (HLW) Now is in its 4th year, the walk project has proved a great success. This area, a field grazed by cattle until the mid-1960s, then reverted to thick almost impenetrable scrub. With the help of a grant and contractor to start the project off, and an awful lot of hard work we now have a lovely woodland ride. Many plants, typical to this area and the reserves soil type, have done very well.

These include **Purple Loosestrife**, **Red Campion**, **Spiny Restharrow**,

Oxeye Daisy, F, was magnificent on the grasslands in early June as was the **Blackthorn** blossom.

In July, the yellows of **St John's Wort** took over.

Common Spotted Orchid, F5w, numbers are holding up well. 21 counted.

Stemless Thistle, F5w, there was only one tiny patch this year, so we need to nurture them.



Meadow Cranesbill 17th July (PP F2w)



Red Campion 6th Jun (PP D14e)



Guelder Rose 6th Oct (PP D31w)

Grass Vetchling, F3e, had a particularly good year, and over 100 flowers were counted on 26th Jun. As the flowers only last a short time there must have been many more plants. We still only have it on the south part of this section.

Ploughman's Spikenard, F4e, only one or two seen on 3rd July.

Common Gromwell, F3w, one plant by the path, a recent arrival, possibly a garden escape.

Ladies Bedstraw, F3, Two or three plants still occur by the path and pleasingly it has a strong patch on the west bank of Tennis Meadow above Jolly's Hedge. D14e

Hop Trefoil is uncommon on Ashlawn, but has been recorded near the silver birch's in Station Grasslands D14w, and on Tower Bank D14w as recently as 2014

Doves-foot Cranesbill & Storks-bill, F5b, in a small patch on track bed grassland strip at the bottom of section 5. This grassland is becoming wetter and we didn't see Storks-bill this year.

Yellow Rattle had been noted in some of the grasslands for years, but has recently increased which is good news for controlling lush grass growth. On F3e it seems to be having the positive effect of reducing the problem we have with spreading invasive False Brome.

False Brome grass. *Brachypodium sylvaticum* is an [invasive species](#) colonizing new areas and outcompeting [native plants](#)

Marjoram, F3e, just a couple of small patches of plants, thought to be garden escapes, one in the hedgerow by the GCW path, and one towards the top of the bank.

Shaggy soldier, F, *Galinsoga ciliata/quadriradiata*, or a hybrid, just one was found on the blue brick parapet wall of Ashlawn Bridge 9th Oct.

Guelder Rose, D13w, a couple of small bushes west side of the path opposite Pytchley Marsh

Mistletoe, E10w, east side of top path in a Hawthorn which is rather unusual. It is the only plant we know of on the reserve though large numbers are not far away in Warren Road where its hosts are Rowan, and in gardens, apple.

Adder's-tongue Fern is an unusual fern that grows in old grasslands, on hillsides, along woodland rides and on sand dunes. It is quite difficult to spot unless you look closely for it. It usually appears between June and August, spending the rest of the year underground as a rhizome. It is considered a good indicator species of ancient meadows. It appears some years on F3 east & west and we last saw it in May 2013.

Trees.

It is worth remembering that there were virtually no trees on the reserve in the 1960's except in the hedgerows on some of its boundaries.

Ashlawn is dominated by **Hawthorn**, with **Blackthorn** and **Ash**. There is some **Oak**, **Silver Birch**, and **Sycamore**.

Apples, especially common near the old railway track bed, provided vast amounts of blossom & fruit this year.

Hornbeam, (E6w) there are two quite large and two smaller trees towards the Ashlawn Bridge end of this section.

Elm, (E11w) there are young **Common Elms** and a **Wych Elm** on the west bank south of Pytchley Bridge, and maybe a few White-letter Hairstreak breed there. One was photographed at the south end of this section 1st Aug 2013.

Field Maple, E6w, a few trees near Ashlawn Bridge.

Walnut, D14e. There is just one young tree in Jolly's Hedge bordering Tennis Meadow. It is thought to have originated from one of three trees that used to be in a nearby field dividing hedgerow. The hedgerow may have been removed when Jolly & Barbers printing works was built in the late 1950's, demolished early 1990's, to become Deacon Close.

Hazel, D14w, 2 small trees in near the south end of Station Grasslands, and one opposite the south access path from Pytchley Bridge, E11e, near the latest school scallop.



Knopper Galls 21st Aug (PP F3w)



Berries 24th Nov (PP D14e)



Health Living Walk (HLW) 31st Oct (PP D14e)

The **Knopper Gall** is caused by a tiny gall wasp, **Andricus quercuscalicis**. It produces ridged outgrowths on the acorns of our native Pedunculate Oak; forming in August they are sticky and red, later becoming woody and brown. A second generation then develops in the catkins of Turkey Oak. The Turkey Oak (*Quercus cerris* L.), introduced into Britain in 1735, is required for the completion of the life cycle of the gall.^[1] The knopper is a recent introduction to the British Isles, first arriving in the 1960s and now found throughout England, Wales and as far north as Scotland. This makes us wonder if we have the Turkey Oak on the reserve.

Invasive species

Azolla, a water fern, has become a problem on the marsh covering it in a blanket most of the year. It's thought to have been introduced by someone emptying the contents of a fish tank. By July it had formed a really thick mat which suppresses our natural pond vegetation by the elimination of light on which a lot of pond life depends. Its flowering – spore spreading heads are orange.

<http://www.feedipedia.org/node/565>

Azolla is used in some parts of the world as it does have several unquestionable agronomic qualities: the capacity to fix atmospheric nitrogen, a very high productivity in the right environment, a high protein content, a herbicide effect, and the capacity to decrease N-fertilizer volatilization. For those reasons, Azolla started to attract attention again in the late 1990s, notably as a component of integrated farming such as rice-fish-azolla, rice-duck-azolla, rice-duck-fish-azolla or pig-fish-azolla systems.



Azolla on Pytchley Marsh (D13e), pictures: 23rd Apl, (D Champion), 10th May (PP), Azolla matting 18th Jul (PP) .

Melilot, of which there are a number of sub-species, is an introduced species in the UK, originating from Europe and Asia, is a member of the clover family. It has been introduced as a forage crop in some parts of the world. Seeds can be viable for up to 30 years. Plants have large tap roots and tend to grow in groups. It is a good source of nectar for invertebrates.

It arrived on Ashlawn in 2000 and is spreading along the path from each end of the reserve towards our key grasslands. We have seen how it has dominated some other local sites to the detriment of our native species, so we are trying to restrict its growth by pulling up plants before they set seed.

Butterflies See Ashlawn 2016 spreadsheet report.

Elaine Box (EB) undertook a weekly Transect Walk along the length of the reserve. These walks, of which there are now over 1,200 in the UK, form the core of the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme.

Butterflies are recorded in a fixed width band (typically 5m wide) following the same route along the reserve each week from the beginning of April until the end of September. Ideally, there are 26 counts per year. Transect walks are undertaken between 10.45am and 3.45pm and only when weather conditions are suitable for butterfly activity. They enable scientific analysis of trends over the years. We are very grateful to Elaine and to Butterfly Conservation-Warwickshire branch for this magnificent effort.

2016 was generally a poor year for butterflies and moths, with few sightings of **Small Copper**, & **Brown Argus**, and numbers of **Common Blue** down.

Small Tortoiseshell's were seen in small numbers.

Just one **Painted Lady** on 9th May (EB), but **Red Admiral** was more frequently seen in the autumn.

Highlights were, **Small Heath** seen on F3e and **Silver-washed Fritillary** is still present in E & F. Silver-washed was first seen 1st Aug 2013 by Max Amos.

Marbled White had an excellent showing with 106 seen on 26 June.

This compares with previous years back to 2007 of 60, 50, 36, 23, 21, 34, 52, 48, & 31.

Three were seen by Elaine on 4 July and one by Steve Wright on 16 July in section D near Pytchley Marsh and this offers hope for colonisation at the north end of the reserve.

Comma, Brimstone, Orange-tip, Holly Blue, and Speckled Wood did quite well.



Small Copper, 18th Aug. (S Batt, D14e)



Silver-washed Fritillary, 3rd Aug (S Batt, E9w)



Orange-tip 26th Jun (PJP F5w)



Brimstone, note 2 eggs below her. (PP, D14e)



Small Heath 18 Aug (S. Batt, F2)



Large Skipper 23rd Jun (S Wright)

On 5th May I checked the recently planted Common Buckthorn at the south end of Jolly's Hedge for the eggs of the **Brimstone** butterfly. There weren't any, but as I backed away a female Brimstone landed, and over the next 10 mins or so laid at least a dozen eggs. How lucky is that?

The Brimstone was then harried by a Green-veined White but returned to lay a few more and then chased away by an amorous male Orange-tip.

Moths Day-fliers

Forester Moth, (F3w) Phil Parr and Steve Wright visited on 19th, 23rd and 30th June and used a pheromone lure to see if the Forester Moth is still on the site.

Moth expert David Brown visited on 7th, 23rd, 24th of June, & 7th July also with a lure. Temperatures were between 21 & 23C, and the weather was a mixture of sunny spells, cloudy, & sunny on his visits.

Martin Kennard visited on 26 June.

Unfortunately, all our attempts proved unsuccessful. The weather was not ideal for some of the visits.

Forester has not been seen with a verified record since 2007 when Iain Reid reported just one.

Of the other day fliers, **Burnet Companion** did well in May. **Lattice Heath** numbers were down, and **NB Five-spot Burnet** and **Six Spot Burnet** had an extremely poor year.

We saw a few **Cinnabar & Lesser Treble-bar, Silver Y, & Yellow Shell**.

Moths Night-fliers

Bridget Allen runs a light trap just above the HLW D14e and says it's not been a good year

Highlights for her were **Puss Moth** on 26th May, **Marbled White Spot** 8th June, **Spinach** 9th July, and a **Dotted Clay** on 14th July.

She reported, the best night this year for species numbers was 9th July with 47 species (Last year 2015 it was 13th July with 64 species, and 2014 was 23rd June with 75 species)

Micro moths seen in June

I.D.s thanks to Martin Kennard



Lathronympha strigana 16th Jun (K Monk)



a Syncopacma sp. 26th Jun. (PP)



Plum Tortrix 30th Jun (PP)

Lathronympha strigana; a distinctive species with bright orange-rufous forewings and several greyish metallic markings towards the rear of the wing, this moth is locally common in the south of Britain, becoming scarcer further north.

The adults fly at sunrise, and later from dusk onwards. They are on the wing in June and July, sometimes with a second brood in late August/September.

It frequents open woodland and similar areas, and feeds on St. John's-wort (*Hypericum*).

Syncopacma sp. The distribution of these species is not fully understood, due to confusion between *S. cinctella* and *S. larseniella*, from which they can only be reliably distinguished by dissection of the genitalia. Reliable records have shown that it occurs locally throughout much of England and Ireland, but is probably scarcer than *larseniella*.

The larva feeds on birds'-foot-trefoil (*Lotus* spp.) and maybe also greenweed (*Genista*).

Flying in July, the adult moths can be attracted to light. <http://ukmoths.org.uk/species/syncopacma-larseniella/>

Plum Tortrix; The larvae feed on various forms of *Prunus* including blackthorn (*P. spinosa*) and plum (*P. domestica*).

The adults fly from late May to July and the species is fairly common throughout most of Britain.

Birds Steve Batt again carried out monthly bird counts, walking the length of the reserve. These are sent to the Trust and then to the BTO. He says his highlights include **Red Kite, Osprey, and Raven** flying over,

Kingfishers on the Marsh and Reservoir Pond (D14e), **Willow Tit, Nuthatch, Sparrowhawk, Great Spotted and Green Woodpeckers.** **Mistle Thrush** was nesting section F5.

Treecreeper and Goldcrest regular, at least 5 **Jay's** between Pytchley and Ashlawn. Sadly, no owl reports but Little Owl seen on the Polo field.

Buzzard are seen quite regularly,

Heron was seen mostly in the spring when the weather is hard, as the cutting has places that don't often freeze.

Apparently, there is still an escaped Harris Hawk in the area.

Amphibians

Grass Snake are rarely seen on Ashlawn despite us piling up herbage to make hibernaculum's in sunny spots. Just one record this year, a casualty on Onley Lane near reserve gate on 20th October

In 2015 we had one seen on the reserves entrance Zig-zag path (SB)



Res. Pond 13th Mar (K Monk D14)



Path Pool, Smooth Newts, 9th Jun (PP D14e)

Frogs: Steve Wright conducted regular surveys and produced an excellent report.

It turned out to be a very good year with 1177 clumps of spawn counted, even though numbers were down in many of the smaller pools, it was more than made up for it by increases in Pytchley Marsh.

Previous years: - Spawn totals: 2015 - 1111, 2014 - 688, 2013 - 609, 2012 - 495, 2011 - 651, 2010 - 760, 2009 - 616, 2008 - 1201, 2007 - not collated, 2006 - 997

Toads were seen on occasions, mainly in Section F. They breed in the pit pool near the crematorium above section F4e.

Common Newts have been noted in previous years, they are common in local gardens

Fungi

A comprehensive survey of fungi was not undertaken this year but we did find scarlet elf cup. I think that the Elf cup and the Artist's fungus are new to our small list, but we've seen Jew's ear, Turkey tail, Velvet shank, Candle tuft, and King Alfred's cakes in previous years



Velvet shank 19th Jan 17, (SW E9e).
Flammulina velutipes.



Scarlet elf cup, school scallop 18th Jan 17, (SW E7e).
Sarcoscypha austriaca.



Jew's ear 31st Dec, (SW E11e).
Auricularia auricula Judae

Insects

Dragonflies: **Southern Hawker, Migrant Hawker, Brown Hawker** were seen in most parts of the reserve, with **Broad-bodied Chaser** most often seen on Reservoir Pond.

Damselflies included the **Common Blue**



Bee Fly *Bombylius major*, 30th Sept (SB F4w) **Broad-bodied Chaser** 26th Jun (PP D14e) **Common Darter** 5th Jul (SW D14e)

The bee fly is always a joy for me to see in the early spring, but probably not for solitary bees as they drop their eggs near nest entrance holes and their lava consume their food stores and grubs.

They use their long and stiff proboscis to probe for nectar as they fly, much like a hummingbird.

Wasps, didn't have a good year nationally, but more than made up for it in our Heathy Living Walk, D14e, as our grass cutting teams found out with 5 nests spotted and two of those disturbed. This made the walk not so healthy and caused a general retreat, and decision to leave the job until later in the year.

Hornet On 21st August a Hornets' nest was just discovered in time as Steve Wright started brush cutting the ant hill that contained it. (F3w). There was a small amount of activity but it appeared dormant on visit a visit on 4th September though one was photo'd by Steve Wrights on old apple branch nearby. See below.

Apparently, they do move to other nests if the one they are using becomes unsuitable



Hornet 4th Sep. (SW F3w) **Roselle's Cricket** 9th Sep. (SW F3w) **Field Grass-hopper**, 18 Aug. (SB F3e) **Fat Thighed Flower Beetle** 16th Jun. (KM D14e)

Mammals:

Roe Deer were reported by a workmate of Malcolm's, on 17th July, maybe a couple of them, behind a house towards south end of Percival Rd. where gardens back on to a plot where RBC onetime planned a tree nursery. (E6-7)

Muntjac and **Fox** are seen and reported quiet frequently. (We even had a Muntjac in our garden 200 meters from the cutting for a few days. It had jumped over fences nearly 6 feet high)

Hedgehogs. The Trust is one of the few in the country to employ hedgehog officers to try to address the dramatic decline in this species. We met with Debbie Wright and set up 3 footprint traps in the cutting on 25 August. They were monitored for a week but not visited by hedgehogs.

Later there were reports of a few sightings in gardens near the cutting in the region of Tower Road west of Station Grasslands D14w.

Badgers are active in Section E, and roam a long way to forage for food. They are known to predate Hedgehogs

Fox's are quite regularly seen.



Muntjac 16th Jul (PP)



Dog fox, 24-6-16 (SW D14e HLW).



Elusive Field vole 1-12-16 (PP E7e)

Field Voles are seen on Ashlawn's grassland from time to time, but more regularly we see evidence of them is when we are doing management work. The field vole or short-tailed vole is a grey-brown vole, around four inches in length, with a short tail. It is one of the most common mammals in Europe, with a range extending from the Atlantic coast to Lake Baikal. These voles are found in moist grassy habitats, such as woodland, marsh or on river banks.

Brown Rats are present, and very occasionally seen, most often near the bridges where we presume they find extra food from discarded take aways.

Rabbits sadly from time to time suffer from Myxomatosis, but there are plenty on site and most often seen towards the south end of the reserve.

Grey Squirrels are very regularly seen, numbers no doubt enhanced by plentiful supply of bird food put out at nearby houses.

Fish **Stickle-back** are seen in Reservoir Pond and some other pools. They attract Kingfisher's that also take aquatic insects, freshwater shrimps, and tadpoles.