

Kempshott Conservation Group



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Annual General Meeting....and plant sale

Our AGM will be held on 14th October in the usual venue, Kempshott Village hall, starting at 2.00pm. We look forward to telling you about our plans for the next 12 months and hearing any suggestions you may have.

Our sister group, Friends of Stratton Park, has found that local residents can't resist an opportunity to pick up a few garden plants at bargain prices - so we are also going to give it a try with a selection of perennial plant and shrubs for sale at the AGM. Why not come and browse?

In return for a donation to our funds, we will also have a range of wild flower seeds and seed mixed for those who would like to support their garden butterflies and bees.

Please do make a special effort to come and join us.



Wild flower seed.....

..... collecting and processing, which we do for several conservation sites on the west of Basingstoke, is a rewarding but time consuming business. If you are interested in giving us some help, either in collecting or processing, please contact Marion Wolstencroft - details above.

We would be delighted to hear from you.



Down Grange Meadow news

Our 24th butterfly species - the Silver-Washed Fritillary

This is Britain's largest fritillary and our second largest butterfly. (The Purple Emperor is larger). A handsome butterfly, it is usually found in sunny rides within mature woodland but, for the second year running, one has been spotted here in the Meadow.

We don't know yet where they are breeding. Last year a faded female was seen in the middle of the Meadow on 27th July. It is estimated that the poor weather has delayed the season by at least three weeks.



Photo (taken 8/7/2012) shows a fresh looking male nectaring on bramble.

Most butterflies lay their eggs on the caterpillar's "food plant", which it will eat as soon as it hatches. The Silver-washed

Fritillary uses most species of violet as its "food plant", but primarily Common Dog Violet. But does the female lay her eggs directly on leaves of violets? Oh no, she lays them in the cracks in the bark of mature Oak trees, often 2-4 metres above the ground. The tiny caterpillar hatches out and over-winters in the bark cracks. In early spring, it descends to ground level to find and feed on the violets.

While we have violets in the Meadow, and more will be planted this autumn, we do not think we have any Oaks mature enough to provide good over-wintering habitat. So we are perplexed as to where the butterflies are breeding. One possible location is Down Grange Home Park (the area around the Toby Carvery), but it is just as likely to be on a mature Oak in and around Homesteads Road. Please let us know if you see these butterflies in your garden.

Our other butterflies.....

.....are doing well and, despite the catastrophic effect the weather has had on early numbers, it seems to have had no effect on the species that use grasses for laying eggs. All our "meadow" species, Meadow Brown, Ringlet, Marbled White and Small, Large & Essex Skippers, were out in force, albeit late. The numbers of Ringlets appear to be very good and are back at the levels they were two years ago. It's also been a very good year for Marbled Whites.

Down Grange Meadow news.....cont'd.

Orchids

Our clump of Pyramidal Orchids put on a good show despite the very wet and cold weather and then being almost overwhelmed by grass.

On 5th July, to our astonishment given the growing conditions, a single spike of Common Spotted Orchid was discovered on the same site it used in 2010. These Orchids appear to like the grass cut the previous autumn or spring. This particular site was cut in autumn 2011.

A positive effect of the recent reorganisations within the Council has been the establishment of a (very) small team to undertake grass cutting and other work on conservation sites. This should provide more flexible conservation-friendly grass cutting for larger areas of the Meadow than the contractor cutting we have had to negotiate in the past with all its limitations. This must be good news for our population of orchids.



Sunday morning conducted walks

Our third conducted walk took place on 1st July and was attended by seven adults and a number of children. It was a showery morning, but when the sun came out it was quite warm, bringing out the Ringlets, Meadow Browns and Marbled Whites.

At this time of the year we normally have a good selection of flowers that can be seen from the various paths that criss-cross the Meadow. This year has been very difficult as a lot of rain and the occasional sun has caused the grass to really take off resulting in a number of flower patches being smothered.

We saw that the yellow Perforate St John's Wort was beginning to put on a good show. This is a source of nectar for hover flies and other insects. Curiously, it is little used by butterflies, although skippers will sometimes use it if nothing else is available. The red clover was also out, but was not tempting the butterflies. Since the walk we have seen dozens of small Skippers nectaring on this common flower.

We hope everybody enjoyed themselves and learnt something about the Meadow and its flowers and butterflies. The walks are scheduled to take place on the first Sunday in the month from May to October and last about an hour. There will, however, be no walk in August and they will resume, weather permitting, on 2nd September. They start at 11 00 from the Homesteads Road interpretation board located in the meadow behind St. Mark's Church. We look forward to seeing you. All are welcome, including dogs on leads.



In the Old Orchard.....

Plenty of blossom, but where's the fruit?

For three years running we have had a really good harvest from the community orchard - even though the trees are still young. This year the combination of warmth, then driving rain followed by chill from March to May guaranteed that most of the lovely fruit blossom would not set seed - and so virtually no fruit.

We have a very small number of apples, and that's about all. The good news is that the trees are having a great growth year. In August, we will be able to do a really good summer prune and next year we hope for a bumper crop again.

The flower ribbons

.....are beginning to get into their stride. This is their second summer and a number of species have emerged that skipped last year, notably the Bird's-foot Trefoil, Kidney Vetch, Hedge Woundwort, Chicory and Sainfoin.

Both the Bird's-foot Trefoil and Kidney Vetch are low growing and have yellow flowers. These are used by butterflies and moths as both "food plants" and as a source of nectar.



The Hedge Woundwort has a purple-pink spike of florets and can be seen in the foreground of the photo. It's a common flower of hedgerows and insects love it.

The Sainfoin (right) looks like a small pink lupin and is a member of the pea family. In Victorian times it was grown as a forage crop for working horses. These days it is an excellent source of nectar and pollen for bees and other insects.

In case you were wondering the 2m. tall spikes of bright blue flowers are wild chickory, a plant of roadsides and waste ground. It's not normally this tall, but the prolonged wet weather gave it a boost.

