



A walk on the wild side... the foragers deep in Hudnalls wood on a beautiful October day



Another find is identified by Raoul (right)



A good day's work... a fine haul of fungi

Wild food was the subject of our October meeting. In the afternoon forager Raoul Van Den Broucke took a party of 15 on a foray in the Hudnalls woods, and they returned with a splendid basket of edible fungi. Our evening session at St Briavels Assembly Rooms began with tastings of the foraged fungi, cooked by Raoul. Next was a blind tasting of wines by Debbie Attrill from VQ Country Wines, Longhope, followed by a demonstration of cooking with nettles by Yvette Farrell, principal of Harts Barn Cookery School, who also judged our Wild Food and Drink Competition, won by Sally Secrett's perry pear compote.

Photographs: George Peterken, David Pollok



Entries in our wild food and drink competition



NEWSLETTER

www.parishgrasslandsproject.org.uk

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Things to spot this month



Primrose and chiffchaff

A helping hand for traditional orchards

Come to our AGM to find out more

Growing up I had a dog whose chief pleasure in life, beyond menacing policemen, was picking apples straight from the tree. His technique was balletic: a gravity-defying leap, snap and a twist. No sedentary Newton, he. Sadly the fruit was invariably unripe and the resultant mess far too ripe, but what stands out after all these years is the delight he took in this pursuit: there's nothing finer, one might imagine, watching him soar through the air, than the freedom to browse an orchard at will.

Which flimsy preamble leads me to the PGP's upcoming AGM, to be held at 7.30pm on Thursday 23 March at the Mackenzie Hall. We are delighted to announce that Natural England's orchard specialist, Chris Wedge, will be on hand to talk about the planting and management of traditional orchards. With particular regard to local conditions, his talk will focus on practical advice for anyone considering planting an orchard, or even just one or two fruit trees. Chris has written extensively on this subject, offering A-Z guidance from early-days planning to best-practice pruning, as well as detailed biodiversity studies: a traditional orchard

can support a staggering 1,800 species of flora and fauna. Unsurprisingly his advice is much sought-after by a host of organisations including The Orchard Project and Gloucestershire Orchard Trust. The latter's website, in particular, serves as a time-traveller's Baedeker to this once orchard-dappled county, the names of our ancient apples and pears a litany to rival even the shipping forecast: Foxwhelp, Kill Boys, Betty Prosser... These are fruits to savour. Indeed, in these difficult post-truth days there is a certain comfort to be derived from a plum called Shit Smock. At least you know where you stand with it. And you can't say that of a Golden Delicious.

The evening also sees the launch of a new citizen science project: our participatory survey of key wildflower species to assess the botanical health of our parishes - see pages 2 and 3. We hope to combine the project with a wildflower walk later in the year and we are looking for ways to involve local schoolchildren in the survey - so do come along and find out more. All welcome, refreshments available.

Alice Hogge

Join our flower hunt

Eight species to monitor health of the fields

Have you seen these flowers recently? The PGP would be interested to know because we would then be able to tell how well we are maintaining the flowers in our fields.

Most of the colour in the fields comes from common and widespread species, such as Meadow buttercup,



Above Harebell; below Scabious



Red clover, Cuckoo flower, Common sorrel and Common spotted-orchid. These and many less conspicuous species wax and wane according to how we use the fields, but they will always be around, unless we suddenly decide to plough every field in the Hudnalls. However, the diversity of species – the total species list – is swollen by a large number of uncommon species, which are found only in a few places and then only on specialised soils, such as permanently wet ground or the alkaline soils on the limestone. The PGP has some information on these, but it is getting out of date.

So, we thought we would ask members, and anyone else who is interested, to look out for some of the most recognisable local rarities. The eight species selected are chosen to represent the whole flora, in so far as this is possible. Meadowsweet, Ragged-robin and Bugle like moist soils. Harebell does well on dry soils. Tormentil is most often found on acid, heathy soils, whereas Scabious and Cowslip are commoner on lime-rich soils. The eighth species is Yellow-rattle, which tends to be present on all soils where fields are cut for hay, or at least not grazed in spring and early summer, but it dies out if fields are grazed continuously in its March-July growing season. We have a good idea where these were around 2000, but would like to know where they grow now.

So, if anyone has seen these species in the last year or two, we would like to know where. Best to let me know via gfpeterken@tiscali.co.uk or just tell one of the PGP committee, who will pass the information on.

There are other species that would be equally good indicators, but they either need a specialist to be sure they are correctly identified (such as Zigzag clover and Pale sedge) or they are known from only one place (such as Dyer's Greenweed, Green-veined orchid). But, if anyone feels ambitious and confident, it would also be worth looking for Common milkwort, Twayblade, Meadow vetchling, Earthnut, Spring sedge, Common bird's-foot-trefoil, Rough hawkbit and several others. These would tell us a lot more, but, if we can collect most of the locations of the eight featured species, that would be an excellent start.

George Peterken



Above: Meadowsweet, Ragged Robin, Bugle; below: Tormentil, Cowslip, Yellow Rattle



Have you met Red Ruby Devons?

PGP members will have seen past references to Barry Hutchinson's Red Ruby Devon cattle and the pasture management service he offers with them. Barry's 2017 grazing season is getting under way, so if you are a field owner seeking a flexible, sustainable way to manage your land, contact Barry via the Beanhill Herd website at www.beanhilldevons.co.uk, or members of the PGP committee by emailing info@parishgrasslands.co.uk

