

Notes on the wildlife of Crow Lane Open Space, Henbury, Bristol, 2007-2009

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In 2009 Bristol City Council invited local residents in the Henbury district to complete a questionnaire concerning its proposed improvements to the Crow Lane Open Space (O.S.map ref.: ST566790). As well as completing and returning the questionnaire to the Council's Community Engagement Team at the end of May that year, I appended a summary of the flora and fauna I had recorded there up to that date. As this Bristol Open Space contains much of wildlife interest I have considered it worth publishing the following preliminary account in this journal. Moreover, I consider that it should have been designated as a site of conservation interest in the Greater Bristol Nature Conservation Strategy (English Nature 1991).

Prior to the 1950s, the Henbury district largely consisted of agricultural land, farmed by the adjacent Elms Dairy, Norton and Westmoreland Farms, surrounding the ancient village of Henbury. The Crow Lane Open Space lying between the Norton and Westmoreland Farms is practically all that survives of the pre-1950 countryside that existed immediately to the north of the village.

Today, the Open Space, managed by the City of Bristol's Parks Department, consists largely of a mosaic of managed grassland (regularly mown), areas of lank vegetation and narrow belts of woodland and scrub (Plate 1). One of its most attractive feature is the Hazel Brook (Plate 2), a narrow stream that winds its way between steep banks from north to south to combine with the River Trym and then eventually to flow into the River Avon at Sea Mills. Its course through the Open Space is lined with such trees as Crack Willow *Salix fragilis* and its banks are covered with a luxuriant growth of Dewberry *Rubus caesius*, Common Comfrey *Symphytum officinale*, Common Nettle *Urtica dioica*, Hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium*, Hemlock Water Dropwort *Oenanthe crocata* and other species (Plate 3).

Dragonflies (Odonata) apparently breeding in the Hazel Brook include the Beautiful Demoiselle Damselfly *Calopteryx virgo*, the Large Red Damselfly *Pyrrhosoma nymphula*, the Azure Damselfly *Coenagrion puella* and the Hairy Dragonfly *Brachytron pratense*. Sadly, the brook is used by some local residents as a depository for such rubbish as supermarket trolleys and I have not so far seen any fish in it, although I understand that they used to occur. Fortunately, there are plans afoot to clean it up, so we can but hope.

A meadow-like area north-west of the Hazel Brook, which was apparently the former Exhibition or Show Field, is now covered with a luxuriant growth of tall grasses, such as False Oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius* and Cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata*, intermixed with Dewberry, Common Comfrey, Hogweed, Cow Parsley *Anthriscus sylvestris*, Meadow Buttercup *Ranunculus acris*, Common Ragwort *Senecio jacobaea* and Crow Garlic *Allium vineale*. Here butterflies, such as Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina*, Ringlet *Aphantopus hyperantus*, Small Tortoiseshell *Aglais urticae* and Peacock *Inachis io* fly in some plenty. On 24 June 2009 I saw at least eight *urticae* imagines in this spot, an extraordinary number in view of the scarcity of this species in recent years. In addition, I found on the nettles a brood of young *urticae* larvae and two large broods of Peacock larvae, one almost full grown and the other still very small, adjacent to their larval web (Plate 4). I also located the larval shelters of the Mother-of-Pearl Moth *Pleuroptya ruralis* in rolled-up leaves of the nettles.

Strips of land bordering the Hazel Brook elsewhere are similarly vegetated with a thick growth of

these plants, interspersed with Crack Willows, Elders *Sambucus nigra*, White Poplars *Populus alba* Hazels *Corylus avellana* and other trees. Farther to the north-west there are strips of woodland along the paths where Speckled Wood Butterflies *Pararge aegeria* fly in considerable numbers as they do elsewhere in suitable habitat in the Open Space. Other butterflies I have so far seen in the Open Space are Brimstone *Gonepteryx rhamni*, Large White *Pieris brassicae*, Small White *P. rapae*, Green-veined White *P. napi*, Orange Tip *Anthocharis cardamines*, Painted Lady *Vanessa cardui* and Small Heath *Coenonympha pamphilus*. I have also come across such moths as the Cinnabar *Tyria jacobaeae* and the Yellow Shell *Camptogramma bilineata*. There is obvious scope for recording many more, especially by the use of a mercury vapour moth trap.

The bird-life of the area is varied; so far I have seen Mallard (in Hazel Brook), Woodpigeons, Blackbirds, Song Thrushes, Robins, Blackcaps, Chiffchaffs, Dunnocks, Wrens, Blue, Great and Long-tailed Tits, Treecreepers, Carrion Crows, Jackdaws, Magpies and Greenfinches. Black-headed, Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls are almost always to be seen patrolling overhead. Regular observations throughout the year would almost certainly add 10 or more additional species.

The 119 species of wild plants that I have recorded so far in the Open Space are as follows:-

Austrian/Corsican Pine *Pinus nigra* J.F. Arnold: one mature tree (Plate 5).

Yew *Taxus baccata* L.: several trees.

Lenten-rose *Helleborus orientalis* Lam: Not seen by me, but a 'fine specimen' was found by I.P. Green on the west bank of the Hazel Brook (Green *et al.*, 2000)

Meadow Buttercup *Ranunculus acris* L.: abundant.

Creeping Buttercup *R. repens* L.: abundant.

Bulbous Buttercup *R. bulbosus* L.: common.

Lesser Celandine *R. ficaria* L.: common.

Greater Celandine *Chelidonium majus* L.: frequent.

Common Stinging Nettle *Urtica dioica* L.: abundant.

Turkey Oak *Quercus cerris* L.: one tree.

Common/Pedunculate Oak *Q. robur* L.: several trees at least.

Silver Birch *Betula pendula* Roth: one large tree noted.

Hazel *Corylus avellana* L.: frequent.

Common Chickweed *Stellaria media* (L.): common.

Common Mouse-ear *Cerastium fontanum* Baumg.: common.

White Champion *Silene latifolia* Poir.: common.

Red Champion *S. dioica* (L.): frequent.

Knotgrass *Polygonum aviculare* L.: common.

Common Sorrel *Rumex acetosa* L.: frequent.

Broad-leaved Dock *R. obtusifolius* L.: frequent.

Perforate St. John's-wort *Hypericum perforatum* L.: frequent.

Large-leaved Lime *Tilia platyphyllos* Scop.: one large tree.

Common Lime *T. x europaea* L.: frequent.

Common Mallow *Malva sylvestris* L.: common.

White Bryony *Bryonia dioica* L.: frequent in the hedgerows.

White Poplar *Populus alba* L.: several trees noted.

Crack Willow *Salix fragilis* L.: frequent along the Hazel Brook.

Goat Willow (Sallow) *S. 'caprea'* L.: Occasional.

Hedge Mustard *Sisymbrium officinale* (L.): frequent.

Garlic Mustard *Alliaria petiolata* Cavara & Grande.: common.

Winter-cress *Barbarea vulgaris* W.T. Aiton: frequent.

Water-cress *Rorippa nasturtium-aquaticum*: (L.): plentiful in a small, stagnant, duckweed-covered pool.

Hairy Bitter-cress *Arabis hirsuta* L.: frequent.
Shepherd's-purse *Capsella bursa-pastoris* (L.): common.
Hoary Cress (Pepperwort) *Lepidium d. draba* L.: frequent in suitable habitat, such as around the Crow Lane entrance.
Perennial Wall-rocket *Diplotaxis tenuifolia* (L.): as the previous species.
Charlock *Sinapis arvensis* L.: frequent.
Bramble (Blackberry) *Rubus fruticosus* agg.: abundant.
Dewberry *Rubus caesius* L.: frequent, especially by Hazel Brook.
Silverweed *Potentilla anserina* L.: common.
Creeping Cinquefoil *P. reptans* L.: frequent.
Wood Avens *Geum urbanum* L.: common.
Dog-rose *Rosa canina* L. common in the hedgerows.
(Sweet-briar *R. rubiginosa* L. wild roses, which I considered to be this species, were frequent in a hedgerow. Identification requires checking).
Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* L.: frequent.
Bullace *P. domestica* L. ssp. *insititia* (L.): occasional.
Wild (Gean) Cherry *Prunus avium* L.: several.
Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* Jacq.: common.
Common Bird's-foot Trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* L.: occasional in open grassland.
Tufted Vetch *Vicia cracca* L.: frequent.
Bush Vetch *V. sepium* L.: frequent.
Common Vetch *V. sativa* L.: frequent.
Meadow Vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis* L.: frequent.
Black Medick *Medicago lupulina* L.: frequent.
White Clover *Trifolium repens* L.: common
Hop Trefoil *T. campestre* Schreb.: frequent.
Red Clover *T. pratense* L.: especially abundant.
Great Willowherb *Epilobium hirsutum* L.: frequent.
Broad-leaved Willowherb *E. montanum* L.: frequent.
Mistletoe *Viscum album* L.: noticed on some trees, such as lime.
Sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* L.: several trees.
Cut-leaved Crane's-bill *Geranium dissectum* L.: frequent.
Hedgerow Crane's-bill *G. pyrenaicum* Burm.: frequent (Plate 6).
Dove's-foot Crane's-bill *G. molle* L.: common.
Herb-Robert *G. robertianum* L.: common.
Ivy *Hedera helix* L.: very common.
Cow Parsley *Anthriscus sylvestris* (L.): especially abundant.
Hemlock Water-dropwort *Oenanthe crocata* L.: frequent along the Hazel Brook.
Hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium* L.: common.
Upright Hedge-parsley *Torilis japonica* (Houtt.): frequent.
Bittersweet (Woody Nightshade) *Solanum dulcamara* L.: frequent.
Field Bindweed *Convolvulus arvensis* L.: frequent.
Hedge Bindweed *Calystegia sepium* (L.): frequent.
Large Bindweed *C. silvatica* Griesb.: frequent.
Common Comfrey *Symphytum officinale* L.: very common (Plate 7).
Rough Comfrey *S. asperum* Lepech.: not seen by me, but a 'fairly large patch' of this very rare alien was found by R. Milne on 'open grassy ground' at Henbury in 1990 (Willis, 1990, Green *et al.* 2000).
Green Alkanet *Pentaglottis sempervirens* (L.): frequent.
Hedge Woundwort *Stachys sylvatica* L.: frequent.
White Dead-nettle *Lamium album* L.: common.
Red Dead-nettle *L. purpureum* L.: common.

Ground-ivy *Glechoma hederacea* L.: common.
 Greater Plantain *Plantago major* L.: common.
 Ribwort Plantain *P. lanceolata* L.: common.
 Butterfly-bush *Buddleja davidii* Franch.: occasional
 Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* L.: occasional.
 Ivy-leaved Toadflax *Cymbalaria muralis* (P. Gaertn.): frequent on old walls.
 Purple Toadflax *Linaria pupurea* (L.): occasional on rough ground, etc.
 Heath Speedwell *Veronica officinalis* L. at least one large patch.
 Common Field-speedwell *V. persica* L.: occasional.
 Slender Speedwell *V. filiformis* Sm.: frequent.
 Ivy Broomrape *Orobanche hederæ* Duby: occasional on ivy.
 Hedge Bedstraw *Galium mollugo* L.: frequent.
 Cleavers *G. aparine* L.: common.
 Elder *Sambucus nigra* L.: frequent.
 Red Valerian *Centranthus ruber* (L.): common
 Lesser Burdock *Arctium minus* (Hill): occasional.
 Spear Thistle *Cirsium vulgare* (Savi): frequent.
 Creeping Thistle *C. arvense* (L.): common.
 Chicory *Cichorium intybus* L.: noted by R.L Bland growing in a hedge at Henbury in 2002 (Willis 2003).
 Nipplewort *Lapsana communis* L.: frequent.
 Goat's-beard *Tragopogon pratensis* L.: occasional.
 Smooth Sow-thistle *Sonchus oleraceus* L.: frequent.
 Prickly Sow-thistle *S. asper* (L.): frequent.
 Prickly Lettuce *Latua serriola* L.: frequent.
 Wall Lettuce *Mycelis muralis* (L.): occasional.
 Daisy *Bellis perennis* L.: common.
 Mugwort *Artemisia vulgaris* L.: occasional.
 Yarrow *Achillea millefolium* L.: common,
 Oxeye Daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare* Lam.: common.
 Common Ragwort *Senecio jacobaea* L.: frequent.
 Groundsel *S. vulgaris* L.: frequent.
 Wild Arum (Lords-and-Ladies) *Arum maculatum* L.: frequent.
 Duckweed *Lemna* sp. Very plentiful on a small, stagnant pool in a hollow.
 Cock's-foot Grass *Dactylis glomerata* L.: common.
 False Oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius* (L.): abundant.
 Yorkshire-fog Grass *Holcus lanatus* L.: common.
 Wall Barley *Hordeum murinum* L.: frequent.
 Crow Garlic *Allium vineale* L.: frequent.

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Captions to illustrations:-

Plate 1 Managed grassland at Crow Lane Open Space.

Plate 2 The Hazel Brook at Crow Lane Open Space.

Plate 3 Vegetation bordering the Hazel Brook at Crow Lane Open Space.

Plate 4 Larvae and webs of Small Tortoiseshell *Aglais urticae* and Peacock Butterfly *Inachis io* at Crow Lane Open Space, 24 June 2009.

Plate 5 Austrian/Corsican Pine *Pinus nigra*, Crow Lane Open Space, June 2009.

Plate 6 Hedgerow Crane's-bill *Geranium pyrenaicum*, Crow Lane Open Space, June 2009.

Plate 7 Common Comfrey *Symphytum officinale*, Crow Lane Open Space, June 2009.

All photographs by John F. Burton.