

Twelve go wild in Dorset

28th June to 1st July 2015

Despite promises of a heatwave to come our group of Dorset adventurers set off in more typical British conditions and our first day's programme was adjusted slightly to accommodate the likely reluctance of the Large Blue to fly in drizzle. As it turned out our timing was perfect and we arrived at our first stop at Walton Hill just as the drizzle stopped. This initial stroll gave us our first orchids of the trip (Pyramidal), lots of agrimony and scabious and the trip lists began in earnest. Our planned second section of the Polden Hills (Collard Hill) was deferred till the final day of the trip as this was anticipated to be our best hope of seeing the Large Blue and we moved on from the National Trust to the Somerset Wildlife Trust Reserve at Green Down.

This reserve falls into two sections above and below a very picturesque stretch of gallops. The wild flowers here were prolific - lots of frothing bedstraw, a great variety of very architectural thistles, quantities of Butterfly Iris and our first Bee Orchid, cheek by jowl with a Butterfly Orchid. Here we saw significant numbers of Marbled White butterflies and, contrary to all expectations, some of the group were fortunate enough to catch a first view of the Large Blue. In considerable optimism we moved on to our final stop of the first day at Hibbitt Woods. Here there was more to see in the way of Bee Orchids in the adjoining meadow whilst the wood itself gave us sedges, woodruff and Enchanter's Nightshade.

Our accommodation at Kingcombe Centre was well appointed and located in the village of Toller Porcorum. Outdoor seating areas overlooked by banks of Rosa Rugosa and striking chicken wire sculptures set an atmosphere of tranquillity and the adjoining garden and wildlife ponds created a fertile moth trapping territory for Richard's investigations.

Thanks to Kingcombe's cockerels (ably supported by their guinea fowl neighbours) there was no difficulty in getting up the following morning for breakfast and following this we went on a guided walk of Powerstock Common Nature Reserve. Here we saw very large numbers of butterflies - including Common Blue, more Marbled White and Dark Green Fritillary as well as large numbers of the Meadow Brown, Ringlet and Gatekeeper. Among the other more memorable sights here were Golden Ringed Dragonfly (all over the site) and stunning views of a very obliging Yellowhammer. A small pond on the site also provided Emperor Dragonfly, several blue Damselflies and Four Spotted Chaser. The afternoon session at Porton proved less productive of species but provided some very brisk walking opportunities for the stalwarts thanks to some punishing slopes and a slightly off kilter map. Unfortunately the final planned location of the day at Loscomb had to be abandoned because of access difficulties for the minibus. Some of the group made a partial return to Kingcombe via the Jubilee Path, which would benefit from some restoration - but provided opportunity for plenty of speculation as to which Jubilee it commemorated.

Fortunately the following day started at Chesil Beach and the Fleet Lagoon so while rail lines across the country contorted in the heatwave we needed our fleeces thanks to the strong onshore breezes. After an informative talk about the area from a Wildlife Trust warden based at the beach centre most of the group went across to see the Little Tern nests which were under the watchful eye of an RSPB project with wardens in attendance. The afternoon was spent at the King Barrow Quarry Reserve at Portland and here we saw several Silver Studded Blues - which some of the group even managed to photograph mating. The quarry workings had created a range of habitats within a smallish geographical area as well as exposing a very large ammonite to view. There was an extraordinary quantity of Viper's Bugloss on the site as well as Yarrow, Valerian, Marjoram and more Pyramidal Orchids. Overhead there was a Kestrel and in the brambly thicket a Whitethroat.

Our final day began with a morning exploring the Kingcombe Reserve itself then, en route to home, we made our rescheduled stop at Collard Hill. As soon as we started walking we came across a larger number of Marbled Whites than anyone in the group could ever recollect seeing previously and a chance encounter with a local warden assured us that the Large Blue were to be seen. Sure enough before we arrived at the bottom of the hill we had seen more than 10 and had again seen them mating and depositing their eggs on the wild thyme. During the walk we were also fortunate enough to have excellent views of a Spotted Flycatcher in action and saw lots of Centaury in bloom.

Thanks must go to Margaret for organising such a wonderful trip, to Lyndon for negotiating lanes which 'narrow' fails to fully describe and to Richard for his daily showings of the moths collected overnightand for sharing his 60th birthday with us!



Large blue



Silver-studded