

u3a Wild Things field trip to Weedley Springs and Little Wold Plantation June 6th, 2022

Nine of us set out in coolish weather, threatening drizzle which never arrived. We were immediately greeted by a group of Roe Deer, nonchalantly safe behind a wire fence.



The springs at Weedley were too wet and treacherous to access, except for intrepid Angela, but we had time to examine the chalk flora community on the hillside to the east of the footpath. Here grew calcicoles (chalk lovers) such as Rock Rose, Crosswort, Quaking Grass, Fairy Flax and Mouse-ear hawkweed with Glaucous Sedge in the wetter parts, and banks of Wild Thyme, especially on the southern flanks of the anthills.





Returning to the track, Chris led us past the Little Wold Vineyard (lovely wines he told us), past the huge chalk quarry and then through the delightful Little Wold Plantation at the back of the quarry, a strip of woodland full of birdsong. We found pink and white plants of Dame's Violet (or Sweet Rocket), a brassica which has naturalised in this country. Apparently, its odd name comes from its being 'cultivated by dames of baronial castles' and 'called castle gillyflower'.

Here we found more Sanicle growing than anywhere I've seen in our area. This is a woodland umbellifer in decline because of habitat



destruction. It's a plant of deciduous woodland in calcareous areas, particularly where there is plenty of Beech, Ash and Oak. The name comes from the Latin 'sanus' meaning 'health' as it was a traditional herbal remedy, particularly for treating wounds. "He who has sanicle and self-heal needs neither physician nor surgeon", it was said.

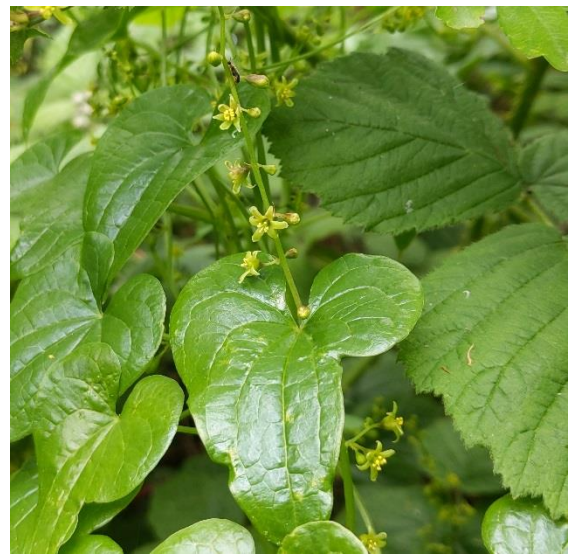
Photos page 2: top: Rockrose and Quaking Grass; bottom: Dame's Violet.

Above: Sanicle

Bottom: White Bryony left and Black Bryony right.

On our return I spotted both White and Black Bryony growing close to each other in the hedge. They're both climbing and twining hedgerow plants with small creamy flowers that grow into bright red berries and are both poisonous. However, they come from two separate flower families, Black Bryony is our only native representative of the yam family, and White Bryony is from the cucumber family.

In days of yore, the massive roots of White Bryony were known to be carved by fraudsters into the shape of the Mandrake root, which fetched exorbitant prices for its alleged aphrodisiac properties. In fact, Bryony is a fierce purgative, so, as one wag put it, you would be up all night but not in quite the way you'd hoped.



At this time of year, the insect population is in no need of aphrodisiacs, so I was disappointed not to see the 'Hogweed Bonking Beetle' as it's known in the naturalist world, the Red Soldier Beetle. Probably too cold. However, as the weather warmed, I managed to snap these four insects all feasting on the nectar of a single much maligned Hogweed plant lining the track.



Left: Flesh fly; above right: *Grammoptera ruficornis* and a small flower beetle; below: Common green bottle fly, all on a Hogweed.

Page 5: the fungus is Jelly Ear, the red flowers grown along the valley are

Sainfoin and the blue flowers in Carole's picture are Speedwells. I couldn't begin to identify the snail!

Photos from Carole, Helen and Paul. Report by HK.

