



Summer 2013

If this year's spring was cold and wet, the summer (to date – late July) has been warm, dry and generally glorious!

And in contrast to 2012, this has been a wonderful summer for butterflies.

Throughout June and July we have been spoiled for choice as to where to go to see not only large numbers, but also many species. Hills and Holes in July boasted its usual population of marbled white and chalkhill blue; there were white admirals in Royce Wood and small, Essex and large skippers at Swaddywell.

A grizzled skipper appeared at Swaddywell for the first time for over 20 years and of exceptional note a purple emperor – the country's largest and most elusive butterfly – turned up at Castor Hanglands in late July – the first record since the 1920s. <http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/species.php?species=iris>

The debate will rage as to whether this is a natural re-colonisation from the long-term stronghold at Fermyn Woods, near Oundle, or has been reared artificially indoors and released by a butterfly enthusiast, but the main thing is that this is a seriously beautiful butterfly, which glides elegantly around the tops of oak trees. Any visitor to the Hanglands at this time will find butterflies in profusion, including purple hairstreak, silver washed fritillary, gatekeeper and white admiral.

Another insect dramatically on the wing over the summer was the often seen, but little noted chironomid, otherwise known as the non-biting midge! These insects are the building blocks of aquatic life, providing food for fish and dragonfly nymphs when living under water as larvae, and for birds and other flying insects when they take to the wing.

Individually they are small and nondescript but when the males swarm at the end of a long, hot day they form veil-like clouds across the banks of water-ways or at the tops of trees, leading to an impression of smoke. The clouds above the Maxey Cut in early July sprang up from both banks, forming an insect arch over the water!



Midges swarming on the bridge over the Maxey Cut, Helpston Road

It has also been a good year for amphibians – there were record numbers of great crested newts at Swaddywell in April and after only 8 months, both common and great crested newts have rapidly colonised my new garden pond. I also found a common lizard running around the side of my house on 12 July. David Cowcill has twice seen adult grass snakes at Etton Maxey – swimming in the shallows of the lake and beside the northern footpath.

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And of course no summary of the great things to see this summer can be complete without mention of the carpets of pyramidal orchid at Swaddywell – creating flushes of purple within the grass across the southern part of the top meadow. We were also lucky enough to find a new species of orchid here in June this year. It was an early marsh-orchid, *Dactylorhiza incarnata* bringing the total species in the reserve to four, plus quite a lot of difficult-to-identify hybrids.

Richard Keymer found the first recorded lesser centaury on site in July. Another new record for Swaddywell, was burnet rose, and stems of crimson-pink grass vetchling reappeared this year. At the same time don't overlook the old favourites – common centaury and self-heal both made a splendid show of colour, and the wild marjoram is in full bloom.



Pyramidal orchids at Swaddywell 2013

The pyramidal orchid colony at Etton-Maxey Pits continues to expand – there were several hundred spikes there this year, substantial increase yet again. And a new to the site orchid was found here too, several handsome specimens of common spotted orchid were discovered by Ivan Cumberpatch under willow scrub. Also notable at Etton/Maxey were quite large colonies of Narrow-leaved Birds-foot-trefoil. Again the more common flowers shouldn't be overlooked. At the Open Day on 9 June the site was a sea of white ox-eye daisy, and perhaps the most attractive plants were red and white clovers.

At Etton-Maxey Pits we currently have two chicks on the tern rafts – they should fly soon, making this three years out of three that young have fledged on the rafts.

John Saunders was lucky enough to see an otter on the reserve on two occasions in May. There were also several wheatear during the spring passage and one glorious male whinchat. Of most 'birding' interest were the two Temminck's stint in May and the wood sandpiper in July.

But perhaps of more historical significance, red kites have nested in Royce Wood, Helpston, for the first time since the 19th Century. I can hear the young bird whistling for its food as I write!

And talking of young there was a delightful family of little owls (including two heavily spotted young) living between the Cut and the north drain. Indeed a walk along the Cut in the evening this summer is likely to offer views of barn and little owls, as well as the ever present and ever increasing little egrets. Mick Beeson saw 13 together there recently.

Torpel Field Update

As many of you know, we now have the visitor centre up at Torpel! We have been promising this for quite some time, but it is really here now! The patio surrounding it has also been laid and the entrance to the site improved to allow easier access off the road.

And to celebrate we were able to welcome over 120 people to this year's Torpel Festival, as part of the John Clare Society Festival, to enjoy both a wonderful summer's evening – a real contrast to last year, when we had to cancel the event due to rain – and a display of art, natural history photography and local crafts, as well as drama from the You're In Control Theatre Company, music from Pennyless and the annual John Clare Poetry Smackdown!

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The new cabin at Torpel and the John Clare Poetry Smackdown

Frieda Gosling also hosted a very successful archaeology event on 20 July, attended by 14 volunteers, with Bob Hatton from Peterborough Regional College helping to explain the basics of field surveys. There will be further opportunities to take part in field walking events in the autumn – so watch out for details!

Sadly the high winds in May brought the large ash tree at Torpel down – a great shame as this was one of the most distinctive of our local trees and probably over 150 years old.

Langdyke Volunteers

We are always looking for members to help out with the many tasks that the Trust needs to deliver every year, both on the reserves and in the necessary administrative work.

We are currently particularly looking for anyone who would like to support David Cowcill with our membership work and Jean Stowe with our publicity work, including the Trust website, which is sadly suffering from not enough care and attention at the moment.

As part of the Torpel project, we are looking for anyone who can help with reading

medieval Latin and 17th century English handwriting. Do let Frieda Gosling know if you think you have what it takes!

And our two reserves committees are always keen to welcome new faces. If you would like to be more involved with our ‘western’ reserves (Swaddywell, Torpel and Bainton) do please contact Chris Topper. Or if you are interested in the ‘eastern’ sites – Etton Maxey and Etton High Meadow, do contact Richard Jagger or Carol Pilson who have recently take up the position as joint - chairs of this committee – rdjagger@live.co.uk

It’s great to welcome Richard and Carol in their new roles. Equally we are delighted to welcome Mike Clatworthy and Peter Wordsworth who are actively involved on the Torpel project and on the ‘western’ reserve committee. Many thanks to all!

We also want to thank Stuart Irons for all his hard work over many years as Trust treasurer, a post which he has recently handed over to Brian Lawrence. And finally David Cowcill has also recently been elected as a new Langdyke trustee – thanks to him and Brian for “joining” up!

View 5 at Swaddywell

Outdoor art at Swaddywell by View 5



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As advertised in the last newsletter, the View 5 artists held an open-weekend at Swaddywell on 15/16 June, attracting over 100 visitors to the reserve to see their work – both in the cabin and around the site!

Langdyke Events

Our next events are

Friday 13 September, 7pm, Botolph's Barn

- Langdyke Annual Public Meeting – a review of the year and chance to hear from the members their thoughts on priorities for the year ahead.

Saturday 21 September - 11am onwards -

Field trip to RSPB Frampton (between Boston & The Wash, nr Kirton/A16). Depart Helpston Post Office, 8.30 am/Meet RSPB Frampton 9.30 am

Saturday 28 September - Work Party, Etton/Maxey - Main entrance Etton Road

Contacts

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