



Three Brooks Nature Conservation Group  
<http://www.three-brooks.info>

## Wildflower walks - 7 April 2007

Rupert Higgins from Wessex Ecological Trust, who drafted the management plan for the reserve, led two wildflower walks.

The first walk in the morning went through Savage's Wood and the plantation to the north. On the path next to the school, Rupert pointed out the dry seed heads of Teasel, a composite flower related to scabious. They are a member of the Asteraceae family, one of the largest plant groups. The heads are attractive to birds in winter, especially goldfinch. They are still used for carding felt for snooker tables. Coltsfoot is still used by herbalists for throat lozenges. Several willows grow next to the path - these come in male and female varieties. Male willow catkins are one of the first flowers to appear in spring. Rupert thought these were grey/goat willow hybrids. We also noted the white willow with white hairs on its leaves. Rupert demonstrated how the twigs bend, while those of the crack willow crack (of course!) We were also rewarded by the sight and sound of both green and greater spotted woodpeckers in a large oak tree.

As we entered the wood we noted lesser celandine and also the leaves of arum maculatum (lords and ladies) - some leaves are spotted. We also saw wild garlic, also known as ransoms, or bear garlic (*Allium ursinum*). It is the only allium that likes woods and damp soils, and has a wide leaf. We saw the white wood anemone, *Anemone nemorosa*. This is strongly linked to old woodlands.

The bluebells were just coming into flower. Fortunately these were the English bluebells (flowers are on one side of the stalk) rather than the Spanish hybrids.

We looked at the hornbeam plantation in the corner near the wood entrance, noting the serrated edge to the leaf (beech leaves are smooth). Both hornbeams and beeches are native to Britain, but not to the Bradley Stoke area where they have been deliberately planted.

The leaves of dogs' mercury covered the ground. Rupert explained that where a plant's common name contains "dog", this is an indication that the plant is no use for anything! Dog violet is another example.

Several types of grasses grow in the wood. Identification of grasses is notoriously difficult, but Rupert noted that sedge can be recognised by its triangular stem. Pendulous sedge has dangling flowers, hence the name. Male flowers are borne separately from the smaller female flowers.

We noted wild privet, a woodland edge plant, and the small pink flowers of the geranium Herb Robert (*geranium robertianum*). As Rupert pointed out guelder rose and wild honeysuckle, a sparrowhawk flew past. We also spotted a nuthatch.

We reached the newer plantation to the north of Savage's Wood. The ground flora here is much poorer as there has not been much time for it to colonise the area. Local schoolchildren have planted cowslips under the trees - Rupert thought they might not be the right sort! He pointed out cherry trees and noted that these have extra-floral (outside the flower) nectaries, which entice ants.



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Our afternoon walk followed the path beside the brook up towards Sherbourne's Brake. The ferny fronds of angelica grew next to another plant which, apart from purple spots on its stems, looked deceptively similar. "This is why people die", said Rupert, explaining that the purple-spotted plant was hemlock (yes, the one that killed Socrates). He also pointed out meadowsweet (which has leaves similar to strawberry), Jack-by-the-hedge or hedge garlic, and ivy-leaved speedwell (*veronica hederifolia*). A plant that looked similar to deadnettle was yellow archangel, - the plain-leaved variety is a native woodland plant, but this variegated one was a garden escape. We also saw wood spurge, *Euphorbia amygdoloides*.

By the small footbridge Rupert pointed out the warty trunk of English elm. The leaves are like those of hazel, but are asymmetric at the base.

In Webb's Wood, new plants included early dog violet and sanicle (palmate leaves which are glossy underneath).

We turned then to the lake and the tump, which yielded a variety of new plants:

- Ground ivy - bears tiny purple pea-like flowers
- Several plantains - hoary (with downy hair), ribwort and rat's-tail
- Creeping cinquefoil (with five-lobed palmate leaves)
- Bristly ox-tongue (warty)
- Burdock
- Mugwort
- Bush vetch
- Hard rush (another grassy one)
- Meadow buttercup
- Meadow vetchling

On the top of the tump we watched the skylarks rising as they sang.

As we headed back up to the leisure centre we noted common field speedwell and wayfaring tree. We caught a quick glimpse of a bullfinch and of a peacock butterfly.

We thanked Rupert for a fascinating and educational day. (Now, how many can we remember?!)