

Visit to Hunthouse Wood, 5th October 2022

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The weather forecast was for rain showers interspersed with sunshine but, undeterred, 11 of us met to visit this special nature reserve owned and managed since 1976 by the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust in Dumbleton Dingle. The site is described on their website as “Parts of the reserve are amongst the most impenetrable and undisturbed woods in the county, making for a rich and varied wildlife”. This sounded just the sort of place we liked to explore.

The rain began whilst Susan Limbrey was describing the geology, soils and history of the site. “The Upper Carboniferous Coal Measures here consists of sandstones, shales and clays, with coal seams and a thin Spirorbis limestone which crop out low down in the deeply incised dingle. Some of the sandstone is calcareous, giving soils which support the lime-loving plants of the site’s rich vegetation high above the limestone band. There had been coal working from outcrops in the Dingle before mining began in 1924 with excavation of horizontal drift mines into the valley sides, and then deep shafts were dug to reach the coal seam from the higher ground in 1929 and 1939. This seam was exhausted, and shafts were deepened to reach a deeper seam. The last of these shafts closed in 1950, but new drifts had been opened in 1946 further down the valley where a fault brought the original productive seam out in the valley bottom, and new shafts were dug in 1956 and 1963. A flooding event ended this activity in 1964, and a workers co-operative took over for a short period but failed in 1972”.

The main mine buildings were on the site of M and M Timber, yet evidence still remains in the woodland of old tramways, machinery and pits, and during the health and safety briefing we were advised to stick to the pathways, especially avoiding the section marked with a skull and crossbones symbol on the map!

There are two circular paths in the Reserve

and the morning was spent wandering slowly along the Nature Trail past giant Cherry trees, Yew trees on steep banks and innumerable Hazel coppice stools. Several opened hazel nuts were later identified as having been eaten by Dormice and Bank Voles. Tony Simpson recorded micromoth mines in leaves as we walked and obtained many records. A Stinkhorn fungus *Phallus impudicus* was located by smell and Dave Barnett later identified two of the flies that were attracted to feed on its spore-laden mucus. As the rain became heavier those writing records in notebooks abandoned the practice and Rosemary Winnall’s Dictaphone came into its own, as did our waterproof Olympus TG cameras.

We paused for lunch on a horizontal birch trunk bedecked with Hoof Fungi *Fomes foventarius* and rain dripped into our sandwich boxes. After our steep postprandial uphill climb, we were rewarded with sightings of lime trunks filled with sap-sucking woodpecker holes, False Death Cap *Amanita citrina* fungi, Holly Speckle *Trochila ilicina*, Garlic Snails *Oxychilus alliarius* and Lilac Bonnets *Mycena pura*. Slugs were still eluding us. A log full of nibbled Sulphur Tuft *Armillaria mellea* fungi looked hopeful until closer inspection led us to believe that this was evidence of a hungry Muntjac.

As we neared the reserve entrance a few very wet and cold members decided to call it a day whilst seven of us continued round the second loop, down steep ground into the valley bottom where we enjoyed brighter weather and collected some interesting records. The stream valley, with its Hard Shield Fern *Polystichum aculeatum*, Great Scented Liverwort *Conocephalum conicum* and Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* was the location of the Ash Black Slug *Limax cinereoniger* and Green Elfcups *Chlorociboria aeruginascens* growing on, unusually, a dead Ash trunk. We wandered past Sanicle *Sanicula europaea*, Cramp Balls *Daldinia concentrica* and paused to photograph some

splendid Magpie Inkcaps *Coprinopsis picaea*. Fungi became more frequent on this damp shaded bank and more snails were recorded, including the three look-alikes *Clausilia bidentata*, *Cochlodina laminata* and *Macrogastris rolphii*, the last being one of our target species for the day.

Climbing back up the valley side we stepped over trunks spotted with Purple Jellydiscs *Ascocyne sarcooides* and Lemon Discos *Bisporella citrina*, noted Small Teasel *Dipsacus pilosus* seedheads and Horsehair Parachutes *Gymnopus androsaceus*. Brightly coloured Yellow Shield *Pluteus chrysophaeus* toadstools stood proud on a dead mossy stump and we interrupted a Pale Tussock caterpillar on its way, perhaps, to a pupation site. Tony Simpson noted: "37 species of leaf-mining Lepidoptera were recorded during the walk, with 12 new to the site. There were a number of old cases of the Pyschid moth, *Psyche casta*, found on tree trunks once again as on a previous visit, which is interesting as I have been unable to locate any in woodland further north in the nearby Teme valley. A hibernating Noctuid, the Satellite, was found by Ian and I found a

pupa of Maiden's Blush under an oak leaf. It always seems extraordinary to me that this exposed pupa under a simple silken girdle will fall to the woodland floor with the leaf and then survive until the moth emerges in the late spring."

Before we reached the cars, we paused to admire the fruiting Violet Helleborines *Epipactis purpurata* that flower annually under the conifers, and Andrew Curran added Plums and Custard *Tricholomopsis rutilans* to our list of records. We departed to dry our clothes and write up our records after our visit to a special woodland and good day out with friends. We still have one question – are Lemon Slugs present in this site or has it been too disturbed for this ancient woodland species to survive? We shall have to go back to find out!

References

- Mitchel, G. H. and Taylor, J.H. (1962) *Geology of the Country around Droitwich, Abberley and Kidderminster*. Memoirs of the Geological Survey of Great Britain. HMSO.
- Poyner, D. and Evans, R. (2000) *The Wyre Forest Coalfield*. Tempus.



Recorders in Hunthouse Wood from left - Tony Simpson, Rosemary Hill, Ian Wright, Andrew Curran

Rosemary Winnall