

September Walk between Bewdley and Bypass via Snuffmill Dingle

JANE SCOTT

Saturday 22nd September 2012 proved to be one of those rare days, sunny, reasonably warm and dry. Meeting at Blackstone Riverside Park we made our way to Ribbesford Church along the avenue of trees, noting that almost all of the Horse Chestnut trees were showing many leaf mines of the Horse Chestnut Leaf Miner moth, *Cameraria ohridella*, with one adult seen on the wing. Dave Scott also spotted a Grey Shoulder-knot moth, *Lithophane ornitopus ssp lactipennis* at rest on one of the tree trunks. Picking up the Worcestershire Way, we headed through the tunnel beneath the bypass towards Bewdley. Crossing a small lane on the way, Tony Simpson noticed a feeding larval case of an uncommon, though widespread micro moth, *Coleophora violacea* on Blackthorn.

The path then passed along the edge of some interesting rough grassland which we were able to walk over with the permission of the landowner and it was here that we hoped to find two of our target species for the day as suggested by Brett Westwood. These were Long-winged Coneheads *Conocephalus discolor* and Roesel's Bushcricket, *Metrioptera roeselii*, both relatively recent colonisers in Worcestershire and still with few records in this part of the county, particularly west of the River Severn. Although a few lucky individuals were still able to hear them, most of us relied on bat detectors and before long the distinctive call was picked up and several Long-winged Coneheads seen, admired and photographed. We had no luck in finding any Roesel's but the habitat appeared to be less suitable. One other species of note found here was the mine of the micro moth *Tischeria dodonaea*, a widespread but local species, rarer in recent years, with only two other VC37 records since 1996.

This site had some wonderful veteran trees along its lower side and on the ground below one of these we found a number of Barn Owl pellets, some of which Rosemary collected to sort through for small mammal bones. Pellets were also collected by Tony Simpson to check for any larvae or pupae of micro moths. He has subsequently had one small Tineidid, *Monopis laevigella* emerge and, no doubt, more will follow. Another tree yielded a colony of the Jet Black Ant, *Lasius fuliginosus*, a species which the Study Group has been recording whenever a nest is discovered. These uncommon ants forage for honeydew, often climbing high into the canopy of mature trees, returning to the nest following their own scent trails.

We then headed up the hill through further rough pasture to find a lunch spot in the sun with good views



Long-winged Conehead, Kemerton 30/7/10 Rosemary Winnall

over the Severn Valley, noting on our way both Dark Bushcricket, *Pholidoptera griseoaptera* and Speckled Bushcricket, *Leptophyes punctatissima*. Whilst eating we were treated to the sight of a flock of 25-30 Mistle Thrush and those with very good eyesight were able to pick out flocks of House Martin in the distance over the valley, gathering in preparation for their winter migration.

Feeling replete, we left the pasture and headed down into Snuffmill Dingle, a very deep wooded valley sandwiched between the bypass and the town and virtually hidden from view. At the lower end were a series of pools of which only three now remain, reminding us that there were once mills here producing snuff using raw material brought up the River Severn (see photographs and article following).

Amongst the birds seen on our way up the dingle were Heron, Grey Wagtail Nuthatch and Treecreeper and we also noted that in addition to the usual woodland trees there were a number of Hornbeam and Beech. A splendid group of the fungi Dead Man's Fingers, *Xylaria polymorpha* was found on rotting fallen logs and the egg cases of a spider, *Theridion pallens* were spotted on the underside of leaves. Coming across a large patch of Common Cow Wheat, *Melampyrum pratense* we searched without luck for the eponymously named shield bug but the timing wasn't ideal and we hope to perhaps have a further search earlier next year.

A steep path at the top of the dingle led us onto a further area of rough grassland, with scattered birch and hawthorn scrub. Many Birch Shieldbugs, *Elasmotethus interstinctus* were found here amongst the scrub and a few Speckled Wood, *Pararge aegeria* and Comma, *Polygonia c-album* butterflies were flying in the vicinity. Heading down into the town along some of the old footpaths that run behind both new and old houses, Brett spotted Sword Fern, *Polystichum munitum*, a North American species normally only found growing in gardens (see photograph). This was subsequently confirmed by John Day as the first county record of this fern found growing in the wild in Worcestershire. Definitely one of the 'spots of the day'.

As we walked behind some of the older properties closer to the town centre, other interesting plants presented themselves, such as Flattened Meadow Grass, *Poa compressa*, growing on the top of an old wall and Rough Comfrey, *Symphytum asperum*, a garden escape probably from St Anne's House. A quick check on the flowering ivy revealed the Beautiful Plume, *Amblyptilia acanthadacyla*, a micro moth which truly lives up to its name and which seems to have enjoyed a period of expansion in recent years as has *Bombus hypnorum* noted nectaring on late garden flowers.

A short detour into Jubilee Gardens Park, one of Bewdley's hidden places, led us inevitably into the back of the museum for a very welcome drinks/ice cream stop before we began our return along the river



Sword Fern, *Polystichum munitum*, Bewdley Rosemary Winnall

back to Blackstone where we had left the cars. On the way we looked for and found the capsid bug, *Pantilius tunicatus* sitting on cones of the Alders growing along the river. Sadly, many of the Alders looked very unhealthy and were clearly succumbing to yet another of the diseases attacking our native trees.

As a finale to an interesting and varied day we were entertained by the sight of a solitary Great-crested Grebe trying to manoeuvre a large fish that it had caught, into a position where it could be swallowed. Allowing for the usual 'fishy' exaggeration, we estimated it to be between 25-30cms long and it was held horizontally in the beak. The grebe employed a tactic of repeated diving until it finally emerged with fish head down in its beak and proceeded to slowly swallow it. Quite a gruesome event, at least as far as the fish was concerned, but an entertaining end to the day.



Snuffmill Dingle pool, 30 October 2012

Rosemary Winnall