

## The Study Group's visit to Finch's Wood

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At Beach Hay we drove into the forest and up the hill, and wood smoke rising through the trees ahead confirmed that we were heading in the right direction. After we'd parked our cars in the woodland clearing, we were pleased to see that Roy and Frances Finch already had their large kettle boiling on the open fire. As we sat around the hearth sipping tea and nibbling blackberry muffins, Frances welcomed us, and Roy told us about how they came to purchase this 5 acres of woodland in 1975 from Christopher Tangye of Sodington Hall. Their land is part of Cleobury Coppice, all of which is ancient semi-natural woodland and a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

Four Speckled Wood butterflies spiralling in the sunlight beckoned us down through the trees to the Lem Brook tributary which we followed upstream through oak coppice (with kind permission from Joe Birch). This was mainly Sessile Oak (stored singled coppice) with some Hollies, birches and occasional Alder Buckthorn, with Alder and Hazel in the valley bottom. We soon spread out, everyone going at their own speed as usual. Mick Blythe was soon seen near rotting wood with his head in his white net, where, to his delight, he was pootered up some tiny black flies which most of us could hardly see. Trevor Duke scanned tree bark and showed us *Graphis scripta* on Hazel as expected, but surprisingly also on smooth Holly bark. Many of the Holly leaves had evidence of the fly leaf miner *Phytomyza ilicis*. We found galls too, *Aceria nalepai*, *Eriophyes laevis* and *Acalitus brevitarsus* on Alder all caused by mites, and the fly gall *Chirosia betuleti* on Male Fern.

Higher up the valley John Cox discovered the only Ash Black Slug *Limax cinereoniger* of the day with its distinctive stripy sole. Jane Scott found a caterpillar which Dave Scott identified as a Peach Blossom larva *Thyatira batis*. Deer Toadstools *Pluteus cervinus* were spotted growing on dead wood, their gills showing pink spores. Two different delicate groups of *Mycena*

toadstools were found growing on oak trunks, one where the stipe bled red *Mycena haematopus* and the other with a white latex *M. galopus*. Jane Pope found the large crane fly *Pedicia rivosa* with its beautifully-marked wings whilst some of us scrabbled in the leaf litter looking for molluscs. Not many were found, indicating how acidic this woodland is, although we confirmed the presence of the Garlic Snail *Oxychilus alliarius* and recorded *Aegopinella nitidula*, amongst a few others.

A Robin serenaded us with its mournful winter song as we passed an occupied Badger sett and we were pleased to follow the animals' well-beaten trail across the slope through the dense bramble growth. Tony Simpson and Oliver Wadsworth searched for evidence of micromoth larvae and showed us leaf mines in Hazel, oak, Honeysuckle and Alder, and brown fallen oak leaves with green islands showing the presence of micromoth *Stigmella atricapitella* larvae. Jane Scott pointed out several dung beetles *Anoplotrupes stercorosus* ambling across the path and some very large *Arion ater* (agg) slugs which stopped us in our tracks. Picking one up, we observed it rocking from side to side – presumably a deterrent to dissuade us from eating it! A few harvestmen came to our attention and four species were identified. *Leiobunum rotundum* was noted wandering across ground vegetation, whereas *Dicranopalpus ramosus* was observed on tree branches, its distinctive bifurcating palps evident with a hand lens.

We enjoyed a most pleasant lunch break back round the fire where Roger Plant took photographs of us all celebrating 25 years of the Wyre Forest Study Group's existence. We were reminded about the last time the Study Group had visited when Roy scaled one of his large oak trees that needed felling, and brought down each branch one at a time onto a tarpaulin so that we could identify invertebrates, lichens and bryophytes from the tree canopy. This was a most interesting exercise and has been written up in the Wyre Forest Study Group REVIEW 2012 and on the website: [www.wyreforest.net](http://www.wyreforest.net).

During the afternoon we ventured down into the lower end of the woodland past clumps of Bilberry, Heather and Wavy Hair-grass, watched by a large fat yellow Frog. An interesting slime mould was found at the side of the track. It looked blue from a distance and we marvelled at the intricacy of each tiny sporing head on its slender stalk. Marian Davidson kept records of the plants we found including the ferns Male, Lady, Hard, Broad Buckler and Bracken. Enchanters Nightshade grew down in the valley, but we couldn't find the



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Enchanter's Nightshade Stilt Bug that we'd seen here in 2012, although Jane Scott located the Mirid bug *Pantilius tunicatus* on an oak trunk. A small Hedgehog Slug *Arion intermedius* sat hunched on some dead wood with *Lithobius variegatus*, the centipede with stripy legs. A few Blusher *Amanita rubescens* fungi were found pushing up through the leaf litter; the one mature specimen had blushed pink where slugs had nibbled its cap.

Small bracket fungi were seen on dead trunks which had fallen across the valley, and *Stereum hirsutum*, *Trametes versicolor* and *Bjerkandera adusta* were identified. Deciduous stumps were sprouting small yellow jelly sticks of *Calocera pallidospathulata*. Under the damp bark several woodlice were recorded including *Oniscus asellus* and *Trichoniscus pusillus* and Susan spotted some circular slug eggs looking fat and opalescent in the dark soil. Ann Hill kept her eyes to the ground and showed us some beautiful *Pellia endiviifolia* male and female liverworts alongside the stream. Water Cricket *Velia caprai* nymphs were found skimming the surface of the pools, and bright orange nitrogen-fixing nodules on Alder roots were admired

in the bank. There was no sign of crayfish or molluscs in the water.

Later in the afternoon we went into a compound on adjoining land where pigs had been kept for a number of years (with kind permission from Mick Bell). Although the ground was well churned up, there was plenty of new plant growth. A damp patch gave us some records of several rushes and sedges, and we saw the tiny prothalli and first small leaves of ferns growing on the damp soil. Trailing St. John's-wort was taking advantage of bare ground to spread out, and Heath Speedwell and Heath Milkwort were growing close by. Many young Foxglove plants were present, and discussion ensued about how the seeds had got there. Steve Horton spotted large webs stretched between foliage with the spider *Araneus diadematus* sitting in the centre.

At the end of the afternoon, we thanked Roy and Frances for their hospitality and for sharing their interesting woodland. As we departed down the hill we were left with the evocative scent of woodsmoke in the air, and our memories of a special day.



The Wednesday Study Group in Finch's Wood. Standing from left, Susan Limbrey, Jane Pope, Trevor Duke, Mick Blythe, Marian Davidson, Dave Scott, Ann Hill, John Cox, Jane Scott, Oliver Wadsworth, Tony Simpson, Ann Hadfield, Steve Horton, Rosemary Winnall. Sitting, Frances and Roy Finch. Inset - the photographer Roger Plant

Roger Plant