

# Wyre Forest Study Group

## WFSG at Whitethorn Bank

GRAHAM HILL

The early months of 2021 were afflicted by a third 'lockdown', meaning that the Wyre Forest Study Group were unable to gather for our usual field meetings and when we could, we were limited to groups of six. By the time summer arrived, restrictions were eased and larger groups were able to meet out of doors. It seemed to us that the numbers of visitors to places like the Wyre Forest had exploded during the pandemic as people flocked to the great outdoors, encouraged by Government advice. As a result, we were cautious about forays into Wyre, preferring to head for lesser frequented places. So where could we get thirty of us together safely?

On Saturday 17th July 2021 twenty-three members of the Wyre Forest Study Group gathered at Whitethorn Bank Woodland, near Rushwick, Worcester to socialise and explore the woodland, recording species along the way. Although Whitethorn Bank is not part of the Wyre Forest, it was a place where the group could meet friends, explore and record the natural environment on, what turned out to be, a rather good-weather day.

Whitethorn Bank is 7.5 acres of broadleaf woodland with a 0.5 acre pond, Ann and Graham Hill have owned and managed it, with nature in mind, since 1997. Hawthorn is widespread through the woodland, hence its name, but there are 27 Veteran trees around the boundary and many Ashes and Oaks scattered throughout. The pond was constructed in 1971 to provide irrigation for fruit trees. In 2000 a mixed species hedgerow was planted

along the southern boundary, we only started to lay this hedge in 2021.

A list of flora and fauna was inherited from the previous owners, who had a particular interest in birds and, as time went by, we sought to identify as many species as we could. Initially we added a handful of new species each year (Figure 1). Ann concentrated on plants and bryophytes and I marvelled at how much someone could know because my generalist abilities were soon exhausted. We always thought of the woodland as not particularly special, except that it was woodland and had a pond and probably hosted many more species than we knew about!

Prior to 2016 we had a record of 122 different species, although it may have been more as our record keeping wasn't particularly rigorous in those days! Species included in the inherited list were breeding records of Coat Tit, Marsh Tit, Turtle Dove, Garden Warbler, Whitethroat and Little Grebe, none have been recorded since. In 2000 twenty-eight species of lichen were added by Joy Ricketts. In 2016 we invited several local naturalists to the woodland for a 'Bioblitz', with the promise of a hot drink and maybe a piece of cake by way of reward. Our reward for their labours was an additional 233 species added to our list. Within these records Mick Blythe found several Dipterans that were of interest: in pondside mud *Dolichopus wahlbergi* which is Uncommon and Local; in the campfire area *Syntormon bicolorillum* which is Uncommon and the

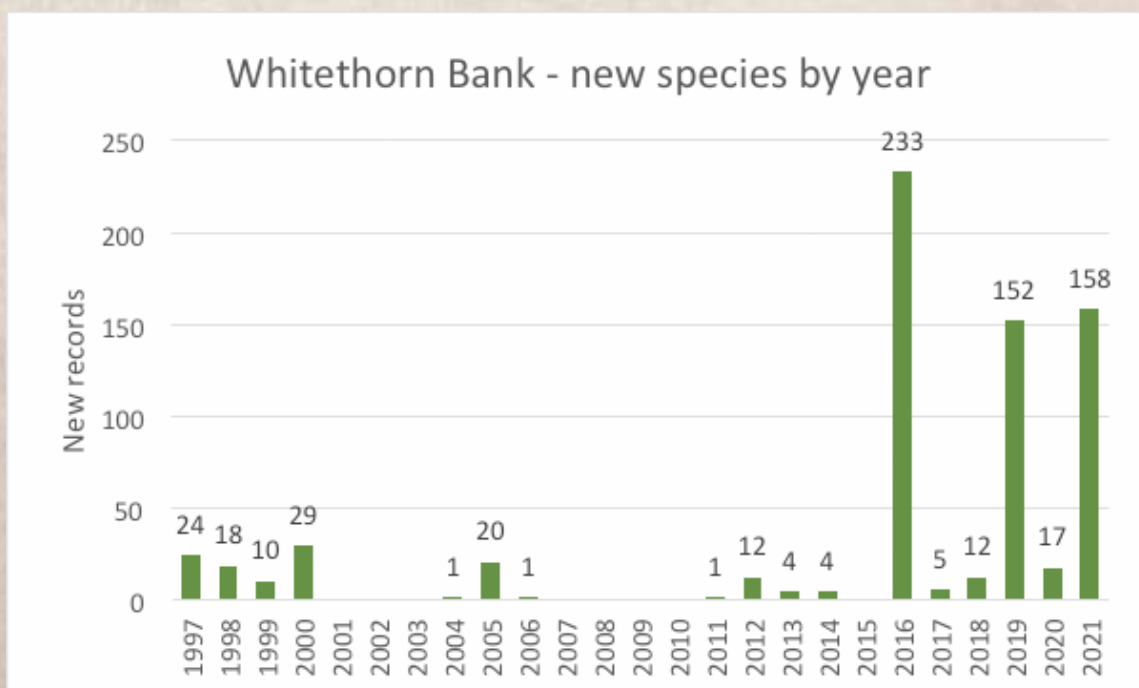


Figure 1. New species recorded at Whitethorn Bank by year.



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first Worcestershire record; *Teuchophorus nigricosta* which is Uncommon and *Teuchophorus simplex* which is also Uncommon; Ann added 45 bryophyte species too. Four species of bat have been found at Whitethorn Bank - *Myotis daubentonii* Daubentons Bat, *Nyctalus noctule* Noctule, *Pipistrellus pipistrellus* Pipistrelle and *Pipistrellus pygmaeus* Soprano Pipistrelle. And, we were quite surprised when a European Eel *Anguilla Anguilla* was seen in the pond one night.

By the end of the 2016 we were aware of 356 species of flora and fauna calling our woodland home.

During 2019 Ann added a further 145 species to our record – most of these were plants although a few birds were there too.

## WFSG Meeting 2021

The WFSG meeting was planned for Saturday 17th July, Tony Simpson had agreed to come along the evening before to set up a moth trap as no moths had been recorded on our list at all!

Tony and Ann Simpson set up a Mercury Vapour Trap near one of the veteran oak trees on the evening of 16th July and collected 92 species of moth before heading home in the early hours. The list included three species of wet habitats associated with the pool and surroundings (three Round-winged Muslin Footman, and micros *Phalonidia manniana* and *Eudonia pallida*). Most of the rest were species of deciduous woodland including a popular and well photographed Leopard Moth *Zeuzera pyrina* but also two recent additions to

county fauna, Box Tree Moth *Cydalima perspectalis* and *Metalampra italica* probably from nearby suburban gardens, three Brown Scallops were from a nearby Buckthorn. The moth trap was close to a veteran oak tree and attracted many individuals of a local nocturnal beetle, *Prionychus ater*, and a single *Opilo mollis* whose larva is said to be a predator of other dead wood feeding beetle larvae. Tony returned at lunchtime the following day with some of his specimens.

The main group of members arrived on the Saturday morning and, after a guided tour, set off to practice their identification skills, chat over a hot drink or explore the pond in the little boat. During the day, 258 species were recorded, or re-recorded, by members of the WFSG. Marian Davidson and Jackie Hardy worked very hard to record 101 species, closely followed by Tony Simpson's 92 species. Carol and John Taylor recorded 24 species on their own account and added a further eight when teamed up with Patrick Taylor who recorded a further six on his own. Gary and Nicki Farmer recorded 18 species whilst Cherry Greenway added six, I managed two and John Cox one. For the sake of clarity (and to dispel argument) many species were recorded by several people, the first record to be processed gets the mention!

John Cox set up a pheromone lure in the hope of attracting a Hornet Moth *Sesia apiformis*, and he was delighted when one appeared. An Orange-tailed Clearwing *Synanthedon andrenaefomis* was attracted to another lure.



WFSG members at Whitethorn Bank

Roger Plant



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A family of Jays *Garrulus glandarius* were quarrelling in the treetops, another new record, whilst a camera trap had been set up the night before and, on reviewing the photographs we saw male and female Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus* – another new record.

Socially it was a great day. Picnic chairs were set out under the big oak tree, people chatted and shared experiences of the pandemic, picnics were eaten there too. Several members took the opportunity to go out in the little dinghy during the afternoon, rowing out on the pond in the warm sunshine. By mid-afternoon people started to drift away, having had a good day out, but not in Wyre!



Leopard moth

Graham Hill



Orange-tailed Clearwing

Graham Hill



Lunar hornet clearwing

Roger Plant



WFSG members at Tony Simpson's moth table

Ann Hill