

A Spider Encounter

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Green Huntsman spiders *Micrommata virescens*, male above, 1 May 2019

Rosemary Winnall

In our 2018 REVIEW Adam Mindykowski documented the find of a Neolithic polished chert axehead by Dr David Sargent in 1974 in a ploughed field near the Lem Brook in Bell Coppice. So on 1st May 2019 the Wyre Forest Study Wednesday Group set off to look at the site and to record wildlife during the day.

Spring was in the air and, although not warm, we were aware of lots of new growth in the sunken lane that took us down to the stream on the east side of the woodland. Ramsons and Bluebells were in flower near the ford, with occasional Wood Sorrel plants on the drier ground. We recorded the weevil *Barynotus moerens* near the stream, and the attractive harvestman *Megabunus diadema* and Land Caddis *Enoicyla pusilla*

on a tree trunk near a sap run. We obtained another Wyre record of the woodlouse *Philoscia affinis* from the leaf litter, and on foliage we spotted a pair of mating hoverflies *Platycheirus albimanus*, the delicate lacebug *Tachycixius pilosus*, and Common Malachite Beetle *Malachius bipustulatus*. Bumblebees *Bombus pascuorum* and *B. pratorum* were quartering the banks and a couple of early *Adela reaumurilla* micromoths were newly hatched from pupae in the leaf litter.

We stopped for lunch up by the old Hornbeam tree, an unusual species to find growing in Wyre, and wondered about its heritage. It grows next to the ditch and fence along the edge of the field, no longer ploughed, but laying fallow. It was near here that the neolithic axe



The Ford, Bell Coppice, 18 April 2019

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Looking down into the Lem Brook valley

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Old Hornbeam tree, Bell Coppice, 18 April 2019

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head had been dropped approximately 5,000 years ago. Or had it been placed in the stream as a votive offering before the valley had eroded down to its present position as suggested by Adam Mindykowski?? We shall never know, but we surveyed the scene trying to imagine what it had been like all those years ago when Neolithic folk lived and farmed near here and walked in this woodland.

It was near this Hornbeam tree that we spotted a pair of Nursery Web *Pisaura mirabilis* spiders on bare ground. Whilst we were photographing these, someone spotted a Green Huntsman spider *Micrommata virescens*. Then there were shouts of "Here's another" "And another"! In a small area of leaf litter we counted 7 males and 4 females, and one of these females had a male in attendance. Suddenly this became more interesting. Why were there so many just in this one spot measuring about 10 paces by 10 paces? Was it a kind of spider lek? Were the males attracted by pheromones from females close to their final moult? This area of dry leaf litter with bare ground is certainly not the place we would normally see either of these spider species. But perhaps they had come in from the adjoining field of

long grass to where they would return to find food and make their nests?

With kind permission of the owner James Tibbetts, we spent the afternoon in the small meadow nearby where we found a male *Misumena vatia* (far less often seen than the female), micromoths *Ancylis badiana*, and *Parornix anglicella*, hoverfly *Portevinia maculata* near the Ramsons, and Orange Tip eggs on the Ladies Smock. We sat and listened to some summer visitors as male Willow Warbler, Chiff Chaff and Garden Warbler advertised their new territories. On a rotting stump 2 *Arion owenii* slugs were identified. The snail *Hygromia cinctella* had already been found near the stream, and as both molluscs are usually associated with the urban environment in Wyre, we suspected that they may have arrived in garden waste from a house nearby.

As we wandered back to the road we passed fields full of cowslips and stopped to listen to a Lesser Whitethroat singing from the hedgerow. We'd enjoyed the day, let our imaginations run back through time, revelled in the present spring scene, and finished with looking forward to what the future summer in Wyre would hold.

This article is an extract from the Wyre Forest Study Group annual Review 2019

Wyre Forest Study Group



Wood Sorrel, 1 May 2019

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Old bank and ditch, 1 May 2019

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A pair of *Pisaura mirabilis*, 1 May 2019

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Photographing spiders, 1 May 2019

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Green Huntsman spiders *Micrommata virescens*, showing the male's red pedipalps, 1 May 2019

John Bingham