

Wildlife Report for Turnpike Fields Working Group Meeting - Monday 3rd July 2023

General

The dry weather conditions have followed the same pattern as last year. The regular seasonal pattern has again been interrupted. This has resulted in short flowering period for spring and early summer plants and a knock on effect for insect numbers. The wetland area is now the driest that it has been since observations began.

Survey

Wildlife surveying has continued and the headline results for the Spring period are:

Plants (in flower) 73 (including 9 new species)
Grasses 7
Insects 27
Birds 14
Animals 4

Plants

The reduction in plant species may be the result of a number of factors.

1. Not all plants flower each year due to weather factors, perennial characteristics or altered physical conditions.
2. Where a species is represented by very few specimens, the sighting of those species is less predictable.
3. The changing nature of the ecosystem means that plant species will come and go.

The changing soil composition has been shown by the sighting of a new orchid plant, the Early Purple Orchid. We have also had another sighting of the marsh Orchid first seen last year. Orchids are signature species indicating that the "improved" nature of the top field is reducing and allowing natural mycellial soil structure to increase. (Orchids are dependent on the fungal mycellium for growth). The changing nature of the field is also show by the weakening of the grass growth (without added stimulants). This is one of the reasons that the Common Ragwort plants have been able to thrive over the past two summers. This change is natural, even with the added effect of weather change. The ecosystem will in time balance itself and we see some plants go and others come.

Grasses

The grass growth is less this year and the grasses have seeded earlier. A reduced number of types have been recorded which again may be due to the changing nature of the fields.

Insects

The changing seasonal pattern and plant life has a knock-on effect on the insect life which is vital to the whole system. This year there has been a dearth of insects particularly bees and hover flies, both of which are important pollinators. There is also very few ladybirds and other beetles. The butterfly count has also been small, even if most species previously recorded have been recorded again. Better news is that the summer fliers such as Ringlets seem more numerous.

Birds

A good selection of the birds recorded previously have been sighted again. In common with BTO Garden Birdwatch Survey, birds such as Blackcaps which was a migrating species now over-winter with us. Chiffchaffs were present earlier this year and a very audible if not visual presence.

Community Interaction

Three Safaris, with Guides, Cubs and Beavers have had to be postponed.

The Spring and Summer Nature walks leaflets have been produced and made available.

Meeting with North West In Bloom judges is to take place on 13th July.

