

THE LEEDS NATURALIST

NEWSLETTER NUMBER 7

Field trip to St Aidan's RSPB reserve 27th May 2015

11 members attended the first field trip for 2015 on a cold overcast day with a strong north-easterly wind

Birds The highlight of the day was a very visible Bittern that spent about 20 minutes flying around the reserve before apparently departing high NE. A Peregrine circling with a large number of swifts invited mis-identification. A solitary male Wigeon on one of the lakes might suggest breeding. Other waterfowl included large numbers of Gadwall and Tufted Ducks, smaller numbers of Pochard and Mallard, odd Little and Great-crested Grebes and Grey Heron. Apart from a solitary Lapwing feeding on the mud and an Oystercatcher flying over there were no waders and no sign of breeding activity. Reed Warblers were plentiful but no Sedge Warblers. Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff, Garden Warbler, Whitethroat and Black-cap were present around the edge of the reserve, Reed Bunting and Sand Martin were on it.

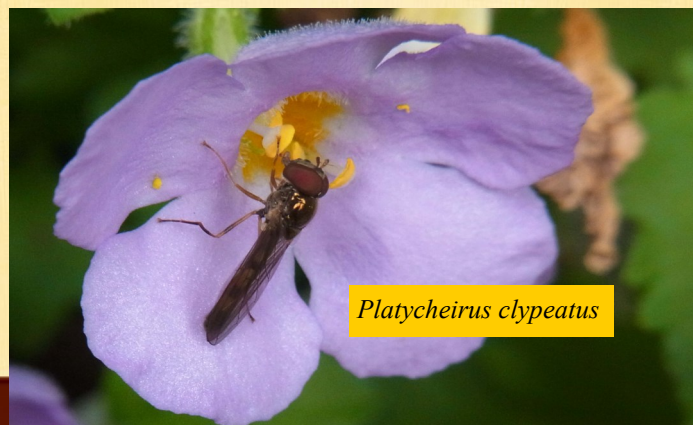
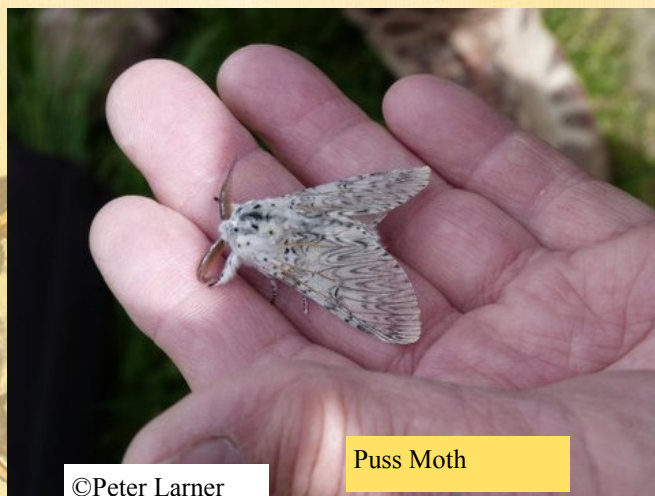
Dragonflies It was really too early. 1 *Calopteryx splendens* and a few *Ischnura elegans*



Lepidoptera The party was entertained by a puss moth found on the bank by the car park. Other moths included yellowtail and a handful of common species. Only two butterflies were seen but one was the first Common blue of the season.

Diptera Gavin Boyd recorded 35 species of insect (2 Odonata; 7 Coleoptera; 3 Hymenoptera; 11 Lepidoptera and 12 Diptera).

The highlight was probably a Tachinid fly, *Actia lamia*, which has recently been added to the Yorkshire list with 2 records in VC 63



Field trip to Letchmire Pastures 17th June 2015

7 members attended the meeting on an overcast blustery day.

Apart from flowers, few of anything was seen. 10 species of birds including Linnet and both Reed and Sedge Warbler were recorded. Dragonflies were just emerging and four species seen: *Ischnura elegans* where xuviae were collected; *Enallagma cyathigerum*; *Sympetrum striolatum* and *Libellula quadrimaculata*. Late instars of Common Green Grasshopper (*Omocestus viridulus*) were present. There were plenty of bumblebees of four common species (*Bombus pasquorum*; *B. lapidarius*; *B. terrestris*; and the cuckoo *B. vestalis*). We saw only 3 species of butterflies and 7 common moths. As almost everywhere this year, Ringlet was the commonest butterfly. Moths included Straw Dot, Blackneck, Shaded Broad-bar and Yellow Shell

The highlight of the day was a hoverfly; a male *Anasimyia contracta* in a small swamp on the edge of the reserve. Records of this species are scarce. There was just one in VC 63 in 2014. Its habitat requirement is for swamps with plenty of decaying vegetation. The only other hoverfly seen was a single *Episyrphus balteatus*

In the absence of Gavin Boyd, no small diptera were collected.



Grass vetchling

But the joy of the day was undoubtedly the flowers. There were large numbers of Southern Marsh Orchid (*Dactylorhiza praetermissa*) and Common Spotted Orchid (*D. fuchsii*) and, for the connoisseur, hybrids between the two. Grass Vetchling (*Lathyrus nissolia*) was found in a number of places and voted a 'goody' by the botanists.



Anasimyia contracta



Southern Marsh orchid

Field Trip to Ledston Luck 25th June 2015

10 members and guests attended on what, unusually, was a fine sunny day. There were no birds of note and the dragonflies, while being more numerous, comprised the same species as at Letchmire Pastures.

But the sunshine brought out the *Lepidoptera*. 8 butterfly species included large numbers of newly minted Speckled Woods, Large Skippers, Common Blues and Small Heaths in Peter Larner's only East Leeds site. 14 moth species were mainly expected but Cinabar and a female Ghost Swift were pleasant surprises.

Diptera were few but contained quality: *Trixa conspersa*, a large grassland Tachinid; the hoverfly *Chrysotoxum festiva*, a southern species extending its range northwards; Black Snipe-fly *Chrysopilus cristatus* on the edge of the pond where also the common scorpion fly *Panorpa communis* and the (also common) alder fly *Sialis lutaria* were present.

Bumblebees were everywhere; 6 species were seen including the cuckoos *Bombus vestalis* and *B. bohemicus*. Two sawflies *Cyphus pygmaeus* and *Tenthredo livida* were also seen.

The orchids were stunning! large numbers of Southern Marsh and Common Spotted intermingled with a few Northern Marsh and Bee orchids (*Ophrys apifera*). Other species included Grass of Parnassus and surprisingly in wet areas Cotton Grass. Phyl Abbott has compiled a long list.

Marsh and Spotted Orchids

*Trixa conspersa**Chrysotoxum festiva*

©Peter Larner



Small Heath

Field trip to Townclose Hills LNR, Kippax 8th July 2015

Only four hardy members attended on an overcast day with strong winds and a threat of rain which was realised shortly after noon necessitating (since Kippax didn't appear to have any pubs that were open!) retreat to the familiar watering hole in Ledsham.

The grassland on the slopes of the reserve has reached a height where it will need a good mowing before it can be effectively grazed. The dense scrub on the south side of the wood is excellent for insects and needs no management at present.

A good list of hoverflies was found in this scrub: *Cheilosia illustrata*, *Criorhina berberina* var *oxycanthe*; *Helophilus trivittatus*; *Eristalis arbustorum*; *Sphaerophoria scripta* and *Platycheirus peltatus*. The grassland contained *Empis livida*. Six-spot Burnet were plentiful together with both Ringlets and Meadow Browns but no Gatekeepers or Marbled Whites. No orthoptera were found but an *Aeshna grandis* was disturbed from a bramble

Whitethroats, Chiffchaff and Blackcaps were singing and a large party of Swifts were hunting the reserve when we arrived.

The grassland was full of Yellow Rattle that had seeded. There were plenty of Common Spotted orchids

*Cheilosia illustrata*Yellow rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*)*Criorhina berberina* var *oxycanthe**Eristalis arbustorum*

Images from Ledston Luck

But is it a Northern Marsh orchid?



Libellula quadrimaculata

The splendid grassland habitat will need careful management if it is to keep its quality. Looks like a job for highland cattle.



Bee Orchid (*Ophrys apifera*)



Autumn and winter Calendar 2015-16

Indoor Meetings (7.00 pm Quaker Meeting House, Headingley Lane)

The syllabus has yet to be drawn up. Any ideas for guest speakers should be passed to Peter Larnar

Dec 14th

Annual General Meeting and Conversazione



Leeds Naturalists Club and Scientific Association

Annual membership fee £10.00

Applications to the Membership Secretary, Dr A Millard, Woodland Villas, 86, Bachelor Lane, Horsforth, Leeds LS18 5NF. Tel: 0113 258 2482