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NATURE RAMBLINGS (5)

Welcome back everyone. We hope you are all okay and managed to partake in some walking during July. It wasn't a great month weather-wise in comparison to the few months prior, but it did manage to finish with the hottest day of the year and the third highest temperature ever in the UK in some places.

August looks like being generally warm throughout with some rain now and again and maybe a little thunder. We should be able to continue walking regularly.

As you would expect, there are many wildflowers flourishing out there at the moment, too many to list here but some common ones to look out for are Burdock, Knapweed, Mallow, Fox and Cubs and many Heathers.

You will all be ecstatic to hear that the grass verges around our area have now been cut. When I hid within some cow parsley for a photo in notes3 back in June, I hadn't expected it to be a practice run for exiting my own home!

Remember, if you have a photo/s that you would like included in these notes , please send it/them to me or Sue with a few accompanying words.

Talking of photographs, the Keith Addyman competition is currently underway, and you may send me up to five photos (.jpg and with titles) by 24th August to enter.

Details of the caption competition from our previous notes are included at the end of these jottings. There is also another competition to enter.

Remember, you can click inside any of the photographs and 'drag' them to expand the picture.



Boden's Hey Meadow Dibbinsdale

Looking great this year with flourishing growth. There is a smashing site with some historical photos of this area at:

<http://www.dibbinsdale.co.uk/park/Cons%20Man%20N%20Bodens%20Hey.pdf>



Green-veined White butterfly on Crane's Bill

The green-veined white is a fairly small, white butterfly that is on the wing between April and October. A common butterfly, it is found in a wide variety of habitats, including hedgerows, woodland and meadows, as well as farmland, gardens and parks. It especially likes damp areas with lush vegetation.



Field Pansy

The delicate Field pansy is a wild relative of our garden pansy and can be found in fields and on waste ground and roadside verges - anywhere the ground has been disturbed.

The face-like arrangement of the petals of pansies has provided them with many names from 'Cat's Face' to 'Three-faces-under-a-hood'.



Peacock Caterpillar

The fully grown Peacock Butterfly caterpillar is 40-45 mm long with a black velvety body, black spines and white dots.

The 1.5 mm long caterpillars hatch within 2 weeks, spin a silk web and feed gregariously on young nettle leaves.

As they grow they move together, from one nettle to another.



Chicory

Also known as Blue Daisy, Blue Dandelion, Blue Sailors, Blue Weed, Bunk, Coffee Weed, Horsetweed, Ragged sailors, Wild Bachelors buttons and Wild Endive.

Most people do not know that the endive plant is none other than beautiful blue-flowering chicory that grows wild along roadsides and pathways. Each blossom blooms for only one day.

Many varieties of this star-like clear blue flowered plant are cultivated for a broad spectrum of uses such as salad leaves, chicons or roots which once baked, and ground can be used as a food additive and a substitute for coffee.

According to tradition, carrying a sprig will open doors into unseen worlds, and even help one forget past loves.



Red Berries on Rowan

Rowan is an elegant tree with a mystical history. Its leaves and berries are a favourite for wildlife in woods and towns alike.

Rowan was once widely planted by houses as a protection against witches. The colour red was considered to be the best colour for fighting evil.



Small Hoverfly on Petunia

As their common name suggests, they are often seen hovering or nectaring at flowers.

Also called flower flies or syrphid flies. The size of hoverflies varies depending on the species. Some are small, elongated, and slender, while others, are large, hairy, and yellow and black.



Teasel in Bloom

The teasel is best-known for its brown, prickly stems and conical seed heads, which persist long after the plants themselves have died back for the winter (see our notes² from May).

Between July and August, when teasels are in flower, the spiky flower heads are mostly green with rings of purple flowers. Found in damp grassland and field edges, or on disturbed ground, such as roadside verges and waste grounds, they are visited by bees when in flower, and birds when seeding.

We saw these along Rest Hill Road in Bebington.



Yarrow (in Pink)

Pink yarrow is simply yarrow that bears pink flowers, rather than the more common white or yellow blooms. It is a member of the sunflower family and is considered a weed by some.

As a compress, Yarrow can be used for accidents that result with “bruises to the bone”. Anytime someone takes a bad fall, Yarrow is the recommendation.



Apple of Peru (Shoofly)

Introduced from South America in the late 1750s and has been known in the wild since the 1860s. It grows on waste ground, rubbish tips, gardens and allotments. In gardens it may be bird-sown or from commercial, bird seed.

The plant is poisonous and is thought to have insecticidal properties.



Scentless Mayweed

A member of the Asteraceae (daisy) family, it grows in cultivated field margins as well as on waste land and road verges, often forming dense masses of flowers from May through to November.

It is a close relative to the Pineapple Mayweed, an interesting flower of well-trodden land; it has finely divided leaves similar to those of the Scentless Mayweed. It is quite easy to distinguish between the species once the flowers are out: Scentless Mayweed has white outer-ray 'petals' while the flowers of Pineapple Mayweed have no white petals at all.

Despite its common name, this flower does have a slight scent and it is rather unpleasant, which helps distinguish it from other similar 'daisies' such as Chamomile which has a pleasant (and much stronger) odour.



Great Hairy Willowherb

This thrives in damp soil in full sun. Often seen growing by river and stream-sides, around lakes and ditches where the soil is damp and in full sun.

It flowers from June to September, with a peak in July and August. The flowers are visited by many types of insects.



Hedge Mustard

Loved by caterpillars, Hedge mustard grows in hedgerows, on roadside verges and waste ground, and at field edges.

Ancient Greeks believed it was an antidote to all poisons. Today, its edible leaves and seeds are used in salads, but it's White mustard and Black mustard that tend to be cultivated to make popular condiments from their seeds.



Elder

Mature trees grow to a height of around 15m and can live for 60 years. Elder is characterised by its short trunk (bole), and grey-brown, corky, furrowed bark. It has relatively few branches.

The flowers and berries are mildly poisonous, so should be cooked before eating. The leaves are also poisonous. The flowers are often used to make wine, cordial or tea. The vitamin C-rich berries are used to make preserves and wine and can be baked in a pie with blackberries.

Elder is also a great source for a variety of dyes which was used in patterning Harris Tweed. Blue and purple dye was obtained from the berries, yellow and green from the leaves, and grey and black dye was made from the bark.

It was thought that if you burned elder wood you would see the Devil, but if you planted elder by your house it would keep the Devil away. It is also known as the 'Judas tree' as Judas Iscariot is said to have hanged himself from an elder tree.



Large Hoverfly

Many species are brightly coloured, with spots, stripes, and bands of yellow or brown covering their bodies. Due to this coloring, they are often mistaken for wasps or bees; however, they are harmless to humans.

Hoverflies are encouraged by gardeners as their larvae feed on insects like aphids, thrips, and leaf hoppers, which are harmful to plants.



Wheat Field

What is the difference between barley and wheat? A question often asked.

Barley has a long beard (the bristly material protecting the kernels) while wheat has a shorter one. When it is ready for harvesting, wheat is golden brown in hue, whereas barley is yellow white. This local field of wheat near Brimstage looks ready for harvesting.



Lone Poppy

Within all the wheat stood this poppy just shouting out to have its photo taken!

Poppies can be over a metre tall with flowers up to 15 centimetres across. Bees use poppies as a pollen source.

Ancient Egyptian doctors would have their patients eat seeds from a poppy to relieve pain. Poppy seeds contain small quantities of both morphine and codeine, which are pain-relieving drugs that are still used today.

Poppy seeds are rich in oil, carbohydrates, calcium and protein. Poppy oil is often used as cooking oil, salad dressing oil, or in products such as margarine. Poppy oil can also be added to spices for cakes, or breads. Poppy products are also used in different paints, varnishes, and some cosmetics.

Several varieties of poppy are also cultivated in gardens.



Yellow-rattle

Also known as hayrattle or cockscomb. Yellow-rattle is an annual that thrives in grassland.

When the flowers of yellow-rattle fade, the brown calyxes (containing the sepals) in which the tiny seeds ripen can be seen and heard - they give a distinctive 'rattle', hence the common name.



Lesser Burdock

This prickly wildflower is not in fact a member of the dock family; it belongs to the daisy family. They are generally found in shady places or on waste ground.

The seed heads, or burs, have hooked bracts and become attached to the fur of animals; in this way the seeds are distributed.



Meadow Sweet

Meadowsweet flourishes in damp soil in grassland and heathland and in areas where water levels rise and fall. You might spot it in a damp meadow or on a riverbank. Meadowsweet is the food plant for the larvae of several moth species including the emperor moth. Many species of insects are attracted to the flowers.

Meadowsweet has painkilling properties thanks to compounds similar to aspirin. It was steeped in water as a relieving tea before medicines for pain were widespread. It's also edible and can be used as flavouring in a similar way to elderflower.

It was once valued for its lasting fragrance; the dried flowers were strewn across floors to perfume the home. It was also used in Anglo-Saxon times to flavour mead.

Meadowsweet was a favourite of Queen Elizabeth I, who used the plant instead of straw on her chamber floors.



Dock

Broad-leaved dock is a common plant that grows on waste ground, in hedgerows, gardens and roadside verges, and next to water all over the UK.

An abundant perennial, flower spikes appear from June to October. It is well-known to most of us as the herbal remedy for Stinging nettle irritations.



Mushroom

We nearly tripped over this fellow whilst walking on the bridleway from Thornton Hough to Clatterbridge.

It is in the 'Agaricus' family (which includes the button mushroom) however, this genus contains both edible and poisonous species.

We didn't take the chance!!



Sunflower

The name sunflower comes from the Greek helios "sun" and anthos "flower." Sunflower got its name because the flowers turn toward the sun. Some kinds of sunflowers are grown for food, seeds and oil. A sunflower head can produce up to 1,000 seeds. The seeds can be added to breads, eaten on salads or even turned into a creamy nut-free sunflower butter.

Sunflowers are known for being "happy" flowers, making them the perfect gift to bring joy to someone's day.

Our local farmer has a crop of these which he cuts and then sells in his shop.



Echinops

Commonly known as globe thistles. They have spiny foliage and produce blue or white spherical flower heads.

Popular with gardeners who have space and big, deep herbaceous borders. However, we spotted these growing in Storeton woods at the Rest Hill Road entrance.



Speckled Wood Butterfly

The Speckled wood prefers the dappled sunlight of woodland rides and edges, hedgerows and even gardens. We snapped this one on brambles near Brimstage.

There are a number of subspecies of Speckled woods. Those in the north are dark brown with white spots, while those further south are dark brown with orange spots.



Country Path

‘Many landowners regard footpaths as an unfortunate relic from pre-enclosure days when peasants swarmed unimpeded across the countryside’ (The Guardian 01/09/2015). Hello peasants!!

Of course, we are very lucky now that we have our footpaths protected and that we can all take advantage of the benefits they bring. Sometimes when out on a walk you need to stop and absorb the beauty of our surroundings.

Many thanks go to all those responsible for maintaining our paths some of whom are members of our club. In these peculiar times your efforts are appreciated more than ever.



Congratulations to **Steve Martin** whose caption was voted the winner of the previous competition with:

‘Your oats or your life!’

Well done Steve. A bottle of wine awaits.



Caption Competition.

Who are you looking at?!!

Please think of a caption for this photograph and send it to me or Sue by September 4th. We will let you know the winning entry next time.



The year now seems to be racing along. One of the consequences of our early spring and general recent good weather is the early appearance of blackberries. We have already filled a couple small containers.

So, that's it for now. Hope to see some of you soon, perhaps amongst the blackberry bushes!

All the best,

Helen and Gordon.