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NATURE RAMBLINGS (12)

Hi to everyone.

After the warmest year on record, we quickly started searching for umbrellas, wet weather and mud skiing gear! What a change. We hope that you are all coping with it and are able to get out and get some walking in.

As we finalise these notes we are having a fall of snow just to compound problems. At the same time, we have been discussing the forthcoming visit to Nerja; somewhat of a contrast!

Since our last notes we have been fortunate to visit Coniston, Grange over Sands, Falmouth and the Carlisle area. Some of our photos this time have been taken on these jaunts.

As always, we invite members to contribute stuff for these notes. You can see from the content that it doesn't have to be too detailed. Even a photo that you would like to be included will be welcomed.

To conclude this time, we would like to pay our tribute to two stalwart members of our club, Stan Piercy and Bob Roberts who have both recently left us. Great characters, great club members and a great pleasure to have known them. We are sure that they have left some wonderful memories with many club members.

All the best,

Helen and Gordon.



Borage

The flowers have five narrow, triangular-pointed petals. Flowers are most often blue, although pink flowers are sometimes observed. In the UK, its flowering season is relatively long, from June to September.

Traditionally, borage was cultivated for culinary and medicinal uses, although today, commercial cultivation is mainly as an oilseed. Our nature notes 7 has a little more information about this plant.



Foxgloves

Foxglove is a well-known plant across the UK, which produces a spike of purple-pink flowers between June and September. It can grow up to 2m tall and is found in heathland, woodland edges and gardens.

Beautiful but deadly. This familiar flower has the power to cure and kill. Foxglove contains a chemical called digitalis that can be used to treat heart failure and high blood pressure by raising blood flow and increasing the body's defence mechanisms. However, the plant is poisonous if consumed directly, and can cause a number of health problems.

Other names for foxglove include goblin gloves, witches' gloves and dead men's bells.



Seedhead of Hogweed (Beware: the sap of giant hogweed can cause burns)

We couldn't help but take a photo of this striking seedhead.

Giant hogweed looks like an enormous cow parsley plant. Reaching heights of between 1.5m to 5m and a spread of between 1 and 2m. It forms a rosette of jagged, lobed leaves in the first year before sending up a flower spike in the second year and then setting seed.

It is related to some well-known plants such as parsley, carrot, parsnip, cumin and coriander.



Hedge Bindweed

A climbing plant of woodlands, hedgerows, riverbanks and gardens, Hedge bindweed can become a pest in some places. It has large, trumpet-shaped, white flowers with the ability to root from even the smallest fragments, spreading at an incredible rate. It's these features that make it unpopular in the garden.

It flowers between June and September, but the twisting stems can be seen in spring. Its climbing nature and larger flowers can help to distinguish it from Field bindweed.



Mayweed (Other common names: oxeye daisy and moon daisy)

The yellow centre of the oxeye daisy is made up of many small flowers which hold nectar and are exploited by various pollinating insects, including butterflies, bees and hoverflies.

The plant was used in traditional medicines to treat various health problems, such as coughs and asthma. The flower heads have also been used to make tea.

Before the 16th century it was more commonly known as the 'Moon Daisy' or 'Dog Daisy'. Also called Horse daisy, Moonpenny and Marguerite. References to the moon derive from the fact that this bright flower can seem to glow in the fields on midsummer evenings.

The oxeye daisy was dedicated by the Greeks to Artemis, goddess of the moon.



Common Quaker Moth

We think this moth is a common quaker. It flew in and landed in our kitchen.

Markings are extremely variable but always a shade of brown or grey. Recognised by their round-tipped forewing, with large, rounded, pale-outlined oval and kidney mark and uniformly grey hindwing. Flies from March to May in one generation. Small numbers sometimes emerge during warm spells in the autumn and winter. If you think it is a different type, please let us know.



Female Common Blue Butterfly

The Common Blue is the most widespread blue butterfly in Britain and Ireland and is found in a variety of grassy habitats.

The brightly coloured males are conspicuous but females are more secretive. The colour of the upper wings of females varies from almost completely brown to predominantly blue.

Examples of habitats include downland, coastal dunes, undercliffs, road verges, acid grass and woodland clearings.



Executive Bug Hotel with Pool!

A bug hotel or insect house is a manmade structure created to provide shelter for insects. They can come in a variety of shapes and sizes depending on the specific purpose or specific insect it is catered to. Most consist of several different sections that provide insects with nesting facilities – particularly during winter, offering shelter or refuge for many types of insects. Their purposes include hosting pollinators.

We saw this magnificent structure in Grange over Sands. It came with its own swimming pool!



Three Stages of the Spear Thistle Plant

We thought this to be slightly unusual – the three stages of growth of a thistle all in one spot. The pre-flowering bud, the flowerhead and the seedhead.

The seeds are attractive to ants that may aid their dispersal and also to finches, particularly goldfinches and linnets. Thistles are particularly valued by bumblebees for their high nectar production.



Wild Damson Fruit

It is thought the name Damson originates from 'plum of Damascus' and was brought over by the Romans but recent studies show that it may have evolved from a hybrid with the Sloe or Blackthorn and another member of the plum family.

Damsons were used in the past for many different ailments, but modern medicine doesn't seem very interested in them.

It was used as a dye in the 18th and 19th centuries.



Chirotherium Storetonese

The footprints of Triassic Chirotherium were found in the Storeton Quarries in June 1838.

To celebrate the millennium, a scale representation was carved into some of the original sandstone rock. The location is immediately opposite the Travellers Rest pub, on the inside of the sandstone walling between the Scott's Woods (Storeton Woods) and Hancock Woods (Rest Hill). Thank you to Steve Martin who showed us the site on an evening walk back in July. (Further info http://www.friendsofstoretonwoods.org.uk/woods_chirotherium.html)



Russian Vine

Russian vine, also known as mile-a-minute, is a rampant climber. People have planted one when they want to quickly obliterate a view of an ugly shed or border fence. Only when it's too late - this plant being virtually unkillable - do people realise what they've unleashed.

You will see huge ribbons of it in gardens and rambling along hedgerows. It's a relative of Japanese knotweed, so it's easy to see why it's so tough and difficult to get rid of. Beware!!



Shaggy Parasol

A large, stocky mushroom with a convex cap when mature. The cap's surface has raised brown scales, giving it a shaggy look, further enhanced by the shaggy edge to the rim. The caps range from 5–15cm across and the mushroom can achieve an overall height of 20cm.

Shaggy parasol is common in the UK and Ireland, near woods and hedges.



Black Bryony

A climbing plant of hedgerows and woodlands, Black bryony produces greenish flowers in summer and red, shiny berries in autumn. It is a poisonous plant. It flowers between May and August. It is our only native member of the yam family. Despite its name and superficial resemblance, it is not a relative of White Bryony.

Black Bryony is a popular remedy for removing discoloration caused by bruises and black eyes, etc. The fresh root is scraped to a pulp and applied in the form of a poultice.



Common Ink Cap

Common inkcap fungus grows in tufts from buried decaying wood, usually appearing after rain. It can be up to 17cm tall, with a conical cap and shaggy edge which often drips an inky liquid.

Historically common inkcap was used to make ink for important documents. It would guard against forgery as the spores could be detected under a microscope



Evening Primrose

Common evening-primrose, or 'Evening star', was introduced into the UK in the 1600s and has since become naturalised on dry waste ground, roadside verges, sand dunes and railway cuttings. Its common names allude to its large, yellow, sun-like flowers that only open in the evening. These blooms appear on tall spikes from June to September and attract bees, butterflies and moths searching for nectar.

Its seeds are the source of evening-primrose oil which is used in complementary medicine



Common Vetch (Wild Pea)

Common vetch is a scrambling plant with long, twining stems that have curly tendrils on the ends. Its leaves are like folded ovals that sit opposite one another along the stems. Its flowers are pinky-purple and pea-like.

It is useful as a soil-fertilising plant and is also often used as livestock fodder. It grows well on grassland, farmland, waste ground and roadside verges, as well as in coastal habitats, such as sand dunes.

As a member of the legume family, which includes Broad beans, Garden peas and pulses, it's no surprise that archaeologists have found evidence to suggest that ancient people used to eat Common vetch.



Harebell

Harebells are one of the prettiest wildflowers appearing in our hedgerows, grasslands, hillsides, sand dunes and cliffs. Their delicate papery flowers nod happily in a breeze. They are often found in large clumps, adding a lovely splash of light blue to a meadow or woodland.

In Scotland, the harebell is sometimes known as the 'bluebell'; elsewhere, it has picked up various local names, including 'witches' thimbles' and 'fairy bells', alluding to magical associations.



Cow Pat!

How often have you trodden in one of these?!

Often used as manure dung may also be collected and used to produce biogas to generate electricity and heat. In many parts of the developing world, caked and dried cow dung is used as fuel.

On April 21, 2001, Robert Deevers of Elgin, Oklahoma, set the record for cow pat throwing with a distance of 185 feet 5 inches! Have a go!!



Pussy Willow Catkins

The Goat willow, also known as the 'Pussy willow', is a small willow tree found in ditches, reedbeds and wet woodland, and on urban waste ground. It is one of the UK's commonest willows and is known for the fluffy, silver-grey, male catkins - or 'pussy willows' - that appear in January and turn bright yellow in March. It has many common names, including 'Great Sallow', 'Sally' and 'Black Sally'; the name 'Palm willow' refers to its use as a decoration in churches during Easter.

According to an old Polish legend, long ago a mother cat was crying at the bank of the river in which her kittens were drowning. The willows at the river's edge longed to help her, so they swept their long, graceful branches into the waters to rescue the kittens who had fallen into the river while chasing butterflies. The kittens gripped on tightly to their branches and were safely brought to shore. Each springtime since, goes the legend, the willow branches sprout tiny fur-like buds at their tips where the tiny kittens once clung.



You Have Been Warned!

We have all seen some humorous signs on our rambles. There was an excellent one shown on our website recently from the Bickerton walk.

Please send us your examples and maybe we can make it a regular feature in these notes.



Grikes and Clints

Clints are the blocks of limestone that constitute the paving, their area and shape is directly dependent upon the frequency and pattern of grykes. Grykes are the fissures that isolate the individual clints.

If the grykes are fairly straight and the clints are uniform in size, the resemblance to man-made paving stones is striking, but often they are less regular. Malham cove is a great example.



Classical English Woodland in Autumn

A typical, classical autumnal photo. A scene that I am sure most of you will have had the pleasure of enjoying on your walks.

Is there anything better than strolling through woodland?

With the constant changing of the seasons there is always something different to observe. Indeed, if we didn't have these changes Helen and I would have difficulty producing these nature notes!

Right now, of course, trees are stripped, and paths may be muddy, but we know that soon young growth will herald spring.

Hooray!!



Early Evening Mist

On a stroll at the end of November we came across this unusual occurrence. Mist seemed to be rising from the ground in the field giving off an eerie atmosphere.

Mist can occur as part of natural weather, when humid air cools rapidly, notably when the air comes into contact with surfaces that are much cooler than the air.

The sheep don't seem too bothered!



Common Frog

The common frog or grass frog is a semi-aquatic amphibian. The adult common frog has a body length of 6 to 9 centimetres. In addition, its back and flanks vary in colour from olive green to grey-brown, brown, olive brown, grey, yellowish and rufous. However, it can lighten and darken its skin to match its surroundings.

Unfortunately, it seems these little creatures are in decline.

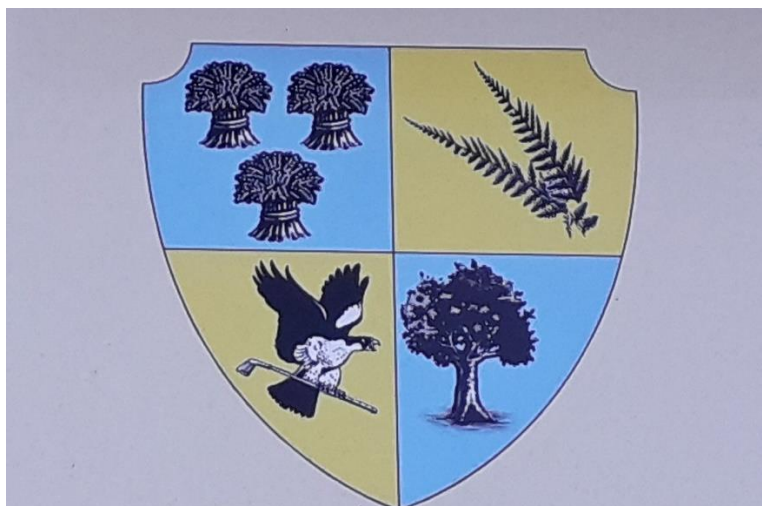


Peacock

Male peafowl are referred to as peacocks, and female peafowl are referred to as peahens, although peafowl of either sex are often referred to colloquially as "peacocks."

The Indian peacock has iridescent blue and green plumage, mostly metallic blue and green, but the green peacock has green and bronze body feathers. In both species, females are a little smaller than males in terms of weight and wingspan, but males are significantly longer due to the "tail", also known as a "train". The peacock train consists not of tail quill feathers, but highly elongated upper tail coverts. These feathers are marked with eyespots, best seen when a peacock fans his tail.

Ancient Greeks believed that the flesh of peafowl did not decay after death, so it became a symbol of immortality.



Can you work out what/whom this 'coat of arms' represents?

Have a go at deciphering it and if you struggle, the answer is below * at the end of the notes.



So that's it for this one, we hope that you find some of it interesting.

We will be in Nerja during February and are sure that we will see quite a few of you there.

When we return we will be a bit closer to spring and more opportunities to fill up the next issue of our nature notes. Until then, good walking and don't forget to send us any stuff that you would like included.

All the best,

Helen and Gordon.

***Coat of arms** — starting in the top right corner you have bracken below which there is a tree representing a wood. To the left of this there is a bird carrying a golf club in its claws. The final symbol in the top left of the shield displays the trio of golden wheatsheaves on blue which have been associated with the Earldom of Chester since the late 12th century and also represents Cheshire. As a point of interest, a wheat sheaf in heraldry is called a 'garb'. So, there is your answer — Brackenwood Golf Club (Cheshire).