

St. Michael's mid-week walk 9/8/23

Five of us met at St. Michael's school car park at 11.00am for a walk along little used public footpaths. Barry led the way accompanied by Howard, Carole & Owen and newcomer Andy from Fleetwood.

It was a windless, warm day with cloud cover as we set off on our adventure. The footpath leading from the car park held some mint plants, from which several common field grasshoppers jumped out of our way. Our first hurdle was to negotiate a wonky stile which took us into a large field dominated by couch grass. I thought it could have been rye grass but later on Owen demonstrated how to tell the difference. A Green-veined butterfly showed quite well but my attention was drawn to the next field which was covered in maize that was to tower over us.

Edging slowly by the overgrown hedgerow, Howard chose the better option to walk in between two rows of maize which was quite an experience with the leaves slapping us in the face as we made our way in search of a stile. It was like being in the Maize maze at Singleton only much less pleasant. We eventually found the stile and made our way into another maize field only this time a generous border made progress much easier and held a few items of interest. On climbing over the stile our feet crushed thousands of the eponymous named Pineapple weed releasing their strong scent. Here too were many weeds of cultivation including fat hen, fumitory, sun spurge, field speedwell, scentless mayweed, persicaria, cudweed and so on. A froglet briefly held our attention.

A few moths were disturbed which included Common carpet, Straw dot, udea lutealis and agriphilia straminella. Some common hoverflies were also present such as the marmalade hoverfly, Syrphus ribesii, Heliophilus pendulus and several drone flies. Ladybirds were represented by the 22-spot and 7 spot and later on a 14 spot and a Harlequin. The unmistakable cinnamon bug Corizus hyoscyami was seen by Howard and Andy, and a Common froghopper was also seen.

We continued on over another stile and a footbridge, entering the upper reaches of Long wood, a stretch of woodland that held little of interest unless you like lichens. Yawn. Owen and Carole's next walk is on the beach, surely there can't be any lichens in the sea. Leaving the wood we walked parallel to a deep dyke, the embankment of which held a few Gatekeeper butterflies and a Meadow Brown butterfly. Birds had been thin on the ground with just the odd blackbird and a few woodpigeons and corvids in evidence. We stopped for lunch at 12.25 then moved on.

As we made our way further south, I have to say that there was still very little of interest to be seen. A Speckled Wood butterfly, a fly by dragonfly and 4 Harvestmen on nettles drew our attention. Luckily the Harvestmen were not the largest when compared to one found in a cave in South America, with its leg span coming in at a whopping 13.4 inches. Aaaagh. Near Pad End Farm we flushed a Red-legged partridge and a receding flood held 100+ assorted gulls but also a Little Egret and 2 Golden Plovers. But that really was as good as it got.

From here we headed back north along Pinfold lane. On this lane, and the continuing track, with hedgerows on both sides and not running far short of a mile we counted less than ten insects. It's difficult to know what to say but herbicides, fertilisers and pesticides must surely be part of the problem. Let's hope governments worldwide are working on how to improve the prospects for our insects without which the planet can't function.

We continued on to our starting point with still very little else to report, but the company was good and I hope we see Andy again who was a very knowledgeable and welcome addition to our ranks.

Barry Dyson