

Plant Survey 2020

This year has seen some of the weirdest weather events in years --- and as far as I am aware, it has nothing to do with Covid-19! We have ricocheted between very hot and very cold, very wet and very dry, and with long periods of very windy weather – blowing down trees as well as garden fences and ripping blossom off trees. This has resulted in some quite weird plant growth. Apart from the weather, Covid has also affected this year's survey in that, due to lockdown restrictions, we have all been out and about in the Reserve less frequently. I may not have actually seen as many plants this year – but they have probably been in their usual habitats. If I haven't seen them, I don't record them.

Using the same Area plan as last year, there are 14 "Areas" in DNW, grouped broadly into Meadows (4), Wet Areas (3) and Woods (7). Please see attached map. Inevitably of course, the meadows have woods or shaws on the boundaries and the woods have wet areas or open glades/ woodland edges etc. but the areas are fairly well defined geographically.

There are just three new species identified this year:

290 Toothed Medick R9 Upright Brome

330 Fool's Parsley

Page references are to: The Wild Flower Key ----- by Francis Rose

or: Grasses, Sedges, Rushes and Ferns ----- also by Francis Rose

After last year's fantastic showing of orchids, I was hoping this year might be similar, especially after seeing 20 - 30 Common Spotted rosettes in Newstead Meadow in late April. However, a few weeks later, none at all could be seen despite my close searching. Either they shrank back into the ground or the leaves fell off, dried out or rotted. Finally, one flower head emerged through the middle of a clump of bird's-foot trefoil at the beginning of June. After that, there was a moderate showing of Common Spotted in Newstead, Tubbenden and Broadwater meadows, albeit very short, plus a few Bee, Southern Marsh and Pyramidal Orchids. --- Not quite the glorious display of last year.

Most of the more common plants like Cow Parsley and Corky Fruited Water-Dropwort were also affected by the weather conditions, particularly the hot dry weather in late June and July / August and were significantly shorter. The Corky FWD (the white cow parsley lookalike) covering the meadows in July was only 12" or so. Normally it is twice that. The grasses too, were short.

Other oddities I noticed:

- Lots of Lady's Bedstraw (yellow) but very little Hedge Bedstraw (white).
- Smooth Tare (tiny purple pea flowers) blooming but no Hairy Tare (tiny pale lilac pea flowers).
- Very little of the small Speedwells (Wall and Slender).
- Very little Petty Spurge or Wavy Bittercress. (Normally ubiquitous garden weeds)

Last year, I noted that Pale Flax (pretty little blue flowers) which had appeared abundantly in all four meadows, was this year hardly to be seen. Although they were probably brought in on mower blades during the hay cut in 2019, they would appear to not find DNW meadows entirely to their liking and have not thrived.

The same can be said about the Redshank which appeared prolifically in the Marsh in 2019 after dredging. I found none this year at all. Whether it was out-competed/swamped by bindweed and nettles or whether the habitat was lacking in some other respect, I can't know. However, it does show that not all inadvertent arrivals are invasive. (Cf. Amphibious Bistort!)

The Water-Plantain which re-emerged after the dredging of the Marsh, has however re-established itself very well – approx. 18-20 plants, half of them flowering this year.