

Chorlton to Sale Water Park**Margaret McCormick****5th January**

Rain was lashing down prior to the start of this walk & it was a surprise to find others actually turning up for the event at all! However seven did & the rain gradually lessened as we made our way round the lake. There were Pochard on the water, also Coot, the inevitable Mallards & Canada Geese. These geese on the lakes at Sale & Chorlton have become a problem in recent years, as their numbers have increased, to the detriment of other nesting species & public health concerns from their droppings. Some 600 birds are now resident at the water parks & some culling of eggs has reluctantly been undertaken. This is the most humane way to reduce numbers.

The River Mersey was running fast as the mornings heavy rain adding to melting ice from the Christmas freeze-up, increased the flow. There was a Dabchick on the river bobbing below the current repeatedly, also a pair of Goosanders, fish-eating winter visitors from Scotland & Northern Europe. We had good views of them as they frequently flew back & to, showing off their splendid black & white plumage & bright scarlet bill & feet. They alone were worth braving the rain for. Happily it stopped before lunch so apart from dodging the remaining icy puddles, the day turned out very well.

The Visitor Centre wardens at Sale welcomed us with a well-heated room for lunch, which we eventually relinquished to walk by the lakeside, to see a pair of Great Crested Grebe performing an early bit of courtship display, a Heron fishing & a colourful male Shoveller. Crossing the boardwalk & turning left onto the river bank again, we crossed the river at the railway bridge & followed that bank back to Chorlton. A flock of Long-tailed Tits & more sightings of the Goosanders kept us entertained as the light faded & our first walk of the year was over.

Birchfields and Platt Park**Audrey Locksley****26th January**

There was not much florally to see but a search was made for mosses. Five members started out but a great downpour after 20 minutes led to one calling it off. For some members it was a nostalgia trip having used the paths around this historic area. At Platt Chapel on Wilmslow Road, John found a moss, *Rhacomitrium aciculare*, which had strayed from its usual sites in hill districts, growing on rocks near swift flowing streams. We learnt a new word *Fencible*, the profession recorded on a gravestone- a militiaman enlisted in defence of his own country, which, in this case, was Canada.

Before lunch by Platt lake one member went home, but we were joined by two latecomers. After a good poke around in some woodland near to Platt Brook, we sought the warmth of Platt Costume Museum. One of many interesting items is a 17th Century bonnet embroidered with plants and minute insects. The sun came out so we extended our trip through the park and went home after what had seemed to be an unpromising winter day.

Swallows Wood**A & N Bamforth****23rd February**

Our last winter visit to Arnfield with the Field Club was back in the eighties when we went in search of White Hares. It was one of those days with blizzards and a biting North East wind, and, as I recall, I noted that the only white hares we saw were on Mrs Bescoby's head (for which I got a severe verbal reprimand). This walk was not much better; after a week of torrential rain and gales, Saturday morning started with a phone call from Margaret McCormick saying that there was an inch of hailstones on her garden. Fortunately Audenshaw had none, so we set off and met four more members at Hollingworth. (This was twice as many as we got on all our summer events together.)

We soon got horizontal hailstones, but it was not too bad, as they were on our backs. We made a detour at Meadowbank Farm to avoid the mud, and got some lovely views up Longdendale with a nice light sprinkling of snow. We cut into Swallows Wood for lunch and sat by a wall in hailstones before continuing to Devils Bridge. I spotted a new entrance gate into Arnfield Nature Reserve, and so we had a sheltered short-cut back. We did not see anything spectacular, natural history wise, the only plants being Daisy and Gorse. There was a log covered with the liverwort *Lophocolea heterophylla* with thousands of fruiting bodies.

Moore Nature Reserve

Margaret McCormick

16th March

Moore Nature Reserve lies a short distance west of the A56 between the Manchester Ship Canal and the River Mersey estuary. We shared this event with Manchester Bird Club who earlier in the year had invited us to an excellent talk about the site, which was given jointly by Michael Deane, the reserves photographer, and the warden, Estelle Linney.

There is a diverse flora owing to previous waste disposal and the site is presently controlled by Waste Recycling group PLC, whose future plans are still uncertain.

It is reckoned to have the greatest population per acre of Great Crested Newts in the North West. It supports a good bird population, having several acres of wetland, reedbeds, and open water, as well as large woodland areas, open heath, and grassland.

We were fortunate to have Michael Deane himself with us, who took us to within a few feet of a pair of Long-eared owls sitting perfectly still and silent in the willows. We stared, and they stared back inscrutably. We would never have spotted them without his help. Even the non-birders were impressed!

There has been a pair of Bitterns in the reed-beds throughout the winter, and they had been seen that morning, skulking about close to the hide, where we gathered in hopes of a further treat, but although we wished and willed the elusive birds to appear, sadly they did not. We did have a Green Woodpecker though during the earlier walk through the woods. This is a site to return to in the summer months for the flora and insect life.

Hopwood Clough and Hopwood Hall

John Lowell

6th April

About 10 members met at the junction of Rochdale Rd and Stanycliffe Rd on a fine spring day. We walked up the E side of Hopwood Clough, searching the woodland for Wood anemones, which had not been recorded for the tetrad. We were finally rewarded when Christine Walsh found a single specimen. Nearby were Marsh marigolds, also new to the tetrad. We heard chiffchaffs and blue tits, among other birds, and were pleased to see what promises to become a fine show of bluebells.

We then went past Hopwood Hall to the Nature Reserve, a good open wood consisting largely of beech, oak, and birch. We saw several jays, great tits and coal tits, and a sparrow-hawk. A steep sided pond had a good colony of Marsh cinquefoil, and also Bottle sedge. We looked as well at Glade Wood, searching the pond for newts, but without success. However, the margins yielded three species of Sphagnum moss. We took a similar route back, but along the opposite side of Hopwood clough, encountering a different range of habitat.

Our excursion gave us 31 new Flowering plant records and about 15 new bryophyte records for the forthcoming NWNu Flora.

Healey Dell

Priscilla Tolfree

20th April

Twelve people assembled for this meeting at Healey Dell. This is rather an interesting place to visit, apart from its natural history interest. It has probably been occupied since Saxon times and is now a local beauty spot. There has been considerable activity going on in the area, starting with the first corn-grinding mill. There are the ruins of a large textile mill dated 1676, which was probably built over the river. Coal mining also took place over the whole area. The Rochdale to Bacup railway branch line passed through here, before it was closed in the 1960s. The magnificent stone viaduct still remains. The limestone chippings laid as hardcore for the track provide suitable conditions for calcareous plants. There are also legends relating to the wells, which may have been used as shrines by the Druids. All in all it is a fascinating place.

We were a bit early for the best flowers, but there was plenty to see, many being recognisable by their leaves. There was *Cardamine amara* (Large Bittercress), which Vera so often reminds us is typical of Lancashire Cloughs. It is worth peering inside the flower with a lens to admire the violet anthers. We also saw *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* (Golden Saxifrage), *Primula Vulgaris* (Primrose), *Ranunculus ficaria* (Celandine), *Caltha palustris* (Marsh Marigold), *Anemone nemorosa* (Wood Anemone), *Viola riviniana* (Common Dog Violet), *Teucrium scorodonia* (Wood Sage), *Blechnum spicant* (Hard Fern), *Polypodium vulgare* (Common Polypody) and many others. A total of about 140 species of flowering plants was recorded. Among birds seen or heard were the following: - Jay, Heron, Mallard, Tits, Great, Blue and Long-tailed, Chiff-Chaff, Blackbird, Chaffinch and Greater Spotted Woodpecker. Thanks go to Diana Downing for the loan of the booklet 'Healey Dell' by Allan Marshall.

Byways of Prestwich

Maureen & Ron Davies

11th May

On a beautiful, warm and sunny day, 10 members and a little boy met in Sainsbury's car park, Heaton Park Road West, Blackley at 11a.m. for a walk that lasted until 5p.m.

We went up a footpath behind Sainsbury's and round the fishing pond and along the river, over the bridge to cross Middleton Road and continued up Old Hall Lane, passing the site of the Old Heaton Hall, which preceded Heaton Hall, and which later had Old Hall Farm built on the site. When the M66 motorway came, the farm was demolished, and rebuilt on the other side of the motorway near Heywood Old Road. We continued along the boundary wall of Heaton Park, along a pleasant footpath to Prestwich, and then made a slight detour to St. Margaret's Church, to look at the graves of the 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th Earls of Wilton (the owners of Heaton Park Hall), and the Countess of Wilton. Here we saw the Fern-leaved Beech. Previous to this we had seen Brooklime, Bistort, Mouse-ear Chickweed, Lesser Celandine, Wood Forget-me-not, Field Horsetail, Coltsfoot and Rape.

Into Heaton Park, past the new Bowling Greens for the Commonwealth Games, and into the Horticultural Centre. This made a pleasant rest in the sun and time for a drink, as we had already eaten our lunch in Stenner Woods in Heaton Park; the various gardens there were very interesting, and there were lots of plants to take our interest.

We continued along shady paths down to the Dell, up to the Old Rose Garden, passing a lovely show of Azaleas, and through the tunnel. We had re-routed our walk because of a Thundersprint

2002 Competition in the Park that weekend, with Steve Hislop, who is the Star of the Ducati World Superbike, and riders from Spain, America, Holland and France. Although we could hear the bikes, we were not interrupted on our walk by them.

Near the Farm Centre we looked at the *Ginkgo Biloba*, or Maidenhair trees, which are reputed to be one of the oldest living trees. Diana Downing was very interested in the foliose lichens growing on the trunks of the Ash trees down the Main Drive, and a little *Usnea* (bearded type). She also noted some interesting ones on a wall in the Horticultural Centre, and some *Cladonia* basal squamules near the Wilton graves.

Leaving the park, we continued along the River Irk, and saw Large Bittercress, Butterburr, Ladies Smock, Marsh Marigold, Marsh Ragwort, Sedge (possibly *Pseudocyperus*) and Pink Purslane.

Butterflies seen - Orangetip, Speckled Wood, Peacock, Comma and small Tortoiseshell. St. Mark's Flies were much in evidence. Birds were in short supply only Lapwings, Grey Wagtails and Chaffinches were noted.

Uppermill

Christine Walsh

18th May

We set off, on a damp day, along the canal from the Visitor Centre, and climbed up the road to the old railway track. Along the roadside we noticed bilberry, wood sage and the moss *Polytrichum commune*, which was identified by Audrey, and was evidently used for wigs in Roman times, (alright as long as there was no rain). The banks of the railway cutting were a mass of bluebells with other woodland flowers, including patches of stitchwort, pink purslane and red campion. One plant of bitter vetch was spotted growing on the limestone railway ballast. A heavy drizzle dissuaded us from spending long on the SSSI and we had a damp lunch in the picnic area beside the stream. Swifts, swallows, chaff-chaff, willow warbler, grey wagtail, tree creeper, and great spotted woodpecker, were noted by our bird enthusiasts.

The afternoon expedition was done in reverse, to allow an early finish due to the rain for those who wished. The meadow beside the stream was full of interesting species including betony, mimulus, valerian, moorland water crowfoot, common vetch, bog stitchwort and forget-me-not. We were very pleased when Audrey's recording eye spotted a Marsh Violet, in a wet patch away from the stream. As the rain poured down some members decided to call it a day, but we followed the planned route, discovering some llamas on the way. Over the hill and down to the Huddersfield Narrow Canal, recently re-opened thanks to a significant injection of cash, which lead us back to our starting point.

Boggart Hole Clough

Dave Earl

1st June

The popularity of Boggart Hole Clough as a venue was demonstrated by the attendance of fifteen members. We began walking along the semi-shaded top of the clough, where a number of trees and shrubs have been introduced, including field maple, red oak, turkey oak, grey alder, white poplar, spindle, bird cherry and bay willow. We ventured into the sunshine to explore the damp grasslands by the upper path, finding yellow loosestrife, glaucous sedge, bog stitchwort and slender rush. After lunch, we found a patch of acid grassland with common sedge, mat grass and heath woodrush. Pill sedge was found in the woodland below the acid grassland. Most members strolled along the central path through the wooded garden area. The more adventurous members later descended the steep clough below the boating lake, in search of indigenous species finding hard fern, wood horsetail, wood sorrel, yellow pimpernel, polypody fern and guelder rose.

The result on the survey increased the tetrad total to 188 species. Since our June visit the leader and local volunteer Peter Milner have carried out further survey work at Boggart Hole Clough, finding additional species such as soft shield fern, and extending the tetrad total to well above 200 species. Local young people have also carried out conservation initiatives such the clearance of *Rhododendron ponticum*, from a clough containing giant fescue and epiphytic polypody fern. It is intended that a detailed survey of the clough will be carried out during 2003: - see The North-western Naturalist Volume 4 No. 2 for further details.

Werneth Low **A & N Bamforth** **17th August**

A glorious day with wall-to-wall sunshine started off with typical Werneth Low hospitality of tea and biscuits provided by Dave Cannon, the warden. Most of the party had not been on 'the low' before, and were very impressed with the views as we made our way to the cenotaph. It was not quite clear enough to see the more distant objects such as the Wrekin and the Clwydian Hills, but Winter Hill, Windy Hill, Bleaklow and Kinder were in view.

The Low has been a recreational area since the 19th century, and even caused a dispute before the First World War, between Hyde Council, the farmer, and the Oldham, Ashton & Hyde Tramway Company, because of visitor pressure. It was purchased for a War Memorial by voluntary subscription in 1920, and operated as a tenanted farm until 1968, the land being for the use of the people of Hyde forever. Hyde Council had other ideas and put the farm up for sale but an action group fortunately stopped it. When GMC was formed in 1974, it was earmarked as a country park, which opened in 1980.

We had a look for the Field Scabious, which has disappeared in the last few years. Grindon in his Flora of Manchester, 1859, says 'abundant in the declivities of Werneth Lowe, descending towards Hyde' but we did not find it.

After lunch we wandered down the horse-track in search of Green Hairstreaks, but it is probably the wrong time of year. We did see some Skippers and a blue or two. The walk then took us up to Windy Harbour for fine views of Longdendale and Etherow Valley. We came back into the path along the main track with plenty of Common Hemp Nettle, and into a field, which we are trying to make into an upland meadow. It has been cut very late each summer for the last ten years, and now has plenty of Catsears, Hawkbits, Devils Bits with Bent Grasses, Oval Sedge and other goodies. The walk finished with more tea. Dave, who is easily impressed, was very pleased to hear that it is better organised than the Mersey Valley.

Houghton Dale **A & N Bamforth** **31st August**

This plant Gall Gala turned out to be a plant gall Bonanza. Ten people arrived with British Plant Gall Society including members from as far away as Doncaster, Leicester and two from Eastleigh (Hampshire) but alas, only two came from the Manchester Field Club beside ourselves, who were in both courts as you might say.

The British Plant Gall Society is a young group formed in 1986 for people interested in Plant Galls, a rather neglected subject in Britain. The last books at that time were written in 1958 and 1910, the latter by E W Swanton, the father of the famous cricket commentator. All this will be changed with the publication of the new keys by Aid Gap in early 2003.

A gall, may I say, is a growth induced by the causer in the host, which induces the host to change for the causers use. It can be in the form of cell enlargement caused by Greenfly or fungus, right through to Oak Apples. There are many causers, which include midges, mites, beetles, weevils, moths, bacteria and nematode worms.

My list for Haughton Dale was 41 galls, a good number for any area in North West England, but I was a little concerned when Chris phoned to say he was coming from Leicester via Wigan by 11am. However, my fears were unfounded as on the day we found 56 galls, and only had time to cover a quarter of the planned walk, in fact we did not leave the first grid square. There were quite a number that I had never seen before. A visit to a prime site in South Yorkshire the following day only provided 50 galls.

Hollingworth Lake, Littleborough Christine Walsh 7th September

Six members set out from the Hollingworth Lake Visitor Centre on an overcast day with a poor forecast. We first checked out the pond in the picnic area and noted skullcap, water forget-me-not and water mint in flower, with tormentil and common cat's ear in the adjacent grassland. Following the stream, part of the same route as last year, we noticed that mimulus was still in flower but had to make a stop to don waterproofs as the rain started. As we climbed the hill Audrey spotted a cut-leaved beech, a sample of which was taken for checking. The track wound gently upwards in a steep sided valley with heather, bilberry, hard fern and oak trees, which were the only shelter available for our lunch stop. A little further up, a ditch was found with branched burr-reed, marsh bedstraw, reed mace and greater birdsfoot trefoil. Soon we reached the edge of the moor where we found crowberry and cross-leaved heath.

An interesting looking bog with sphagnum moss was passed by as the rain came down in earnest, and when some shelter was available in a disused barn, we were very glad of it, though the fledgling swallows still being fed by parents were not best pleased by our intrusion. After a while the rain lessened, and we continued through the Woodland Trust Reserve to a bridge where the sun came out and we had our afternoon drink. Some were quick enough to see a sparrow hawk chasing a small bird, which had a lucky escape. Now the weather had brightened up we decided to climb higher on to the moor, but we were not fortunate enough to see the deer, which we heard were in the area. We were however, rewarded by extensive views over the nearby hills. The track then lead us down to the edge of the motorway, through very muddy fields and back to Hollingworth Lake.

Turton Tower and the Jumbles Tom and Barbara Waghorn 21st September

Jumbles Country Park, in the West Pennine Moors recreation area west of Bolton, gave eight of us a pleasant circuit, which added a touch of local history to the natural history of the reservoir and its environs.

Jumbles is perhaps better known for its variety of trees than its flowers and wildfowl. Ash, Alder, Larch, Sycamore, Norway Maple, Western Hemlock, Horse Chestnut, North American Red Oak and wizened Hawthorns were prominent, though it was too early for the autumn colour pageant.

Broom and Gorse were still in yellow bloom as we shared a picnic table for lunch overlooking a bridge at the northern end of the reservoir. A Grey Heron watched us (and was still standing sentinel on the lip of the same quarry when we returned an hour or so later). Great Crested Grebes, Coot and Mallard patrolled the reservoir.

Highlight of the day was perhaps the impressive Turton Tower, a Grade One listed building dating from 1400AD. Built around an ancient 'pele' tower, a type of fortified house once common in the North, its most famous owner was Humphrey Chetham of Chetham's Hospital fame.

We ambled back by the stream of the wooded valley, which gives the country park its name. The bird hide was birdless, and the pond of the former Horrobin Mill (known as the 'coffin lodge' because of its shape) equally disappointing. But plantwise, a nearby conservation area gave us Sweet Cicely, its pleasant aniseed-scented leaves once being used for cooking.

Just four miles but certainly worth repeating sometime!

Wardle

Dave Earl

28th September

Members gathered at the car park beneath Watergrove reservoir. An area of limestone chippings to the east of reservoir yielded equal leaved knotgrass and common sandwort whilst water horsetail was seen at the nearby pond. Westwards then across the embankment to an old quarry for lunch amongst grassy mounds on which crowberry and heath woodrush grow.

We then descended past an enhanced area with introduced wild carrot to a wooded clough to find angelica and yellow pimpernel. A linear lodge supported Canadian pondweed, yellow flag and upright bur-reed, with an alpine laburnum tree growing nearby. We continued through another clough to the lodge beneath Rydings Farm to see fringed water lily and bushes of Cumbrian bramble at the assumed southeast limit of the species range. Members then ventured back to the car park via Wardle village finding numerous ruderal species on route including feverfew and pale willow herb. The diligent efforts of the team brought the total number of species found in the tetrad to approximately 200 illustrating the significance of the diverse range of habitats which are to be found within our western Pennine moor region. It is intended that further research will be carried out in the Rochdale and Oldham areas by the Manchester Field Club team during the forthcoming 2003 recording season in preparation for the forthcoming New Flora of South Lancashire.

Delamere Forest

Peter and Diana White

19th October

This walk usually attracts a good turnout and we had 11 members and one guest, who had seen the advert placed in the local newspaper by Audrey. Also as usual we enjoyed dry weather...maybe next year will be the wet one!

Before we started out, we bumped into two bird ringers busily measuring and ringing passerines; they kindly told us about their work, demonstrated the measuring and ringing techniques and how they identified the age and sex of the birds they were dealing with. It takes a lot of training and supervised experience to become a licensed ringer.

This year's crop of fungal finds was not so prolific as we have had in previous years, but by the end of our walk in the autumn sunshine we had a good list, which is given below.

There were great crested woodpecker and long tailed tit along the paths.

Here is the full list of fantastic fungal finds

