

Outing to Hurlethill, Glasgow Local Nature Reserve

27th July 2024

We had another opportunity to join Glasgow Natural History Society on their outing to Hurlethill. It had been designated as a Local Nature Reserve by Glasgow City Council in January this year. Hurlethill offers a variety of habitats including semi-natural grassland, beech woods, oak woods, pine woods and wildflower meadows with ponds. In former times it the land was part of the grounds of the Hawkhead Estate and in the 1630s Hawkhead House was described as being 'surrounded by woodlands and enclosures'. It became the seat of the Earls of Glasgow in the 1750s until 1886 when it was divided up and sold. The large Hawkhead mansion has not survived, and housing estates have been built around the site from the 1950s onwards. But there is still evidence of past times. A wire fence around an area of grassland indicates the site of a former reservoir and broken-down stone walls remain around some of the original woodland enclosures.



Grassland area looking towards Leverndale Tower (photo by S Stuart)

There wasn't much insect or birdlife to be seen. The exception being the clegs (*Haematopota pluvialis*) which made their presence very clearly known as they landed and tried to bite us. We did spot a good number of moth species including Shaded Broad-bar (*Scotopteryx chenopodiata*), Silver-ground Carpet (*Xanthorhoe montanata*), Snout (*Hypena proboscidalis*), Mother of Pearl (*Pleuropteryx ruralis*), Silver Y (*Autographa gamma*), Smoky Wainscot (*Mythimna impure*), Common White Wave (*Cabera pusaria*), Yellow Shell (*Camptogramma bilineata*) and Straw Dot (*Rivula sericealis*). Butterflies were very scarce with only an occasional Meadow Brown (*Maniola jurtina*) and Ringlet (*Aphantopus hyperantus*) emerging from the grassland.



Moths: Shaded Broad-bar, Silver-ground Carpet, Smoky Wainscot (photos by P Thomson)

Whilst discouraging insect life, the wet weather had encouraged the growth of the distinctive black projecting sclerotina of Ergot (*Claviceps*) fungus on some of the grass florets including Cock's Foot (*Dactylis glomerata*) and False Oat (*Arrhenatherum elatius*). Woodland fungi however were not evident.



Ergot on Cock's Foot



Green grass in regularly flooded area (photos by K Menzies)

Further evidence of the wet summer was shown by the contrast in the grasses around Rocks Plantation. Short, bright green grass including Sweet Grass (*Glyceria*) and Marsh Foxtail (*Alopecurus geniculatus*) was growing in an area regularly flooded, and looked almost dayglo against the contrasting browns and fawns of the Tufted Hairgrass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*) and Soft Rush (*Juncus effusus*) surrounding it.

Although we didn't spot any of the Jays (*Garrulus glandarius*) known to nest in the area, we did enjoy watching around ten Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*) swooping backwards and forwards above the grassland. There were plenty of signs of Great Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos major*) activity, particularly in some decaying trees which were pecked with holes.



Woodpecker damage to dead trunk, Examining mature phoenix Sycamore (photos by K Menzies)

In the predominantly beech woodland we noticed a couple of mature Sweet Chestnut (*Castanea sativa*) trees. Also, a rather remarkable Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), an ancient phoenix tree where the original tree had fallen and multiple trunks grown from its base, encasing a stone slab within the trunks. The gnarled stumps of the original severed roots could be seen on the side but all except the base of the original trunk had long rotted away. The woodland also offered a welcome clearing with stone walls and a fallen trunk where we could sit and enjoy a bite of lunch.



Lunchtime spot (photo by S Stuart)

After lunch we visited the wildflower area which had been created on a slope next to new-build houses, where we spotted one Narrow-bordered Five Spot Burnet (*Zygaena lonicerae*). Downhill

from there we walked through a more diverse wildflower meadow with several ponds. We saw some more moths amongst the grass and a few Common Darter (*Sympetrum striolatum*) dragonflies and Azure (*Coenagrion puella*) damselflies above the water. Some spiders had made webs within the grasses including a Mothercare Spider (*Pylloneta impressa/sisyphyia*) carefully guarding its green egg sack with the remains of a mirid bug (*Letopterna* sp) in its web. Seems that we hadn't been the only ones enjoying a lunchtime snack!

Report by Kirsty Menzies

Photographs by Kirsty Menzies, Simon Stuart and Pat Thomson