Ledbury Naturalists Field Club

Field Survey 2005

Coneygree Wood Ledbury

February 2006

Acknowledgements

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Document, Data Collation And Photography: Janet Parry

Graphics: Alan Parry

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Forest Enterprise, Mr.Gladwin and Dr. M. Harper

Validation of observations and checking of data:
John Meiklejohn, Stephanie Thompson, Michael Harper and Peter Garnett.

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Introduction

In 2005, Ledbury Naturalists' Field Club decided to focus the year's field work on Coneygree Wood, immediately to the east of the town, and selected areas of interest adjoining it. Frith Wood to the north of Ledbury was recorded in 2003, so gathering records from the adjacent woodland on the ridge further south adds to the knowledge of the wild life in the local environment. The Club President, Dr. Harper, lives close to the woodland at its southern edge, and has recorded its wild life, particularly moths, for very many years, and it was thought that it would be useful to incorporate some of his observations along with a wider overview of the woodland.

Background

Coneygree Wood forms a backdrop to the town and occupies an area of 56.5 hectares. It is leased from Eastnor Estate by Forest Enterprise and forms part of a larger woodland area occupying the long ridge overlooking Ledbury. The ridge is between 50 and 150 meters high and predominantly Silurian limestone of the Upper Ludlow series moving into sandy soils at the lower level. As in Frith Wood, it has a mixture of conifers, which were planted in the '60s, and native broadleaved species, which regenerate themselves naturally. There are remnants of ancient woodland, such as Yew and Small-leaved Lime and evidence of coppicing in past times.

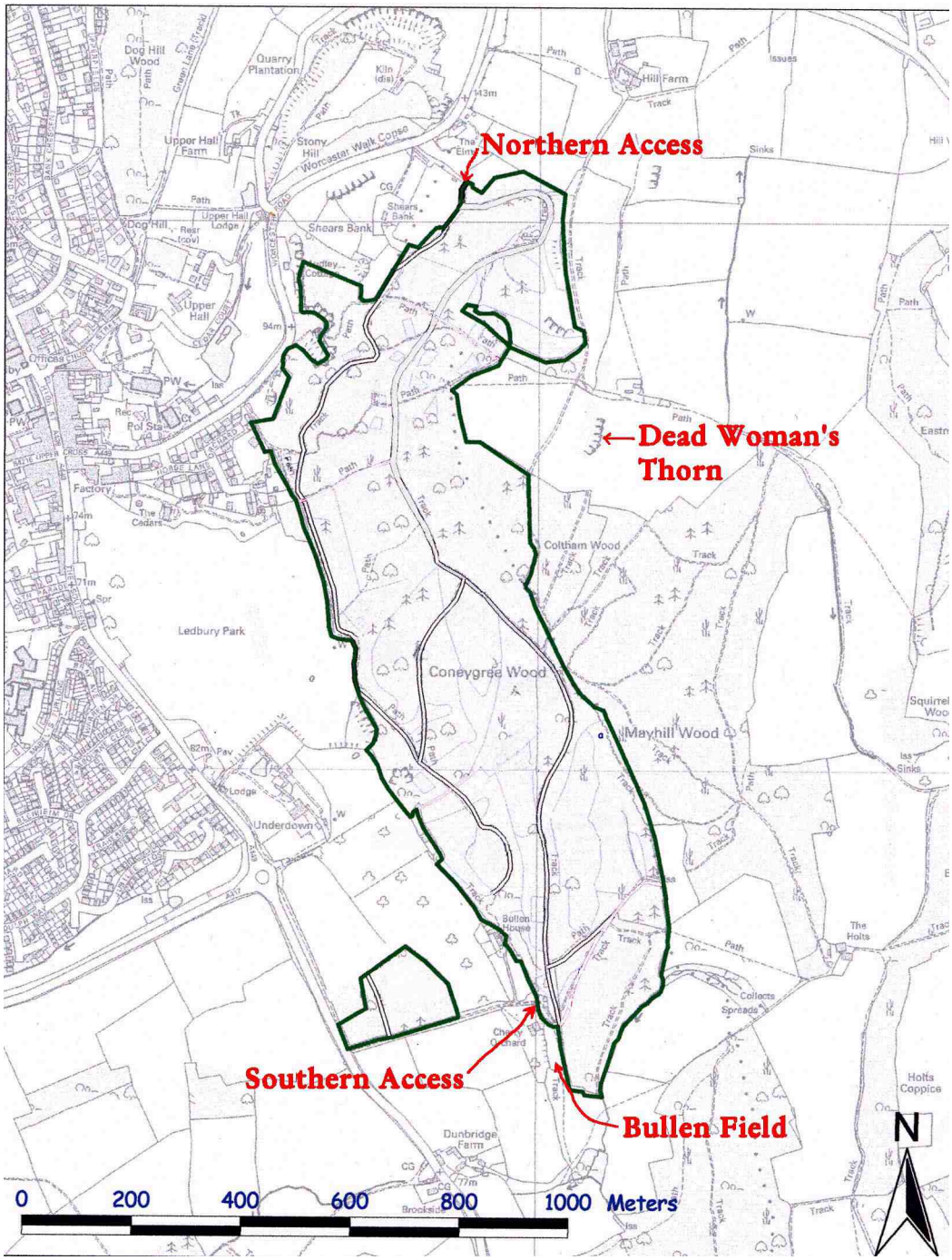
There is archaeological evidence that humans have been in the area for thousands of years with prehistoric sites yielding Neolithic flint implements and more recently, a water mill site and lime kiln.

There is a public footpath in the north, linking Ledbury to Eastnor, and a bridle way in the south, which passes up the Bullen and crosses to The Holts and Eastnor. There are also many informal paths generated as timber extraction routes, which are used for recreation by local people. There is no public car park in the wood, though the woodland can be accessed easily from the town.

The Survey Areas

Work was concentrated on the woodland rides to the north and south leading from the two access points. Access to the north end was gained along the forestry track starting at SO 718382 from the Malvern road, and to the south end along Bullen Lane starting at SO 717365 from the Gloucester road. The group also walked the public footpath towards Eastnor and recorded at Dead Woman's Thorn (DWT) SO 721376, an uncultivated area to the south of the path. The return route skirted the arable field to the north, farmed by Mr. Gladwin, and crossed what was the old golf course at SO 721379. Observations were also made in Bullen Field (BF) SO 720365, which is an ancient uncultivated meadow belonging to Dr. Harper which he has managed for wild life for many years.

Northern Ride



The Survey Area

Conducting the Survey

Volunteers from Ledbury Naturalists' Field Club met monthly in 2005 to carry out the survey. The dates of the meetings were March 14th, April 11th, May 9th, June 13th, July 11th, August 15th and September 12th. On each occasion, members spent about three hours in the morning, walking either from the northern access point along the ride to the south and up the public footpath to Dead Woman's Thorn, or from the access off the Gloucester road up the lane to Cherry Orchard and into the southern part of the wood as well as recording in Bullen Field. All flowering plants, grasses, trees, fungi, mosses, ferns, lichens, birds, insects, and other invertebrates found were recorded. The sites were visited alternately starting with the north end.

In a separate initiative, Dr. Harper set out a moth light over night, once a week from March to September in an area adjacent to Bullen Field. He also walked regularly in the woodland and added more observations to the general listings.

As in previous years, the group was fortunate to have the assistance of several well-known experts in their field, and great trouble was taken to verify each record to ensure the reliability of the survey as far as possible. However the records are doubtless an underestimate of the species present due to the limited time spent.

Results and Comment

All species found were recorded. Complete details of the general survey can be found in Appendix 1 of this report. Dr. Harper's list of Lepidoptera can be found in Appendix 2.

In summary the following numbers of species were noted.

	Flowers	Grasses Sedges Rushes	Trees	Fungi Lichens Mosses Ferns	Birds	Butterflies and Moths	Other Insects and Invertebrates
Coneygree Wood	**166**	**38**	**47**	**78**	**28**	**20**	**155**
Bullen Field	**70**	**21**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**480**	**12**

The main area surveyed is an ancient woodland site. Of the 47 species of trees noted, the main ones were Oak, Ash, Hazel and Field Maple, typical of heavy alkaline soil, but there was a wide distribution of Yew trees, many of great age and character and several Small-leaved Limes and Wild Service trees which indicate the woodland's ancient origins. There was also a wide distribution of Privet and Honeysuckle in the under-storey, thriving in the calcareous conditions. Spurge Laurel, Spindle and Hornbeam were also in evidence. Veteran pollarded Oaks can be found near the South end path. There were patches of conifers, mainly Larch, Norway Spruce, Black and Scots Pine mixed in with the native broadleaved trees.

Old Lapsed Pollard

The flowering plants were found mainly along the edge of the rides and in clearings where the light levels were higher than under the trees. The ground

flora was predominantly Dog's Mercury with some Bluebell though there were considerable patches of Tutsan and various Hypericums in the lighter places. Other plants of note were the few patches of Stinking Iris at the north end with Common Gromwell and Teasle spreading along the ride edge. Spring flowers were represented by Primroses, Cowslips, a few Wood Anemones and a range of Violets, though there were very few Wild Daffodils. Both Common Spotted and Early Purple Orchids were found in clearings, though not in great abundance.

Herb Paris

There was one area of Herb Paris in a clearing (SO 7197 3723) with 7 patches in flower in early May and Nettle-leaved Bellflower was flowering along the ride in mid July. The southern access yielded a similar picture, especially in the woodland. Also of note was a patch of Few-flowered Garlic along the Bullen and large patches of Yellow Figwort flowering along the lane to Bullen House. It is thought this may be an escape from an old walled garden, which used to be near the site. In September, a walk along the arable field near DWT yielded some common arable weeds but also a patch of Sharp-leaved Fluellen, less commonly seen.

Yellow Figwort

The area of Dead Woman's Thorn was basically calcareous grassland with encroaching scrub. There was a typical flora of Rock Rose, Mouse-ear Hawkweed, Creeping Cinquefoil, several Violets and Wild Thyme but the advancing brambles were in danger of overcoming the tiny plants. Time did not allow a separate review of this area and access was difficult.

Dead Woman's Thorn

The Bullen Field was also typical ancient grassland covered in large ant hills and with many interesting species including, Yellow-wort, Lady's Bedstraw, Dyer's Greenweed, Rock Rose, Ox-eye Daisy, Field Forget-me-not, Wild Marjoram, Burnet Saxifrage, False Oxslip, Lesser Sweet Briar, Wild Thyme and four species of Violet. The rich flora made it an ideal habitat for a large range of insects. (See Appendix 2)

Bullen Field

There were 38 species of grasses, sedges and rushes noted in the various areas. They represented both woodland and grassland species and it was pleasing to find some Quaking Grass and Sweet Vernal Grass in the Bullen Field and the southern area.

Fungi were only recorded in the woodland and 44 species found. It was a very dry autumn, so fewer species than expected were noted. There were 3 species of Inkcap, as well as Chicken of the Wood, Scarlet Elf Cup, St. George's Mushroom and Birch Polypore amongst the better known species. Nine species of lichen, 12 mosses, 3 liverworts and 10 ferns were also noted.

The bird list was a little disappointing, given the wealth of insect food, with only 28 species recorded though it did include both Green and Greater Spotted Woodpeckers, Tree Creeper and Goldcrest. No Cuckoo was heard this year at this site though it was recorded nearby. Longer and more solitary observations at other times of day may have been more productive.

In the general survey, 20 species of Butterflies and Moths were recorded including Holly and Common Blue, Painted Lady, Marbled White and Small Copper butterflies. There were 155 other insects and invertebrates recorded in the wood and along the rides including 53 species of Coleoptera. There were 6 species of Bumble Bee, 5 species of Ant, 5 species of Woodlouse and 17 species of Snail included in the list.

Dr. Harper recorded 480 species of Lepidoptera using his moth light during the year. Of particular interest are *Triaxomasia caprimulgella*, a veteran wood species recorded in Ledbury Park and associated with Field Maple. This was the first record for the West Midlands. It was recorded last in Britain in 1974, 31 years ago, also by Dr. Harper, this time in Bedford! Another first for the county was *Yponomeuta sedella*, which is probably spreading from the southern counties, as is *Hoplodrina ambigua*. Another scarce record is of *Antitype chi*, which had not been seen for 20 years. The moth, *Epiphyas postvittana*, is an adventive, originating from Australia and now becoming naturalised in Britain. It was probably imported with apples but has widened its food sources. It prefers towns to countryside and is most common in Portsmouth, so it was interesting to see it turning up in Ledbury. Appendix 2 contains the full list recorded in the year.

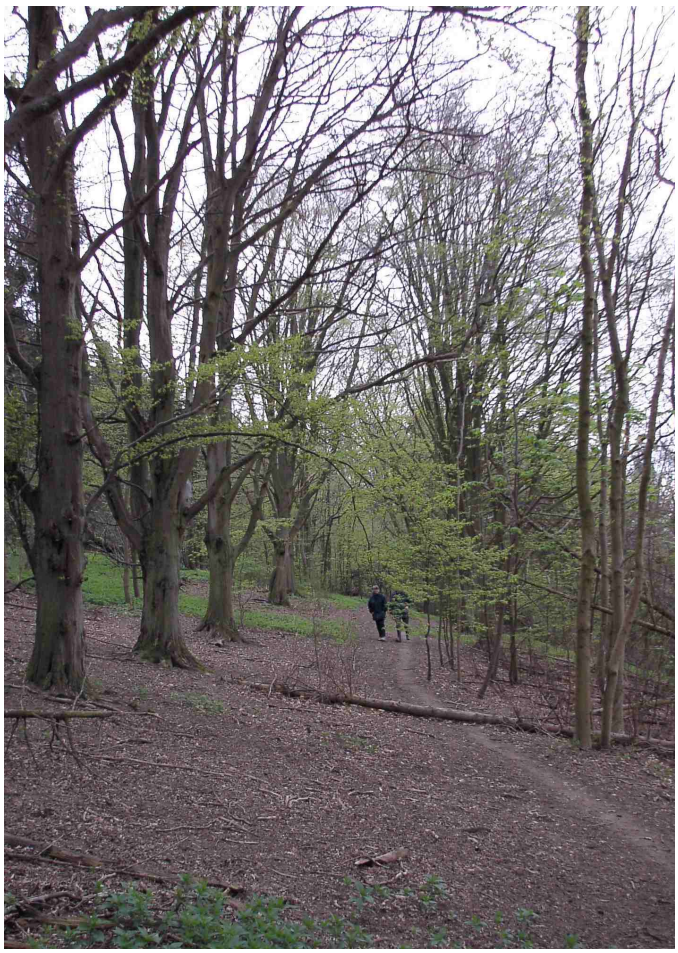
Mammals were not formally recorded but there were several Badger setts and Grey Squirrels were noticed as were the slots of deer. The area has potential as a Dormouse habitat but they have not been recorded yet.

Conclusions:

Coneygree Wood was similar to Frith Wood in its flora though not quite so rich. A wide diversity of plants and insects in particular were recorded, especially along the open rides and in clearings, but the thickly wooded areas, especially the conifer plantations were less productive due to lower light levels. At Dead Woman's Thorn, an interesting area of calcareous grassland is being encroached upon by scrub, though the flora may hang on in the very thin soil in some parts. It would be advantageous to clear back some of the scrub to encourage the more fragile plants.

Bullen field contained many gems, probably more than were recorded this year. Most notable was the large number of moths attracted to the moth lamps set up overnight throughout the year.

The Ledbury Naturalists team were pleased to be able to report again that there is an abundance of wildlife within easy access of the town and which can be enjoyed by all.



Cother Wood from Croft Farm

View East from Coneygree

Distribution

1. Ledbury Naturalists' Field Club, survey team and committee members
2. Forest Enterprise
3. Herefordshire Nature Trust.
4. English Nature.
5. British Trust for Ornithology.
6. Herefordshire Ornithological Club.
7. Herefordshire Biological Records Centre
8. Colwall Parish Council
9. Ledbury Town Council
10. Colwall Library
11. Ledbury Library
12. Woolhope Naturalists' Field Club

Appendix 1

Appendix 2