

Ledbury Naturalists Field Club

## **Field Survey 2004**

### **Cother Wood Nature Reserve and Vinesend**



**February 2005**

## **Acknowledgements**

**Project Coordinator:** Peter Garnett

**Document, Data Collation**

**And Photography:** Janet Parry

**Graphics:** Alan Parry

**Members who carried out the survey, whose expertise and help was vital to the success of the project:**

Gillian Davis	Lorna Garnett	Peter Garnett	Jenny Grant
Cherry Greenway	Michael Harper	John Meiklejohn	Janet Parry
John Partridge	Margaret Rist	Steve Roe	David Taft
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## **Introduction**

In 2004, the Warden of Cother Wood Nature Reserve asked the Ledbury Naturalist's Field survey team, to assist in a new survey of the reserve. Previous surveys had focussed on plants but by bringing in a team of people with broader expertise, it was hoped to get a more complete picture of the wildlife in the reserve. It was decided to extend the area of observation to include the land further north known as Vinesend as this is also valuable limestone grassland and the Conservation group of Ledbury Naturalists had done some clearance here in previous years and so were interested in its development.

## **Background**

To the North and West of the main ridge of the Malvern Hills are a series of narrow wooded ridges which run in a generally north/south direction. They are made of Silurian limestone of the Wenlock series and characterise the attractive landscape of this part of Herefordshire, which can be seen from the main Malvern ridge.



**Cother Wood from the Malvern Ridge**

The whole region lies within the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and is of great landscape value. The area of interest for the survey, sits on the first ridge to the west at an altitude of 165 – 225 metres, and consists of

- a) part of Cother Wood at the southern end at SO 757463.
- b) a cleared area further north along the ridge at SO 753471 including the path leading to it from Vinesend Farm at SO 750475 and referred to as “Vinesend” in the survey.

Part of the ridge is designated an SSSI by English Nature as an example of a remnant of ancient semi-natural woodland and calcareous grassland. It includes 15.8 ha of both Cother and Bank Woods and was last surveyed in 2001 by English Nature.

Cother Wood Nature Reserve lies at the southern end of the ridge within the SSSI, and is 1.6ha in area. It was leased from the Madresfield Estate in 1969 by the Herefordshire Nature Trust (HNT) who now manage it. The warden, Mr. David Taft, keeps it under review. The area had extensive limestone quarrying in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. This ceased, though many humps and hollows are left in the ground. It has now been colonised by lime loving plants. Evidence of its ancient woodland origins can be seen in the abundance of indicator species such as Bluebells, Yellow Archangel, Wild Service tree and Small-leaved Lime. There are still some open grassy areas on the western slope, giving a mixed habitat, healthy for wildlife and biodiversity. It is of particular interest as calcareous grassland is becoming increasingly rare.



**Grassy Area within Cother Wood**

Further north along the ridge, on the western slope, is an area in Six Acre Wood, which has been cleared of the constantly invading woodland to allow a grassland habitat to develop. This land is owned by Mr. and Mrs. James Coomber of Vinesend Farm and managed by English Nature. The Ledbury Naturalists Conservation group, under the guidance of Michael Harper have helped in

this task and so have an interest in the site. The path from Vinesend Farm to the cleared area was also surveyed to give information about the woodland fringe.

There are several public footpaths in the area. The old Worcestershire Way was, for a time,



**Vinesend Site looking North**

routed along the bridleway on top of the ridge, and there are linking paths to Cradley and Mathon in the west, and North and West Malvern on the east side. This gives the whole area a great amenity value as it near the populations of Malvern and popular with walkers and naturalists generally, making it a key site for conservation.

### **The Survey Areas**

## Conducting the Survey

Volunteers from Ledbury Naturalists' Field Club met monthly in 2004 to carry out the survey. The dates of the meetings were March 15<sup>th</sup>, April 19<sup>th</sup>, May 17<sup>th</sup>, June 21<sup>st</sup>, July 19<sup>th</sup>, August 16<sup>th</sup>, September 20<sup>th</sup> and October 26<sup>th</sup>. On each occasion, members spent about three hours in the morning, walking either through the Cother Wood Reserve or up to the grassy clearance at Vinesend along the public footpath, recording all flowering plants, grasses, trees, fungi, mosses, ferns, lichens, birds, insects, and other invertebrates that were found. The sites were visited alternately starting at Vinesend, as the path to Cother Wood, through Croft Farm was extremely muddy in March making access difficult. The Coomers of Vinesend Farm kindly allowed parking on their property, which made access to the northern end of the ridge much more convenient. On several visits some members recorded at both sites, walking from Cother to the Vinesend clearing.

The Border Bryologists surveyed Cother Wood in February 2005. Their records have been added to the list of mosses and liverworts.



**Recorders on the Ridge Path**

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 can be found in Appendix 1 of this report. In summary the following numbers of species were noted.

	<b>Flowers</b>	<b>Grasses Sedges Rushes</b>	<b>Trees</b>	<b>Fungi Lichens Mosses Ferns</b>	<b>Birds</b>	<b>Butterflies and Moths</b>	<b>Other Insects and Invertebrates</b>
<b>Cother Wood</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>Vinesend</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Total species</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>156</b>

The survey area yielded a pleasing list of species across many taxa, many typical of the now scarce habitat of unimproved limestone grassland. There was confirmation of species previously recorded and new finds.

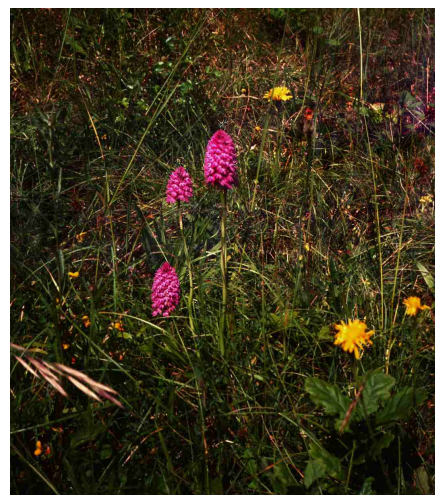


**Greater Butterfly Orchid**

Of the 164 flowering plants noted, it was good to find Dyer's Greenweed, the food plant of the Green Hairstreak butterfly, and both the Woolly and Musk thistles, all uncommon in the county. Sainfoin was once cultivated for fodder, but is probably native in limestone grassland. There were the scarce Pyramidal, Bee and Greater Butterfly orchids as well as the more common Early-purple and Green-winged species and Yellow Rattle. The prickly Oxtongue was found in Cother Wood and also Toothwort on Hazel along the path to Vinesend. The Hairy Violet, which is confined to calcareous pastures and a declining species was found in both sites. Devil's-bit Scabious and several St. John's Worts were common on the Vinesend site. Also at Vinesend there were several interesting Roses, which await identification. The only plant listed in the HNT guide not found this year was Pignut. The grasses included such calcicoles as Upright Brome, Quaking grass and Golden Oat grass and 35 species were noted including 7 rushes, woodrushes and sedges.

The tree cover in Cother Wood was mainly Sessile Oak and Ash, though there was a good variety of other trees and shrubs associated with the calcareous soil. These included Yew, Wild Cherry, Field Maple, Wych Elm, Small-leaved Lime and the uncommon Wild Service tree. Some Sycamore had invaded recently. The shrub layer included Hazel, Hawthorn, Blackthorn, Dogwood and Spindle totalling 33 species.

A range of 56 fungi was found including several Waxcaps, Dog Stinkhorn and Earth Stars. It was a good year for Morels generally and *Verpa conica* and *Mitrophora semilibra* were found in the woodland margin along the path to Vinesend. There was also a range of lichens, mosses, liverworts and ferns.



**Pyramidal Orchids**

This big spread of plants was seen to support a wide range of insects. In the Cother Wood reserve, there were 70 Lepidoptera, including the rare Green Hairstreak butterfly, which was seen flying in numbers during the May visit. Subsequently, the larvae were found on Dyer's Greenweed, giving hope for continuation of the species at this site. The Marbled White, Dingy, Large and Small Skippers were all found, as well as a wealth of micromoths and leaf miners. *Trifurcula bernei* is a rare species of moth known only from one other site in Britain on Hayling Island, and historically associated with Dyer's Greenweed, though it is not proven to be the food plant. *Marasmarcha lunaedactyla* is another declining moth species, which was found in Cother and associated with Restharrow as its food plant also found there. Two adults of *Grapholita jungiella*, another scarce species of grassland moth, were also found in Cother Wood. There was a total of 156 other insects and invertebrates including a large list of beetles, springtails, bugs, grasshoppers and crickets. Not so many bees were recorded nor damsel flies, as there is no water on the site. A range of woodlice, millipedes, centipedes, spiders, harvestmen, slugs and snails all added to the diversity of the fauna.

The bird list was a little disappointing, given the wealth of insect food, with only 30 species

recorded though it did include a Goshawk, both Green and Greater Spotted Woodpeckers, Cuckoo, Redwings and Fieldfares. Longer and more solitary observations at other times of day may have been more productive.

Mammals were not formally recorded but there were several Badger setts and Grey Squirrels were noticed. Dormice have been previously reported at Cother but none were recorded this year.

### **Conclusions:**

The survey has shown these sites to be good examples of biodiversity in a mixed habitat on a limestone ridge. There was a wide range of lime loving plants many of which are uncommon in the county and declining nationally. They support a great many insects and other fauna. The cleared grassy areas in particular yielded uncommon species. These areas are always in danger of encroachment from scrub as they are not grazed any more and need to be cleared of bramble and tree saplings regularly to prevent them reverting to woodland. It was notable at the end of the season how the woody species were intruding again especially at Vinesend.

This is a very beautiful and increasingly rare habitat of great importance for its biodiversity and landscape value, and it is to be hoped that it can be managed to keep it in good health for everyone's enjoyment in the future.



**Cother Wood from Croft Farm**

## **Distribution**

1. Ledbury Naturalists' Field Club.
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
13. Mr. and Mrs. J. Coomber

## **Appendix 1**