Ledbury Naturalists Field Club

Field Survey 2015

Homme House

Much Marcle

January 2016

Acknowledgements

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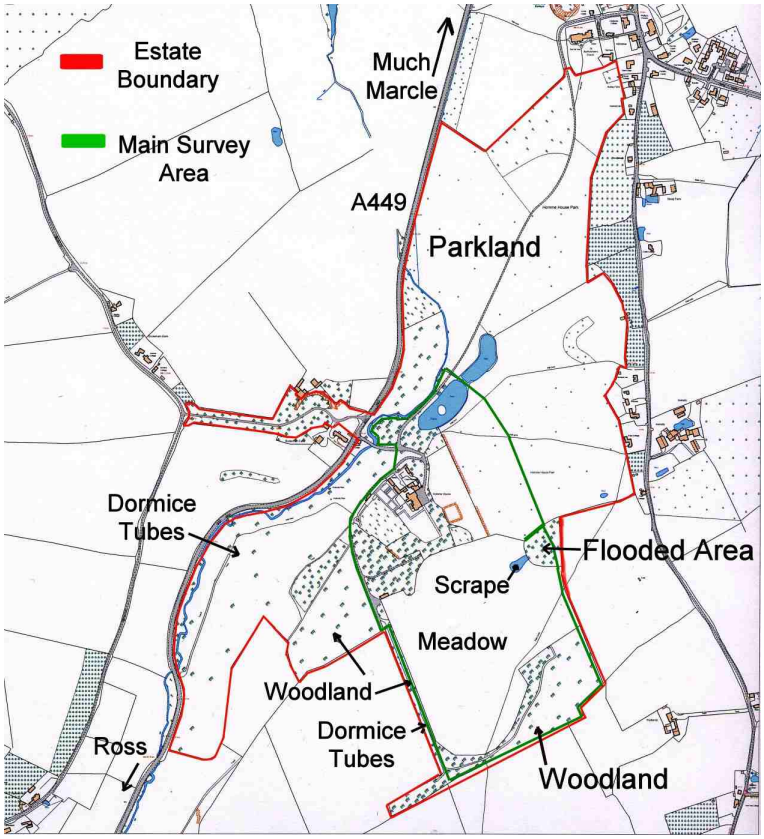
Introduction

This year the club was invited by the Finnigan family to survey the Homme House Estate at Much Marcle. It has been the current family home for 15 years and whilst the main business is running a successful wedding venue in the large house and adjoining garden, the owners are very sympathetic to wildlife in the rest of the estate and keen for us to record what we could to give a picture of its wildlife potential and to add to the knowledge gained from previous more specialist surveys on the main parkland and ponds.

Background

The estate is situated at SO 655 319 to the east of the Woolhope Dome, south of Marcle church and adjoining the A449 Ledbury to Ross road. The main entrance is along a drive through the parkland from Marcle church. This crosses the only public footpath, part of the Three Choirs Way, at its northern end. There is another private access by a small lodge off the main road towards Ross. There are magnificent views toward the Malvern Hills across the Leadon valley as the land slopes NE. This is an historic site, the estate being created in the fourteenth century and the original house built around 1500 on the top of a Silurian limestone ridge. It has seen many additions and refurbishments over the centuries but is now a Grade 2 listed building with extensive gardens. The rest of the estate consists of about 100 acres of parkland mainly on the deep red sandstone soils and 80 acres of woodland primarily on the thinner soils of the limestone ridge. The historic parkland was surveyed by the Herefordshire Wildlife Trust in 2011 as part of their Parkland Survey for the county. This recorded over 250 ancient, veteran and noble trees which form the main part of the site. It is managed by grazing throughout the summer and taking a crop of hay. There are also two large ponds which were surveyed in 2013 as a guide to future management. Beyond the parkland and ponds to the south is another hay meadow and a fringe of woodland, some of which has ancient origins. Part of the SE border is flooded in winter forming a lake. There is also a new scrape full of water used as a horse jump for equestrian events in the summer.

View towards Ledbury from the ridge path (JP)



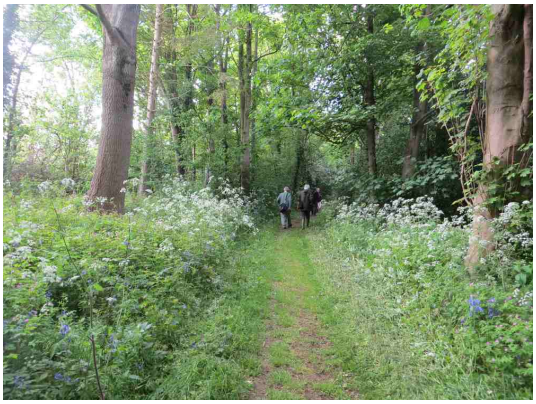
The Survey area

Conducting the Survey

Volunteers from Ledbury Naturalists' Field Club paid eight visits to the site between March and October in 2015 to carry out the survey. The dates of the general meetings were March 18th, April 22nd, May 20th, June 15th, July 15th, August 19th, September 16th, and October 14th . Dormouse tubes were set up in the woodland by volunteers in May and some members ran a moth trap during an equestrian event in August. Moira Jenkins conducted a geological survey especially along the stream bed where there were some rock exposures. (see Appendix 1)

As the main parkland and the ponds had been surveyed recently, the club survey concentrated on the less dramatic part of the estate towards the south beyond the park. This included the meadow managed for hay with the low lying flooded section and horse jump and the parcel of woodland towards the southern edge continuing round the woodland fringe up to the ridge to the west and behind the house. On each date members spent about 3

Flooded area in March (JP)



Woodland fringe path in May (JP)

hours in the afternoon walking around this area recording all flowering plants, grasses, trees, fungi, ferns, birds, insects, and other invertebrates found along the way.

Hilary Ward and Peter Garner supervised the botany, Cherry Greenway identified the fungi, Richard and Phyl King surveyed the scrape and also helped with the invertebrates as did David Taft and Eden Tanner. Michael Bradley and Robin Hemming ran the moth trap and Kate Wollen and Ann Bowker organised the dormice survey. John Davies and many others identified the birds. The club is fortunate to have the support of these experts in their fields, 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 and in some cases due to lack of expertise available. All species found were recorded. Complete details of the survey can be found in Appendix 2

In summary the following numbers of species were noted.

Flowers	Grasses Sedges Rushes	Trees	Fungi and Ferns	Birds	Mammals and other Vertebrates	Insects and Invertebrates
120	23	39	73	50	8	173

The 120 species of herbaceous plants represented a range of both woodland and meadow species. Whilst there was nothing particularly rare there was a good spread across many families. The woodland at the far end of the estate yielded a typical range such as Bugle, Primrose, Bluebell, Red Campion, Ramsons, Wood Anemone, Yellow Archangel and Foxglove and the rarer Moschatel. There were many Wild Daffodils in March. The meadow beyond the parkland was ablaze with the yellow of Buttercups in June and also had a good range of plants including Cuckoo flower, Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil, both Meadow and Bulbous Buttercup, Red and White Clover and Yellow Rattle. Along the path edges and hedgerows many other species were found such as Greater Celandine, Dame's Violet, Cut-leaved Crane's-bill, Autumn Hawkbit, Oxeye Daisy, 2 types of Plantain, 3 of Sow-thistles, Cow Parsley and Hedge Parsley, 5 types of Speedwell, 4 of

Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil (JP)

Branched Bur-reed (JP)

Flooded woodland in April (JP)

Woodland dried out in July (JP)

Forget-me-nots, 3 of Vetches and 3 of Violets. The pond in the horse jump had some large patches of Branched Bur-reed and Gypsywort at its edge and Stonewort floating on the water. The flooded area had a large stand of Yellow Iris and the less desirable Himalayan Balsam was found by the larger ponds and along the stream.

A fair range of grasses was found, mainly typical of pasture land. The Yorkshire Fog was dominant in the hay meadow in June and there was also Sweet Vernal Grass, Crested Dog's-tail and Meadow Foxtail, though the more delicate varieties such as Quaking grass were not found. There were 3 varieties of Rush by the scrape and 3 sorts of Sedge in the damper parts of the wood.

Scaly Male Fern (HW)

A total of 9 Fern species were noted including Rusty-back, Scaly Male-fern and Broad Buckler. These were mainly in the woodland and round the back of the house in the old walls and embankment.

As the parkland trees had been surveyed extensively in the County Parkland survey project, the large specimen trees and non-native specimens were ignored and only the ones in the wilder part of the estate noted. The main strip of woodland was dominated by Oak and Ash with some Sycamore and Horse Chestnut. Parts had been planted with Douglas Fir. There was an interesting group of Small-leaved Limes in a circle which may be very old and have spread vegetatively from a common origin, indicating this strip of woodland has ancient ancestry. There were also both Wyche and English Elms,

Parkland Oak (JP)

Large Woodland Oak (JP)

Spindle (JP)

Maples, Willow, Poplar, Cherry Laurel, Wild Cherry and Snowberry. There was a very old unusual spiney Apple tree by the path along the top ride. The hedgerows contained Guelder Rose, Elder, Rowan, Blackthorn, Hazel and Spindle with Mistletoe in places.

Later in the year a good range of fungi were found, mainly from the wooded parts of the estate. Out of the 64 species identified many were associated with rotting wood such as Honey Fungus and Sulphur Tuft. There was a range of edible ones such as Chicken of the Woods, Oyster Mushroom and Shaggy Parasol as well as Glistening, Shaggy and Magpie Inkcaps. Bracket fungi, a few Rusts, Cup fungi and Puffballs were also represented but only two Waxcaps, these being more frequently found in ancient grazed meadows.

Oyster Mushroom (JP)

Inkcaps (ET)

Scarlet Elf-cup (ET)

There was a good selection of bird life, 50 species being identified in the short time they were observed. These included many woodland birds such as Bullfinch, Nuthatch, Chaffinch and Goldcrest as well as 4 species of Tits. Both Green and Greater Spotted Woodpeckers were seen and the site has had Lesser Spotted nesting previously but was not seen by the team this year. A Cuckoo was heard calling and a Sparrowhawk and several Buzzards flew overhead. Both Pied and Grey Wagtails were observed and in the wet areas, Heron, Teal, Mallard, Gadwall, Canada Geese and Moorhen were seen. There was a fleeting glance of a Kingfisher along the stream, and 17 Mandarin Duck paid a visit to the flooded area in the spring. Spotted Flycatchers were seen round the house and a Barn Owl peeped out of its nest in a hollow in an old Oak tree in the meadow.

Black Arches Moth (ET)

A great many invertebrates, mainly moths, were listed reflecting the expertise available and some extra overnight moth trapping. Of the 98 species of Lepidoptera identified many were micro moths, some being identified by their leaf mines. There was also a range of day flying butterflies,

Scrape and Meadow in July (JP)

particularly in July when the hay meadow and hedgerow had clouds of Meadow Browns as well as some Gatekeepers, Ringlets and Large Whites. Small Copper, Large Skipper, Speckled Wood, Peacock, Holly Blue and Comma butterflies were also seen during the year. There was a selection of flies and midges and beetles including the Cream-spot, 7-spot and Harlequin Ladybirds. Many wasps and mites were identified from the galls they induce on a variety of plants in leaves, stems and flowers buds. Three varieties of Bumble bee were seen and Honey bees as well as a large Hornets' nest in one of the parkland trees. The horse jump scrape attracted more insects in July including the less common Emerald Damselfly and Blacktailed Skimmer. The pond was also host to the Common Frog with much frog spawn in March. A good variety of water loving plants were becoming well established round the fringes in July

Pond Skater (ET)

Gall on stem (ET)

Common Frog (ET)

Alder fly with eggs (ET)

Dormouse nest in tube (ET)

A small survey was arranged to see if there were any dormice on the estate. On 31st of May 50 dormouse tubes were put up. Twenty five were in the fairly newly coppiced area through the wood on the steep escarpment behind the house down towards the main road and 25 were put in the narrow strip of wood that followed the edge of the property. In autumn 7 nests were found in tubes around SO 649 316 which is near the main road in the newly coppiced area and one nest with a dormouse in it, was found at SO 6494 3153, and one nest in the narrow strip at SO 6559 3135.

Of the other mammals noted, signs of Badgers were seen by the stream and in the woods and there was evidence of Grey Squirrel, Rabbit, Mole and Stoat. Deer slots were seen but not identified.

Conclusion

The Homme estate had a good range of habitats as well as its magnificent parkland and veteran trees. This allowed a great variety of plants and animals to thrive there. Though no great rarities were uncovered in this survey there was a pleasing variety of species across many taxa. The discovery of dormice was good news and showed the continuity of the woodland linked all round by strips of hedgerow and copses which thus make a highway for these creatures as well as other wildlife. The several areas of water also provide another habitat. With continued sympathetic management this beautiful area of Herefordshire will remain a haven for wildlife.

Naturalists at work! (ET)

Distribution

1. Ledbury Naturalists' Field Club, survey team and committee members
2. The Finnigan family
3. Herefordshire Wildlife Trust.
4. Natural England.
5. Herefordshire Ornithological Club.
6. Herefordshire Biological Records Centre
7. Ledbury Town Council
8. Ledbury Library
9. Woolhope Naturalists' Field Club
10. Nick Smith, Forest Services