

Ledbury Naturalists Field Club

Field Survey 2009
Hope End House Estate



January 2010

Acknowledgements

The club is grateful to the following people for their roles in this project:

Project Coordinator: (Document writing & Data Collation)	Janet Parry
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Members who carried out the survey, whose expertise and help was vital to the success of the project

Ann Bowker	Gillian Bateman	Felicity Burge	Gillian Davis
Janet Funke	Lorna Garnett	Cherry Greenway	Michael Harper
Rob & Chris Hemming	Garth Lowe	John Meiklejohn	Janet Parry
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Validation of observations and checking of data:

John Meiklejohn, Stephanie Thomson, Gillian Davies, Cherry Greenway

Checking the text : Hilary Ward

Introduction

The site chosen for the 2009 club survey was the Hope End House estate, an area of land around Oyster Hill between Coddington and Wellington Heath. This had been shown by the Herefordshire Biological Records Centre (HBRC) to have few records of wildlife but was well known by locals to support many species. An approach to Mrs. Sharon Maiden for permission to survey the land was met with enthusiasm and great interest. Subsequently, the survey was carried out over the year and the findings reported here.

Background

The Hope End House (SO 723414) estate covers about 100 acres north of Wellington Heath along the ridge of Oyster Hill. It was once part of the Hope End estate owned by the famous Barrett family in the nineteenth century. The area near the house was laid out in 1810 -1820 by J.C. Loudon, one of the early landscape gardeners. The Barrett house was destroyed later by Charles Hewitt and a new one built higher up the hill in 1874. In 1910 this was partly destroyed by fire and fell into disrepair. In 1994, it was bought by the Maidens and gradually restored and a beautiful garden created around it using the framework of the original landscaping, now fully mature. Mrs. Maiden runs a country house hotel business from the house (www.hopendhouse.com). The stables of the original Barrett house have been converted into a separate private dwelling further down the valley.



Members in the grassy meadow

As well as the hotel business, the Maidens manage an area of farmland. This has several strips of woodland and grassy meadow all on the Silurian limestone of the ridge in a complicated folded area. The name Hope End means “closed valley” and the small dry valleys running south have deeper soil as the softer mudstone has eroded away. There is no stream on the property, though water from the fields drains into the ponds in the lower Hope End garden. The grassland is let for grazing by sheep or cattle in the summer then topped by mower in late September when the plants have set seed. Of the woodland, the Cockshoot was cleared of dead wood and undergrowth about 15 years ago and replanted with chestnut and beech in the gaps. It is now re-establishing itself. Berrington Wood was rather neglected when the Maidens acquired it and it awaits management. Currently it is used for a pheasant shoot and horses are ridden along the informal path. A management plan is in place and some coppicing has been started. The whole estate was put into the government's Stewardship Scheme at entry level in 2009 and is aiming for

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Working in Berrington Wood

higher level in due course.

The land straddles the parishes of Colwall and Wellington Heath and is in the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). There is one main public footpath going north/south and this is part of the long distance path, the Herefordshire Trail.



View NW from Oyster Hill

Another footpath coming from Colwall, joins the main path and has been recently designated part of the Geopark Way, which links sites of geological interest throughout its 109 mile length from Bridgenorth to Gloucester and which is sponsored by the Hereford and Worcester Earth Heritage Trust. This means the paths are well used and fencing

prevents the public from straying onto the fields. There are spectacular views to the west from the top of Oyster Hill where the hills of Wales can be seen easily and to the east, where the Malverns form the backdrop.

The Survey Area

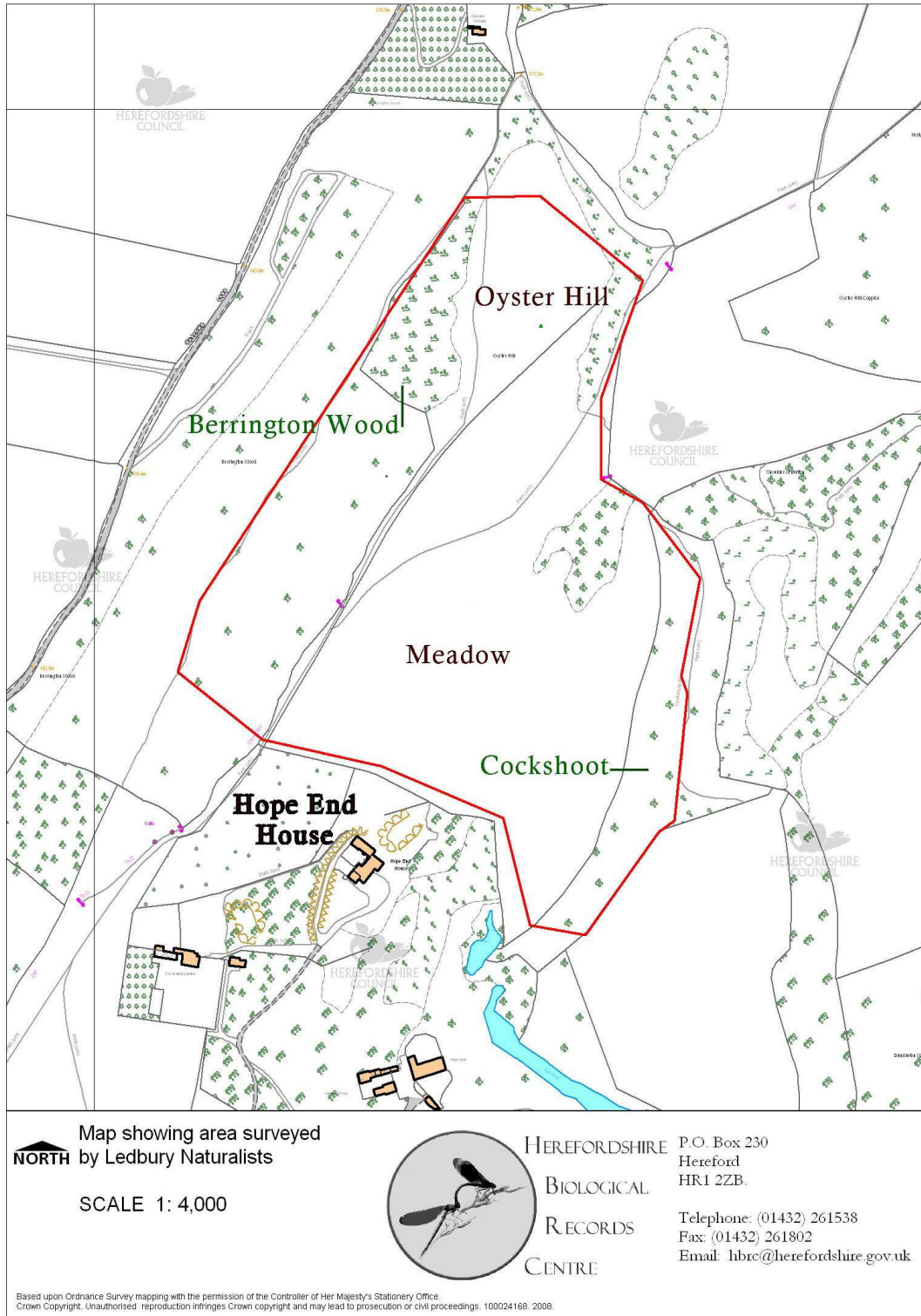
Three separate areas were chosen to survey in detail. They were two parcels of woodland and the grassland. Berrington Wood at SO 722418, is on a steep, west facing slope and is a remnant of ancient semi-natural woodland similar to many in the area such as Frith Wood nearby. It has had some conifer infill and was owned by the Forestry Commission up to 1985. It has a lot of tangled understorey but a clear ride through it.

The Cockshoot at SO 725412 is also on a fairly steep west facing slope but has been cleared of undergrowth in the last 15 years with some replanting. It has a magnificent carpet of bluebells in the spring and has been opened to the public under the “Yellow Book” scheme supporting a gardeners' charity. There is an informal path through it.

The grassland over Oyster Hill at SO 723418 is at 211 meters high at the trig point. It is mainly sloping to the west and quite exposed at the top. It is undisturbed grassland and has not been ploughed in living memory. There are other areas of meadow running south to the house with some more undisturbed banks which were included in the survey.

The three areas were recorded separately and visited on each recording day.

Survey Area



Conducting the Survey

Volunteers from Ledbury Naturalists' Field Club met monthly in 2009 to carry out the survey. The dates of the meetings were March 16th, April 20st, May 18th, June 10th, July 21st, August 17th, September 14th and October 19th. In 2009 the weather was mainly kind on survey days and no meeting had to be called off. This year it was decided to use the afternoon rather than morning for recording to give insects longer to become active.

On each occasion, members spent about 3 hours in the afternoon, walking through the 3 different areas. It was not possible to cover all the ground in each woodland. All flowering plants, grasses, trees, fungi, mosses, ferns, lichens, birds, insects, and other invertebrates found along the way were recorded. Twenty dormouse tubes were positioned in Berrington Wood and another 8 in the Cockshoot and monitored regularly. There were many veteran trees on the site including the garden, which were recorded separately. Michael Harper ran a moth trap on 30 May, 20th July, 26th July, 18th August and 28th September and added 86 extra moth records.



Dormouse tube

Stephanie Thomson supervised the botany whilst John Michaeljohn focussed on invertebrates and Michael Harper identified moths. Cherry Greenway identified the fungi and Kate Wollen from the Forestry Commision and Ann Bowker from the Mammal Society organised the dormouse survey. Gillian Davies and Lorraine Weaver from the University of Worcester came to help with the moss records. 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.

Results and Comment

All species found were recorded. Complete details of the survey can be found in the Appendix.

In summary the following numbers of species were noted.

Flowers	Grasses Sedges Rushes	Trees	Fungi Mosses Ferns	Lepidoptera	Other Insects and Invertebrates
118	31	29	83	110	120

Of the 118 species of flowering plants recorded, the undisturbed grassland yielded the highest number. The western slope of Oyster hill and other grassy bank nearer the house were particularly rich. In May, the hill had a carpet of pink Lousewort, a particularly good show this year. It was also seen to be spreading into other areas of the meadow. Other less common plants in the grassland included Harebell, Pignut, Common Centaury, Meadow Vetchling, Common Milkwort and Bitter Vetch. The presence of this latter species and the Lousewort indicates some acidic influence over parts of the site. There were also several small patches of Wild Daffodils



Lousewort



Cockshoot from Meadow

The woodlands had a different selection of plants such as Yellow Archangel, Wood Anemone, Dog's Mercury, Bush Vetch and Wood-sorrel. Where the undergrowth was more dense in Berrington Wood, the flowering plants favoured the open edges of the ride, though the copious Honeysuckle and Hazel provided useful food and nesting material for the dormice. In the Cockshoot, the undergrowth had been cleared relatively recently so it was much more open and the Bluebells were prolific in late April. It was

strange that no ivy could be found here. There was a small patch of Town-hall Clock by the path in March and banks of Primroses and Violets at the woods margin.

Of the 24 species of grass found, most were recorded in the meadow areas. There was nothing unusual but a good range of shorter grasses including Sweet Vernal-grass and Quaking-grass. Toad Rush and Soft Rush as well as Field and Hairy Woodrush were present. There were large patches of Spring Sedge and Glaucous Sedge on the hill top and some Wood Sedge in Berrington Wood.

Despite the dry autumn, 51 species of fungi were found, mostly in the grassy area of Oyster Hill. These included 4 waxcaps one of which, *Hygrocybe calyptriformis*, is uncommon. There were also small patches of the Magic Mushroom, *Psilocybe semilanceata*, and the Verdigris Toadstool, *Stropharia aeruginosa*. It was reported that many more species appeared in November, after the survey finished. Berrington Wood had fungi more typical of rotting wood such as Blushing Bracket, Sulphur Tuft and Oyster Mushroom. Very few fungi were found in the Cockshoot reflecting its more open character and recent clearance.



Oyster Mushroom



Adder's-tongue

A total of 21 mosses was found, mainly in Berrington Wood, though two species, *Calliergonella cuspidata* and *Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus* were widespread on the hill top. Five species of Liverwort were noted in Berrington Wood and 7 species of fern. It was very pleasing to see quite a few spikes of Adder's-tongue in several locations in the meadow indicating its undisturbed nature. Sadly there was no lichen expert available to help this year so they are unrecorded.

Twenty nine species of tree were counted across the woods and meadow. The woodland was typical of the area with Berrington Wood being mainly Ash with Japanese Larch



Large Sycamore

and Norway Spruce infill from Forestry Commission ownership. The understorey was mainly Bramble and Hazel which had been coppiced in the past. There were a few specimens of Cherry, Silver Birch, Sweet Chestnut and Wych Elm amongst the Ash. The Cockshoot had a different mix with Oak, Beech and Sweet Chestnut predominating, some having been recently planted to fill the gaps left by the clearance. There were a few hedgerow plants such as Hawthorn and Field Maple round the edge and one specimen of Spindle. The meadow had been planted as parkland in the 19th century and now boasts a collection of mature specimen trees. These are mainly Pedunculate Oaks but there are Sweet Chestnut and Beech. Three particularly large Sycamores stand at the bottom of Oyster Hill near Berrington Wood. Sadly, one has

succumbed to a fungal infection this year and is dying.

The veteran trees, i.e. those over 3.7m in girth, were measured in a separate survey. The largest tree recorded was an old Sweet Chestnut at 5.77m on the bank in the meadow. The largest Oak was 4.66m and the largest of the Sycamores was 4.39m. There were two veteran Beech trees in the Cockshoot, the largest being 4.47m. There are also some handsome specimens in the garden which were included in the survey. These results were included in a “Veteran Tree Survey of the Malvern Hills AONB in the parishes of Colwall, Mathon and Cradley” written by David Lovelace and published in April 2009. It is available from the Malvern Hills AONB and can be downloaded from their website. The data should eventually go to the Woodland Trust database of ancient trees.



Veteran Sweet Chestnut

A total of 45 bird species were positively identified, though working in the afternoons was not the best time for bird spotting. Some extra sightings have been noted by Sharon Maiden as the garden area attracts many visitors. As well as more common woodland birds, all 3 Woodpeckers were seen, the Lesser Spotted nesting in the vicinity. The Cuckoo was resident in the summer and a Lapwing was seen flying over. Fieldfare and Redwing were winter visitors. Birds of prey included many Buzzards, a Sparrowhawk and Kestrel. There were Red-legged Partridge and Woodcock in the Cockshoot. Barn Owl, Tawny Owl and Little Owl are all resident in the area and can be seen and heard at dusk and dawn.

The insects noted included 24 lepidopterans during the daytime visits and another 86 from Michael Harper's night time moth lights. These are recorded separately in the appendix. Butterflies seen included Marbled White, Peacock, Painted Lady, Small Copper and Orange Tip. There were 5 species of fly, 42 beetles including 5 species of ladybird, 19 bugs and 5 species of bee. The grassland yielded 3 types of grasshopper

and 5 harvestmen. As there is no open water on the site, there was only one dragonfly, a Hawker, passing by. There was a collection of woodlice, millipedes, centipedes and spiders as well as 12 species of slugs and snails.



Speckled Wood

A Grass Snake skin was found in the meadow and Sharon Maiden reported a regular sighting of Adders which nest in some old stone work in the garden and more Grass Snakes in a compost heap including clutches of eggs this year.

A dormouse nest was found in Berrington Wood at 72066 41521 in October and one dormouse seen hanging out of a tube at 72048 41530. Chewed nuts had also been noted earlier. These records have been passed to the People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) who are running a national monitoring programme.

Other mammals noted were Mole, Fox, Rabbit, Badger and Hedgehog. Brown Hares are regularly seen on Oyster Hill and their footprints left in the snow. Muntjac deer are getting more numerous and wander over the area and occasionally Fallow deer find their way through the woods.

Conclusions

This is a very beautiful corner of the county with its far ranging hilltop views, so it is pleasing that it also contains much biodiversity. The unimproved grassland on the top of Oyster Hill is home to several uncommon species such as Adder's tongue and Lousewort as well as having a range of Waxcaps. As this type of habitat is a shrinking resource in the county and nationwide, it was good to see it flourishing here. The two woodland areas surveyed were contrasting and showed the effect of woodland management in the Cockshoot where the bluebells flourished in the increased light levels. Berrington Wood had a greater range of species including dormice, reflecting the difference in ground cover. The meadow areas also contained some notable veteran trees which are themselves homes for many other creatures as well as adding to the quality of the landscape. A good range of birds regularly frequent the area and it is a site for both Grass snakes and Adders. With continuing sympathetic management the area should remain a haven for wildlife well in to the future.



Hope End in Winter

Distribution

1. Ledbury Naturalists' Field Club, survey team and committee members
2. Peter and Sharon Maiden
3. Herefordshire Nature Trust.
4. Natural England.
5. Herefordshire Ornithological Club.
6. Herefordshire Biological Records Centre
- 7 Malvern Hills Conservators
8. Malvern Hills AONB
9. Colwall Parish Council
10. Ledbury Town Council
12. Colwall Library
13. Ledbury Library
14. Woolhope Naturalists' Field Club

Appendix