

Ledbury Naturalists Field Club

Field Survey 2014

Old Colwall Estate



January 2015

Acknowledgements

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Forestry Commission

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Introduction

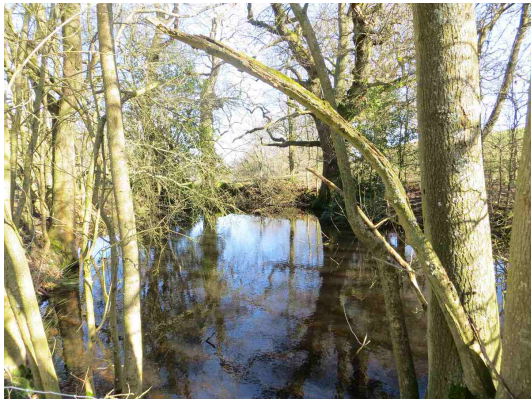
This year the club was invited by Mr. and Mrs. Roland Trafford-Roberts to survey the Old Colwall estate. This is a beautiful area on the eastern side of Oyster Hill and adjoins the land surveyed at Hope End in 2009. The owners were keen for us to record what we could to give a picture of the wildlife potential of the estate.

Background

The estate is located at SO 730 419 and covers about 140 acres of rolling hills and valleys with pasture and parcels of woodland with wonderful views towards the Malvern Hills. The underlying geology is much folded Silurian Limestone forming the ridges with more easily eroded shales in the small valleys. There is a meadow near the road which has been in a habitat scheme following set-aside for at least 20 years which is managed by cutting and removing the hay in late summer. The woodland adjoining the top of the field is being allowed to encroach and small glades are developing which are attractive to insects and birds. The eastern boundary of the field has a wooded fringe, again enhancing the wildlife potential. At the top of the hill is another quite natural area where the encroachment of Bracken is being tackled by cutting back in summer. The dew pond is also in this area but this is surrounded by tall trees which produce deep shade in summer. There is no stream or other natural water on the site apart from a few springs. The steeper sides of the small escarpments are wooded and some of the woodland is rented out for pheasant shooting. The other pastures are grazed by sheep. There are many veteran trees on the estate indicating old parkland origins though one enormous Yew tree of great age probably pre-dates everything else currently



Malvern Hills from the top of the Estate



The Dew Pond

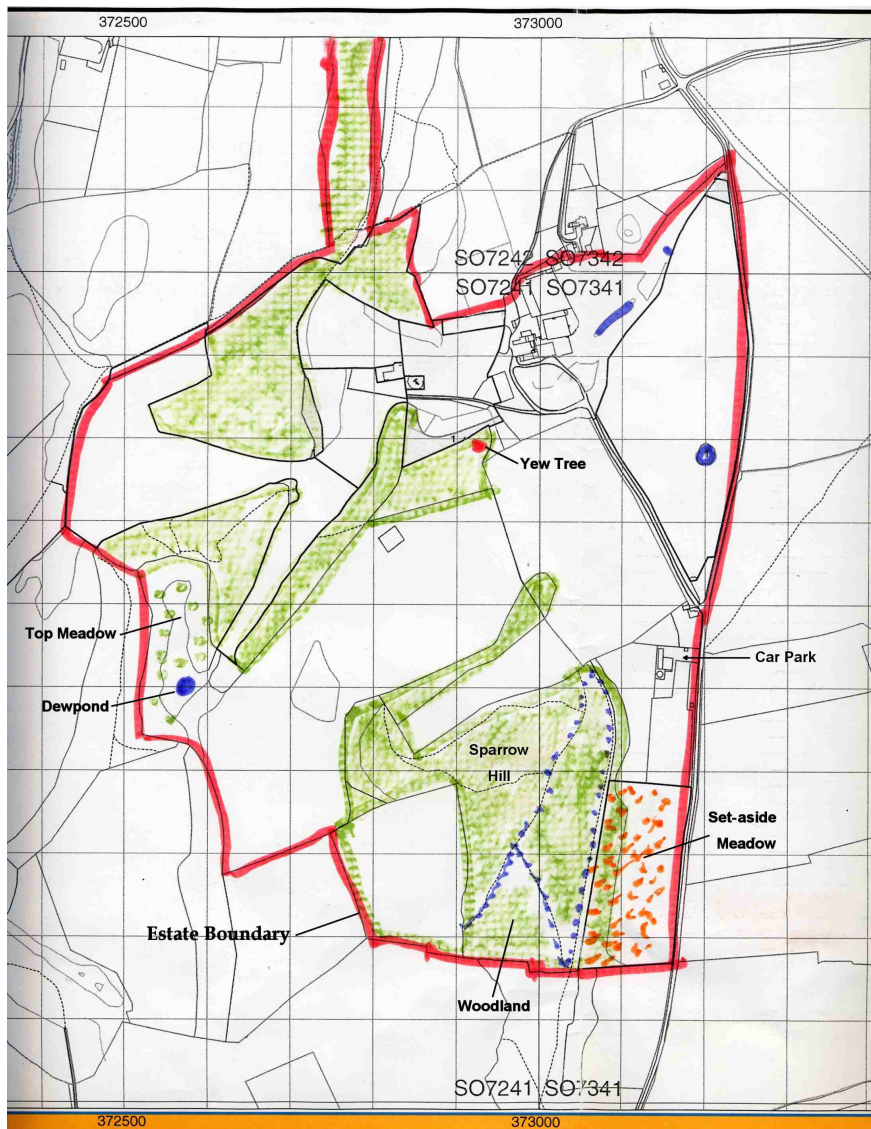
growing. The house and garden also have many interesting features such as an ancient Yew hedge, more water features and many mature trees but these were not surveyed as this area was more managed and less wild.

There are no public footpaths through the estate.



Veteran Sweet Chestnut

The survey Area



Old Colwall Estate Map

Conducting the Survey

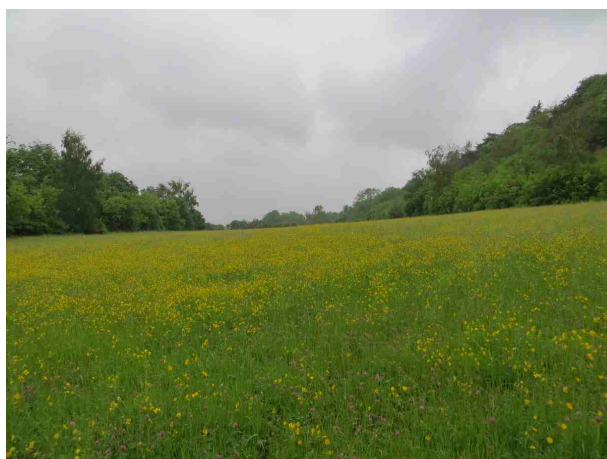
Volunteers from Ledbury Naturalists' Field Club paid eight visits to the site between March and October in 2014 to carry out the survey. The dates of the general meetings were March 26th, April 30th, May 28th, June 25th, July 30th, August 27th, September 24th, and October 29th. There was an extra visit in June by JP and HW as the meadow was flowering prolifically. It was not possible to walk everywhere on the site so members devised a circuit to cover a selection of habitats by going from the car park to the set-aside meadow then up through the woodland on Sparrow Hill and across the grazed pastures towards the dew pond and the top meadow then returning down the grassy valley to the north east, eventually passing the house and walking back along the drive. The land further north and other woodlands were not visited. On each date members spent about 3 hours in the afternoon walking around recording all flowering plants, grasses, trees, fungi, ferns, birds, insects, and other invertebrates found along the way.

Hilary Ward supervised the botany, Cherry Greenway identified the fungi, Gillian Davies and Lorraine Weaver identified the mosses, Richard and Phyl King surveyed the dew pond and also helped with the invertebrates as did David Taft and Eden Tanner. 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 the Appendix.

In summary the following numbers of species were noted.

Flowers	Grasses Sedges Rushes	Trees	Fungi Mosses Ferns	Birds	Mammals and other Vertebrates	Insects and Invertebrates
124	23	35	81	48	8	98

Of the 124 species of herbaceous flowering plants that were identified, the set-aside meadow was the most prolific. In April and May the good range of meadow flowers included both Southern Marsh and Common Spotted Orchids with about 50 spikes of each of the 2 species. Later the meadow was very colourful with 3 species of Buttercup and Clover as well as a great display of Meadow Vetchling. Other species of note were Pignut, Ragged Robin, both Cut-leaved and Dovesfoot Cranesbills and 3 species of St. John's Wort. Bird's-foot-trefoil, Cowslips, 3 species of Forget-me-not and 7 species of Speedwell were also recorded. It was surprising that there

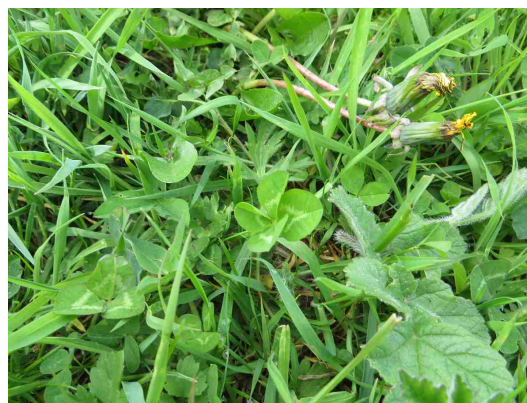


The Set-aside Meadow in June

was no Yellow Rattle or Knapweed and the only Oxeye Daisy was by the house rather than in the meadow. These species are usually typical of lowland hay meadows. The diversity could possibly be enhanced by introducing hay from local flower rich meadows. Several Wildlife Trusts including Herefordshire have had great success with this technique.



Southern Marsh Orchid



Four-leaved Clover



Woodland in May

The woodland had a carpet of Wood Anemones and Bluebells in the spring with Primroses and Bugle at the fringes. It was strange not to find any Wood Spurge or Spurge Laurel which are generally common in these limestone woodlands. The main concentrations of spring flowers were the Wild Daffodils on the hillsides and in the meadows near the house and Snowdrops near the garden.

The meadow at the top of the hill was unimproved grassland and had Heath Speedwell and Ladies Bedstraw amongst other species of



Top Meadow in March



Top Meadow in June

grassland plants. The Bracken grew up in the summer and rather overshadowed the smaller plants. Other meadows were well grazed by sheep resulting in a short sward and it was



Adder's tongue

interesting to find a large patch of Adder's tongue fern in the meadow adjacent to the woodland gate. This had also been found on Oyster hill in the 2009 survey. Other ferns found were Male, Broad-buckler and Harts-tongue in the woods and Common Polypody on the garden walls.

There were 18 species of grasses found in the meadow including Sweet Vernal-grass common in unimproved meadows, though the other grasses were quite coarse ones and no Quaking grass was found. Wood Fescue, which is an

Ancient Woodland Indicator species, occurred in the woodland. There were a few rushes and sedges in the various damp patches but the land was mainly very well drained.

There were 36 species of moss mainly in the woodland and 6 types of Liverwort.

Thirty five species of trees were found. The wooded slopes were covered mainly with native broadleaves such as Ash, Oak and some Silver Birch, with an under-story of Hazel and Elder though they had been coniferised to a small extent. Hedgerow species included Field Maple, Spindle, Hawthorn and Blackthorn. There were odd specimens of Box, Rowan and Wayfaring Tree, also many old parkland specimens especially of Sweet Chestnut which were of considerable age and provided excellent habitats for many other species. The outstanding tree was an ancient Yew on one



Ancient Yew

of the wooded slopes near the house. It was a most magnificent specimen with a great canopy and branches dipping to the ground and re-rooting. Measuring its girth was rather difficult due to its highly convoluted trunk, but was recorded at 9.29 m but others may disagree. It is a tree of great note in the country and has been recorded in the national tree survey.

The site proved a good habitat for fungi with 44 species recorded, half of which were in the top 100 species found in the country, such as Honey fungus, Amethyst Deceiver and Fairy Ring Champignon. Others included 2 Inkcaps, Puffballs, Parasols, several Bracket fungi and a small patch of the Magic Mushroom, *Psilocybe semilanceata*. The top meadows yielded several species of Waxcap later in the season and one, *Hygrocybe citrinovirens*, is quite a rare species, and this is only the 5th record for the county. The short grass at the top of the site favoured these grassland fungi and echoed the ones found on Oyster Hill previously.



Inkcaps



Hygrocybe citrinovirens

The invertebrates are probably under represented due to lack of expertise. However, the meadow was full of



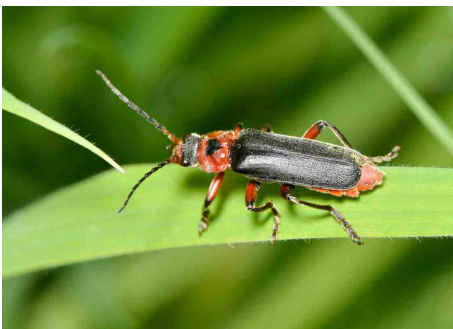
Comma

life in June including 38 species of butterflies and moths. The thistle patch near the car park entrance was particularly good with both Essex and Small Skippers as well as Large Skipper. Also found were Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell, Orange Tip, Large and Green-veined Whites, Holly Blue, Small Copper and Meadow Brown as well as a selection of day flying moths. Unfortunately it was not possible to run moth traps overnight so it is likely there are many more species

especially in the glades at the edge of the woodland. There was also a range of Flies, Beetles and Bugs and the Hymenoptera included 8 species of Bee one of which was the Tree Bumble Bee, which is a recent arrival in this country. Other species were Harvestmen, Grasshoppers and Crickets but only one Dragonfly reflecting the lack of open water nearby.



Lacewing



Beetle

The dew pond at the top of the estate was very shaded and did not have a great deal of life in it apart from duckweed and a few surface beetles and nymphs of other species. A very small Newt larva was found. It was thought to be the rare, Greater Crested but was too small for positive identification. Cutting the trees back would increase the light on the pond and help species diversity.

Forty eight birds were positively identified though afternoons are not the best time for bird spotting.

There was a good range of small birds such as Long Tailed, Blue, Great and Coal tits, Goldfinch and Greenfinch as well as Blackcap, Whitethroat and Spotted Flycatcher. The

diminutive Goldcrest was also heard and the Cuckoo in May. Both Greater Spotted and Green Woodpeckers were seen as well as the migrant Redwing and Redstart. Birds of prey included many Buzzards, 7 all at once, Kestrel, Goshawk and one Red Kite flying over, an increasingly common event in these parts. Moorhens and Mallards were on the ponds in the gardens.

The vertebrates list includes 3 amphibians, the Common Toad, Frog and Newt. The mammals were represented by Badgers which had a very large and active sett at the lower edge of the wood, and many Moles and Rabbits. Four Roe Deer were sighted on the ridge top and Muntjac Deer were seen in the wood.



Toad

Conclusion

This is another beautiful and undisturbed part of the county with fine views and a range of habitats. The section of the estate surveyed showed a good range of wildlife across all groups. The land is managed sympathetically to enable the natural world to thrive alongside the farming. The set-aside meadow is developing well into a diverse flower rich area, and the glades adjacent are a haven for insects and birds. On the hillsides, the short turf was home to many lime loving species, as well as fungi and the many veteran trees provided further complex habitats. Whilst there is potential to enhance some areas, with continuing sympathetic management the estate will remain a haven for wildlife.



The Team at work

Distribution

1. Ledbury Naturalists' Field Club, survey team and committee members
2. Mr. and Mrs. R. Trafford-Roberts
3. Herefordshire Nature 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. Peter Garner Botanical Recorder for Herefordshire

Appendix