

Ledbury Naturalists Field Club

**Field Survey 2008**  
**Old Country Farm, Mathon**



**February 2009**

## **Acknowledgements**

**Project Coordinator:** (Document,  
Data Collation, Photography)

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**Graphics:**

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**Printing and Distribution:**

Herefordshire Biological Records Centre

**Access:**

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**Validation of observations and checking of data:**

John Meiklejohn, Stephanie Thomson, Gillian Davies, Cherry Greenway, Felicity Burge

## Introduction

The club has roamed across most of the open access and Forestry Commission land in the vicinity over the last ten years of recording the natural history of the Ledbury area, so this year, decided it needed to find a private landowner willing to cooperate with survey work. After consulting staff at the Herefordshire Biological Records Centre (HBRC) to look for gaps in the county records, it was noted that many of the under recorded areas were arable farm land and not very promising sites. Subsequently, Janet Lomas of the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) was approached, and it was suggested that farms in the Countryside Stewardship Scheme with owners interested in monitoring wildlife may yield possible survey sites. Old Country Farm in Mathon was suggested and the owner, Ella Quincy, was happy to be involved and cooperate with the project.

## Background

Old Country Farm at SO 726447 covers about 220 acres in the parish of Mathon. It has been owned by the Ballard family and descendants since the 1930s when an old estate was broken up. The section to the east of the road is in the Malvern Hills AONB and sits at about 95 metres above sea level. The land is gently undulating and has 50 acres of woodland of which 35 acres are ancient semi natural and the rest more recently planted poplars and native broadleaved trees. There are about 40 acres of traditional cider orchard with mature trees. The apples do not yield a commercial crop but are collected by a gypsy family and made into cider. Many are left on the ground for the birds and other wildlife to enjoy.



**The Orchard**

The rest is permanent pasture,

some cropped for hay or silage or grazed. Some is left quite rough to benefit the



**The Meadow**

wildlife and most is managed organically. The farm has been involved in environmental management schemes for the last 20 years and is continuing to be so. This involves managing grassland and orchards in traditional manner to sustain landscape and wildlife diversity. The Forestry Commission has granted money for the last 5 years to manage the old woodland by creating glades and rides and

opening up ponds. There are 100 bat roosting boxes in the wood which are being monitored by the Worcestershire Bat Group in a 5 year survey. The farm has also been surveyed for polecats by the Vincent Wildlife Trust.

There is an area of old gravel pit which was worked out about 40 years ago and subsequently planted with poplars.



**Old Gravel Pit**

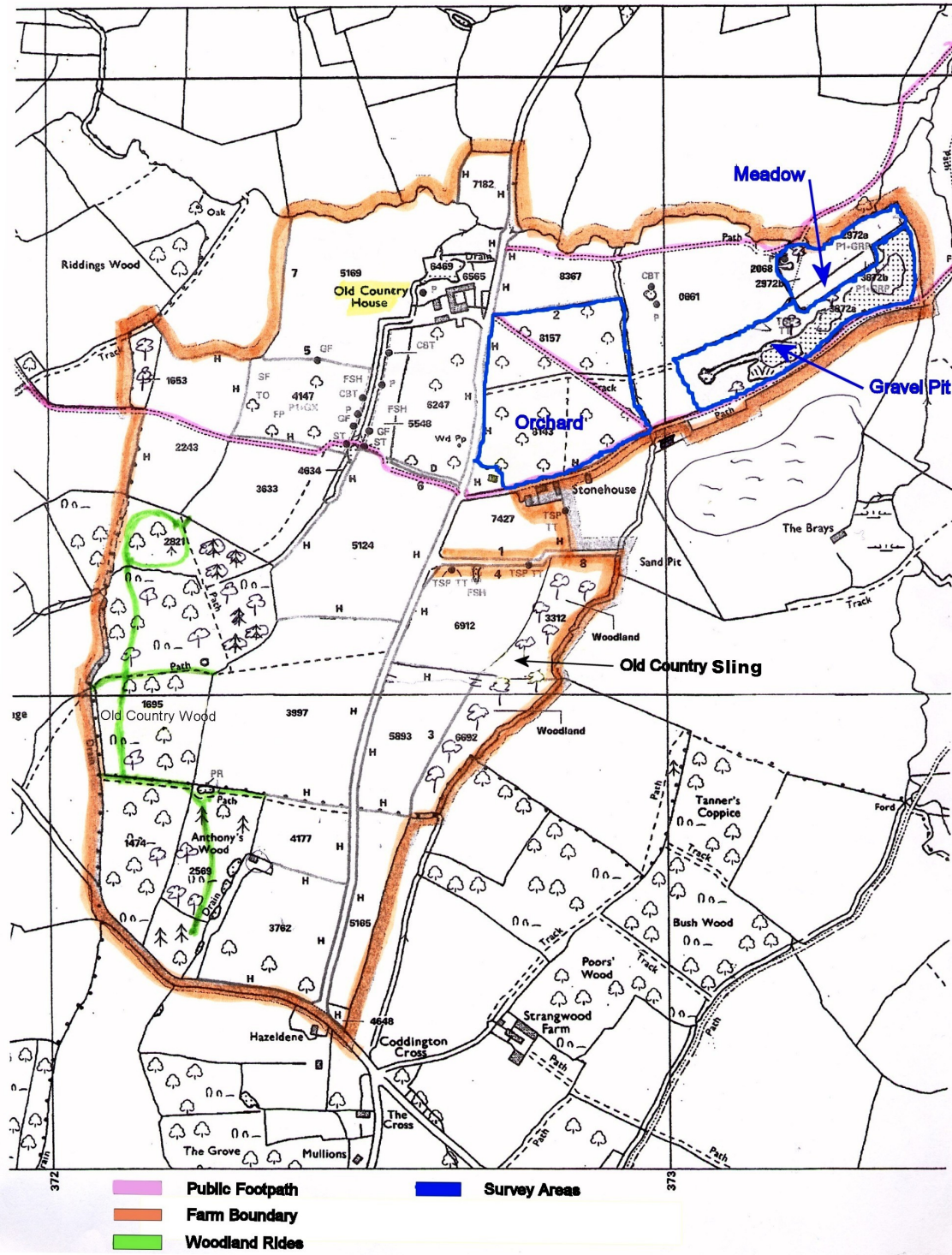
and alongside the gravel pits, continuing to Ham Green in the east and towards Bosbury in the west.

As well as running a farm, Ms.Quincy has a Bed and Breakfast business focussing on organic food and wildlife interests. It operates according to the rules of accreditation for the Hereford Nature Trust (HNT) Green Award scheme for both wildlife and business practice in which it achieved Gold standard in 2005. This enterprise has subsequently been taken over by the national Green Tourist Business Scheme (GTBS) as Herefordshire Council would not support the HNT scheme further. The business is promoted though “Organic Holidays”, “Responsible Travel” and Alistair Sawday's “Special Escapes” publications. Further details of the enterprise can be found at [www.oldcountryhouse.co.uk](http://www.oldcountryhouse.co.uk).

## **The Survey Area**

It was not practical to cover all the farm in the time available, so the section to the east of the road was chosen. This included a traditional orchard, (SO 728445), the old gravel pit area (SO 733445) and a meadow area (SO 735447) which is being managed sympathetically to encourage biodiversity. The three areas were recorded separately.

## Old Country Farm, Mathon



### Conducting the Survey

Volunteers from Ledbury Naturalists' Field Club met monthly in 2008 to carry out the survey. The dates of the meetings were March 17<sup>th</sup>, April 21<sup>st</sup>, May 19<sup>th</sup>, June 16<sup>th</sup>, July 21<sup>st</sup>, August 18<sup>th</sup>, September 15<sup>th</sup> and October 20<sup>th</sup>. Though 2008 was a particularly wet and cold year, none of the meetings had to be called off. Some mornings the weather

was less than ideal for recording wildlife. On each occasion, members spent about 3 hours in the morning, walking through the 3 different areas. All flowering plants, grasses, trees, fungi, mosses, ferns, lichens, birds, insects, and other invertebrates found along the way were recorded. Stephanie Thomson supervised the botany whilst John Michaeljohn focussed on invertebrates. Cherry Greenway identified the fungi. Joy Ricketts joined us on two occasions and recorded the lichens growing on the farm house walls, in the orchard and on some oaks. John Partridge came in August and hunted out some spiders. Gillian Davies and Lorraine Weaver from the University of Worcester came to help with the moss records. Michael Harper added some extra records, particularly of moths, which he had noted on other dates in the year.

The club is fortunate to have the support of these well-known 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 Comments

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.

<b>Flowers</b>	<b>Grasses Sedges Rushes</b>	<b>Trees</b>	<b>Fungi Mosses Ferns</b>	<b>Lichens</b>	<b>Birds</b>	<b>Lepid- optera</b>	<b>Other Insects and Invertebrates</b>
<b>107</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>211</b>

The 107 species of flowering plants recorded were found predominately in the meadow area. This section had been ploughed during the 1940s and suffered some disturbance when the gravel extractions were being carried out so this is not an ancient undisturbed piece of grassland. However, recent sympathetic management is encouraging a good range of plants including Pignut, Knapweed, Lady's Mantle and Goat's-beard. One spike of Common Spotted-orchid was seen this year. There were 5 species of buttercup and 6 speedwells. There was a noted absence of lime loving plants such as Traveller's-joy and St. John's Wort. There is a fenced off, marshy area at the west end of the meadow which had Marsh-marigold growing in it, though it got rather impenetrable in the summer and was not surveyed further.



**Town-hall Clock**



**Broad-leaved Helleborine**

Though not so rich in flowering plants the gravel pit area had several patches of Town-hall Clock alongside the path in March and later, several patches of Broad-leaved Helleborine were found in the grown out coppiced area. A total of 35 spikes were counted in July.

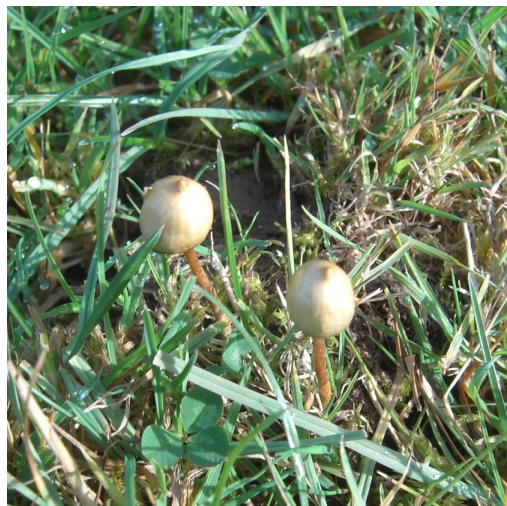
The orchard was not very herb rich but had a range of more common plants and some arable weeds where the earth had been disturbed.

Twenty species of grass were recorded, mainly in the orchard and meadow including Sweet Vernal-grass. Two sedges and both Soft and Hard Rush and Woodrush were noted.

The gravel pit proved an excellent site for fungi with 112 species being noted. There were several more unusual finds such as *Sarcoscypha coccinea*, *Humaria hemisphaerica*, *Tazzetta cupularis* and the Morels, *Mitrophora semilibera* and *Verpa conica*. The rarest find which caused the most excitement was the False Truffle, *Stephensia bombycina* which was sent to Kew for verification. As most of the group had never seen a wild truffle before, this was the highlight of the September recording session. In the orchard and meadow, there was a smaller



**False Truffle**



**Magic Mushroom**

range of fungi though

they both contained the “Magic Mushroom” *Psilocybe semilanceata*. Joy Ricketts recorded 41 lichen species in several sites in the recording area. These are on a separate sheet in the appendix.

Of the other non flowering plants, 26 mosses were recorded, mainly in the orchard and gravel pit and 5 species of liverwort. There were only 5 ferns found including Bracken though this is not surprising as there was very little woodland in the research area.

Twenty eight species of tree were noted. These were the orchard fruit trees and typical hedgerow items including some Spindle near the meadow. There were some good sized Pedunculate Oak trees, the remnants of old hedge lines. The gravel pit had been planted with Poplar when extraction ceased to take up some of the water. These are now very tall trees and overshadow the small lake. There was a lot of old coppiced willow in the same area making it rather overgrown.

The birds seen were recorded in one list rather than allocating them to separate areas. Some recorders observed birds on the adjacent pool in the next farm, and these have been noted separately. In total, 49 species were recorded at the times the team was on the site. Apart from the common woodland birds there was a Sparrowhawk, Tufted Duck, Spotted Flycatcher and both Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers. The Cuckoo was heard in May. The adjacent pool had Canada Geese, Mute Swan, Coot, Little Grebe and Sand Martins at the time of observation. Nightingales have been heard regularly over the last few years at Old Country Sling, an area of newly planted native broadleaved trees to the south of the site, but this year they were only heard briefly by the local inhabitants and did not stay to breed. They were not heard by the team. Both Tawny and Barn Owls are seen regularly by the locals but not during the recording times.

Despite the cold wet weather an impressive list of 251 insects and other invertebrates was made. It was not a good season nationally for butterflies and only 10 common species were seen including Ringlet, Orange-tip, Comma and 3 types of White mainly in the meadow. Moths also were in short supply. Dr. Harper conducted a separate survey in July and added another 54 species, mainly micro-moths, to the total. These are recorded separately in the appendix. Of the other invertebrates, 63 were beetles. A record of the Noble Chafer beetle is included as it was found by Steve Oram, a staff member of the Peoples' Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) who was staying at the farm and whom we met whilst recording in June. There was a good selection of flies, bugs, ants and bees, harvest men and grasshoppers. The gravel pit was once a noted site for dragonflies but it no longer supports these species as it is so overgrown. The meadow was a better site with 7 members of the *Odonata* noted.

Nineteen species of spider were found, mainly in the orchard and there was a range other invertebrates and 12 species of snail.

Other animals noted were frogs, toads and common newt. There was evidence of various mammals including, Muntjac, Roe Deer, Rabbit, Badger, Mole and smaller mammals. The path through the gravel pit area was very sandy and had many animal excavations alongside it.



**Footpath by Gravel Pit**



## Conclusions:

Although only a small section of Old Country Farm was surveyed, it yielded a good range of species. The orchard is grazed by sheep which limits the range of plants, but the old trees are home to many lichens and insects and the windfall apples encourage the birds. The gravel pit, once a haven for dragonflies, is now home to many fungi with some rare species. It also had good patches of Broad-leaved Helleborine, which is not a common plant in the county. The meadow, though not as diverse in species as an undisturbed site, is showing the benefit of sympathetic management and the range of plants is far greater than on a chemically fertilised plot. The diversity can be expected to increase over the years. The rest of the farm is also managed in a wildlife friendly manner making this corner of Herefordshire a haven for wildlife.

## And finally:

What else can you do with windfalls? Turn them into a work of art.



The artist, Kate Raggett, was commissioned to be creative with the apples in another of the orchards at Old Country. This aerial photo shows sinuous lines made from different coloured apples beneath the trees.

See [www.kateraggett.co.uk](http://www.kateraggett.co.uk) for more pictures.

## **Distribution**

1. Ledbury Naturalists' Field Club, survey team and committee members
2. Ella Quincy
3. Herefordshire Nature Trust.
4. Natural England.
5. British Trust for Ornithology.
6. Herefordshire Ornithological Club.
7. Herefordshire Biological Records Centre
8. Malvern Hills Conservators
9. Malvern Hills AONB
10. Colwall Parish Council
11. Ledbury Town Council
12. Mathon Parish Council
13. Colwall Library
14. Ledbury Library
15. Woolhope Naturalists' Field Club

## **Appendix**