

Report for Will Woodlands Friday 16th August 2019

In 2018, when researching our outing to the Dyfnant Forest Rainbow Trails I was put in touch with the manager of the Will Woodlands, situated the other side of the road. A short visit to what had once been 750 acres of 'prime sheep rearing country' and I decided that I would make that an interesting outing for all in 2019. Jane Phillips and I enjoyed several reconnoitring walks in the preceding weeks when the sun was shining, and the 'trackside introduced' flowers were at their best. Jolyon, the estate manager, who also lives in a house on site with his family, had been allowed to indulge his passion for certain wildflowers, including Vipers Bugloss, his favourite. We also enjoyed the sight of many, many Painted Lady butterflies coming in from Africa on the hot weather we enjoyed in July.

Lizzie takes up the story.

"The weather forecast for Friday was dire, and for once it was entirely accurate. As we drove from lowland Montgomeryshire the rain increased as we reached higher ground. By the time we arrived at Llwydiarth it was pouring. There was some confusion over car parks, but we finally condensed into fewer cars for the journey to the meeting point on the estate. Jolyon met us there and explained how the legacy left by Angela Bobbins was formed into a Charitable Trust with the aim of planting more broadleaved woodlands, a habitat which has been sorely depleted over the last 100 years.

As the rain lashed down with even more intensity, we set off mostly unencumbered by reference books, cameras, paper and pencils as normal recording looked almost impossible, to explore the wood from the track winding through it. The wide rides between the blocks of planted trees, which are managed as hay meadows, would have been most inviting on a dry day, but we stayed on the track where the water was only inches deep and not knee deep in saturated grass. In parts the track was lined with a profusion of Viper's Bugloss, Wild carrot, Ladies Bedstraw, Mallow, Rosebay, Wild Marjoram, Teasel, Knapweed and Chicory growing exuberantly. The colours were a delight but insects were few due to the rain. We saw one grasshopper and one Painted Lady where on a good day there would have been hundreds of insects buzzing and fluttering in this perfumed jungle.

The woods themselves were a densely planted mix of oak (50% Jolyon told us) birch, apple, crab-apple, cherry, field maple, alder and ash in the first phase prior to when Ash Dieback disease struck. The trees looked healthy and well grown and certainly not suffering from drought."

Sylvia Backhouse reported a "floral memory of the large patch of wild carrot, teasels, mallow, and Viper's bugloss on the track. A good airing of the lungs was certainly enjoyed by me when walking uphill."

Mike Backhouse sent a list of 12 bird species found by all. I'm sure many birds were taking shelter too.

Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

Carrion crow *Corvus corone*

Blue tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*

Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

House martin *Delichon urbicum*

Long-tailed tit *Aegithalos caudatus*

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Blackbird *Turdus merula*

Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

House sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Pied wagtail *Motacilla alba*

Allan Dawes spotted *Mompha raschkiella*, a micro-moth larvae on Rosebay Willowherb, its foodplant near the parking area. They mine the leaves of rosebay in two generations. The leaf-mines are common, distinctive and very obvious. The original mine is a gallery close to midrib of leaf. This widens to form a yellowish blotch containing the larva and dispersed frass. The larva is yellowish/orange with dark brown head. Other *Momphidae* mine on rosebay, but their signs are different, eg spinning terminal leaves together.

Ruth Dawes said that she thought everyone enjoyed making the effort in the end even though some of them had just considered just coming for the tea, which was indeed, splendid, thanks to the ladies of Llwydiarth WI.

Things she particularly enjoyed on the walk were :-

"The fruitfulness; lots of nuts, blackberries, crab apples, rowan berries - and the feeling that autumn is on its way early. The luxuriant Lady Fern stand near the farm.

Harebells.

Bulgaria inquinans fungus (Black Bulgar or Bacherlor's Buttons) all shiny black on a pile of logs along forestry track.
Zigzag Clover on forestry track.

Lots of Angelica in wet patch.

The added interest of the introduced colourful wild flowers and pondering on whether they would persist.

The views to come back to another day.

The sense of relief when we spotted the line of cars at last - so we were on the right route - having given up on the increasingly soggy maps.

As one man quoted from his father-in-law near the end - "I think I have enjoyed myself enough for now." What a wonderful way of putting it.

Returning to an old-fashioned village hall with those wonderful overhead bar heaters on and the mens' toilet outside.

The warm welcome from the "ladies" who never said a word about the mess we would be making.

As I wasn't the driver, I even enjoyed the drama of the flooded roads on the way home. Well who would have chosen to go out in that."

Thank you very much to all who did brave the elements that day. In good weather, both the tracks, rides and views are amazing. Several public footpaths cross the woods, but the policy of the Will Woodlands is to allow access to all the site, but quietly and without dogs. It will be our secret place. There are no animals reared on the site but it is hoped that more wildlife will slowly return. Do find a spot to park tidily or walk across from the Dyfnant Forest where there is plenty of parking.

Sue Bosson