

SGEG - Shamley Green's Special Places

1. Lords Hill Common

We are so lucky in Shamley Green to be close to some wonderful wildlife havens, and SGEG will be publishing a series of articles in the coming months to highlight them. One such gem right in our midst is Lords Hill Common.

This is a very unusual area of damp grassland, much less common in the UK nowadays as so much damp grassland has been drained and given over to agriculture. Past mowing practices have depleted Lords Hill's wildflowers, but many have hung on and are now on the increase with a more environmentally friendly approach to management. The pale pink flowers of lady's smock (or milkmaids) now dot the common in spring, then give way to masses of yellow greater bird's foot trefoil and tormentil in the summer, followed by lovely displays of purple knapweed later in the year. These are all characteristic flowers of moist sites and great sources of pollen and nectar for insects, interspersed with dark green rushes so typical of wet ground as well as delicate grasses like false oat-grass and foxtail. One very exciting resident plant is galingale (*Cyperus longus*), a relative of ginger, which is very scarce in the UK as a whole (rarity designation RR) but thriving in ideal damp conditions in a little corner of Lords Hill.

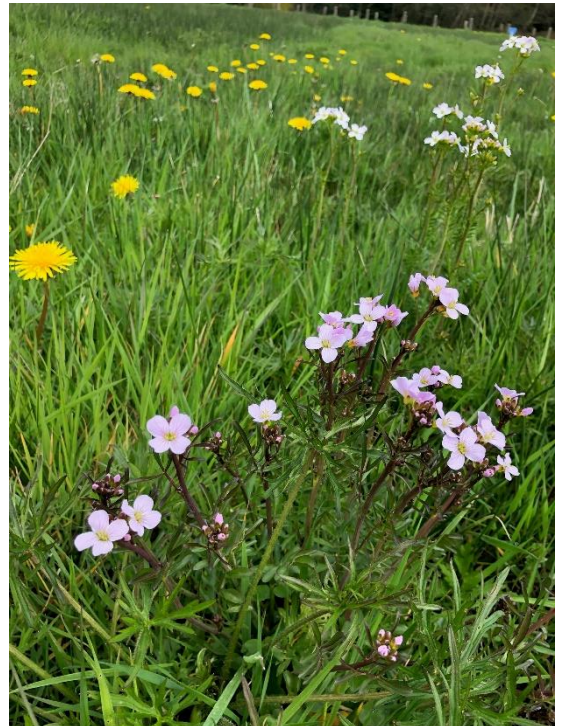
The long grass swaying in the breeze isn't just lovely to look at, it also provides wonderful cover and food for all sorts of insects and other invertebrates, which in turn feed birds and small mammals like voles and hedgehogs – encouragingly there seem to be more hedgehog sightings here this year. With the current crisis in insect populations brought about by loss of habitat and pesticide use, wilder areas like this are more important than ever, and not only for our wildlife – we humans also need insects to pollinate at least a third of the food crops on which we rely, so we have to look after them because we simply cannot do without them!

On our regular plant-spotting walks around Lords Hill we think we are seeing more butterflies and moths now, and we hope this will be confirmed by an invertebrate survey which will be done this year. Many insect larvae develop in the seed heads of grasses and flowering plants, so although the grass must eventually be cut to prevent scrub taking over, the later in the year this is done the better, to allow these insects to complete their life cycle.

Why not take a trip down to Lords Hill Common and see what you can spot – wildflowers, butterflies, grasshoppers – but take your wellies!

For lots more information about the environment in Shamley Green see our website www.shamleygreenenvironment.co.uk

Next month: Cucknell's Wood



Milkmaids and dandelions on Lords Hill Common