

## 19th May Bredhurst Woods TQ798622

See combined report for 14th July.

## 14th July Bredhurst Woods TQ798622

Two visits were paid to Bredhurst Woods during 2007 in support of the work by the Bredhurst Woods Action Group (BWAG) to protect and manage this important habitat complex, the first visit being on 19<sup>th</sup> May; this report combines both meetings. Bredhurst Woods is a large site, and, as the name suggests, predominantly woodland. However, BWAG's area of interest also includes areas of chalk grassland which adjoin the woodland.

As regular attendees will know, field visits generally cover very little ground in the course of a day, and, in this case, most of our time was spent on a southeast-facing, chalk grassland bank which is managed for hay. Most of us made only a limited exploration of the woodland itself, with the exception of Jan Hendey and Joyce Pitt who roved more widely in order to collect fungus and bryophyte records (but who found the bryophyte flora to be generally rather poor and low in species diversity).

Nonetheless, some two-dozen ancient woodland indicators were recorded during the two visits, the most notable of which were greater butterfly orchid *Platanthera chlorantha* and herb paris *Paris quadrifolia*. Both these species were observed in a recently cleared electricity wayleave on the western edge of the woodland. This wayleave occupied a lot of time during the first visit in May, proving rich in plant and invertebrate species. However, by July it had become so thickly vegetated – especially with tall plants of marsh thistle *Cirsium palustre* – that it was all but impassable.

The chalk grassland bank, undoubtedly because currently ungrazed, was dominated by upright brome *Bromopsis erecta* and generally not species-rich. However, shorter grassland at the top of the slope was still interesting, and showed what the rest of the bank might look like with appropriate management. Species here included many associated with high quality chalk downland, including horseshoe vetch *Hippocrepis comosa*, kidney vetch *Anthyllis vulneraria*, rock-rose *Helianthemum nummularium*, downy oat-grass *Helictotrichon pubescens*, meadow oat-grass *Helictotrichon pratense*, and crested hair-grass *Koeleria macrantha*.

Despite the rather cool summer weather, more than 380 invertebrate species were recorded, most being taken by Laurence Clemons. Notable amongst the recorded insects were the weevil-hunting wasp *Cerceris quinquefasciata*, and the large mining bee *Andrena hattorfiana*, both of which are Red Data Book species. Other insects recorded included the grassland butterflies such as chalkhill blue *Lysandra coridon*, green hairstreak *Calophrys rubi* and marbled white *Melanargia galathea*.

Bredhurst Woods continues to be the focus of community-led conservation, and work carried out in association with Kent Wildlife Trust has led to some of the most extensive chalk grassland areas being managed under the Higher Level Stewardship agri-environment scheme, a small-scale resumption of coppicing in the northern part of the woods, and opening up of heavily scrubbed grassland on the eastern part of the site. It will be instructive to revisit the site in a few years' time to assess the impact of this positive management on what undoubtedly remains one of the most important habitat complexes in this part of Kent.

**Richard Moyse** 2 West End Cottages, The Street, Doddington, Sittingbourne, Kent ME9 0BZ