

Ainsdale Dunes Wildflower Walk – July 2018

On a lovely sunny Saturday afternoon in July, a group of Southport Friends enjoyed a wonderful walk in the Ainsdale Dunes, prepared and led by Brian, our very own botanical enthusiast. Although the day itself was quite warm, and the long, hot summer had been going on for a while, the combination of some rain the previous day and the sea breezes helped to make the air delightfully fresh.



Sands Lake

Brian had been out on a 'reccy' in advance and had produced a list of around 50 flowers, 6 butterflies and 1 moth: all in a small area in the dunes behind Sands Lake! The list is given at the end of this report and – with just one or two exceptions – we found them all. Some of the flowers are quite common, such as Ragwort, Bindweed, Red Clover, Rosebay Willowherb and Rest Harrow, while others are less so, especially the orchids.

As the summer had been so hot, some of the orchids that would normally have been flowering in mid-July were past their best, including most of the Pyramidal Orchids; however, some Early Marsh Orchids were still looking good and the Marsh Helleborines and Dune Helleborines were splendid. Dune Helleborines are really quite rare and we're very lucky to have them in the Ainsdale Dunes.



Dune Helleborines

Beautiful blue Harebells provided bright splashes of colour nearly everywhere we walked, obviously loving the hot weather.



Harebells

We were all enjoying the sight and scent of the abundant Japanese Rose, but were informed by Brian that it's an invasive species and therefore perhaps to be discouraged.



Japanese Rose

Some other plants that were less popular, especially among the gardeners, included the ubiquitous Bindweed and Cleavers, the latter known to some of us as 'sticky buds' or 'sticky bobs'. Apparently there are other local names for this, such as 'goosegrass'.

Some plants are well-known as medicinal herbs. These include Eyebright, with its tiny, star-like white flowers, which is good for the eyes, and Evening Primrose, with large, bright yellow flowers, whose oil has many health benefits. Some plants, on the other hand, are toxic; a particularly good example is the Hemlock Water Dropwort, which not only has a great name but is also said to be the most poisonous indigenous plant in Britain. It is an 'umbellifer' and has lacy clusters of small white/pink flowers. Another umbellifer is the Wild Parsnip, which has yellow flowers and, far from being toxic, is supposed to be edible, although no-one actually tested this assertion.

Of the butterflies on Brian's list, we saw the Meadow Brown and the Gatekeeper, and we also saw many Six-spot Burnet moths, eye-catching with their bright red spots on a black background. Other insects on view were dragonflies, darters and beetles, and various spiders were also encountered along the way.

The youngest member of the group showed a keen interest in all the flora and fauna and may well be a natural historian in the making. It was a joy to have him with us!



The list that Brian prepared is given below. Will we remember the flowers that go with the names? This remains to be seen, but we're hoping he will lead us on another walk next year, to refresh our memories... Many thanks from us all, Brian, and also to Elizabeth for taking the beautiful photos!

Flowers

Wild Parsnip
 Creeping Thistle
 Hemlock Water Dropwort
 Meadow Vetchling
 Great Willowherb
 Ragwort
 Large Bindweed
 Red Campion
 White Campion
 White Clover
 Evening Primrose
 Creeping Buttercup
 Common Fleabane
 Red Bartsia
 Meadow Buttercup
 Eyebright
 Rosebay Willowherb
 Yarrow
 Round Leaved Wintergreen
 Yellow-wort

Common Centaury
 Lesser Centaury
 Purple Loosestrife
 Lesser Trefoil
 Restharrow
 Marsh Helleborine
 Harebell
 Pyramidal Orchid
 Early Marsh Orchid
 Mouse-ear Hawkweed
 Meadowsweet
 Silverweed
 Red Clover
 Yellow Rattle
 Dewberry
 Goatsbeard
 Blue Fleabane
 Spearwort
 Dune Helleborine
 Birdsfoot Trefoil
 Sea Spurge

Kidney Vetch
 Broad-leaved Everlasting Pea
 Japanese Rose
 Spear Thistle
 Cleavers
 Forget-Me-Not
 Hawkweed
 Sea Buckthorn
 Water Mint
 Biting Stonecrop

Butterflies

Common Blue
 Meadow Brown
 Gatekeeper
 Small Copper
 Small Skipper
 Various Whites

Moth

Six-spot Burnet