

I-Spy on Hocombe Mead in July 2017



Purple-loosestrife

Lythrum salicaria

This plant is associated with damp and poorly drained soils but it can tolerate dry conditions so Hocombe Mead is an ideal habitat for it: very wet in winter/spring months but dry in summer. During June, July and August when it flowers it provides a valuable source of nectar for bees, butterflies and moths, particularly the Red-tailed bumble bee, Brimstone butterfly and Elephant Hawk moth. The name of the moth comes from the fact that the caterpillar of the moth looks like an elephant's trunk.

What do you think is the colour of the caterpillar?



Meadowsweet

Filipendula ulmaria

Wet habitats such as the meadows in Hocombe Mead are favoured by this plant which is a member of the rose family. The clusters of fluffy flowers which are produced from June until September give off a pleasant sweet smell when their tall stems are blown by the wind.

In the days when houses had just wooden or earth floors meadowsweet used to be scattered over the floor; why do you think people did this?



Agrimony

Agrimonia eupatoria

This yellow flower is found in meadows and pastures and prefers dry ground. It is a good source of nectar for bees, butterflies and hover flies. It flowers from June until August and after the flowers it produces rust-coloured hooked fruits. The fruit of the plant contain the seeds which need spreading; how do you think the hooks on the fruit help spread the seeds?



Ringlet Butterfly

Aphantopus hyperantus

This butterfly is best identified by viewing the underside of its wings which show the small circles that give it its name. The upper surface may show the ringlets but if it is a newly emerged butterfly it may appear almost black with a white fringe to its wings. It is likely to be seen on Bramble which it uses as a source of nectar.

What is another name for Bramble?



Marsh Birds-foot Trefoil

Lotus pedunculatus

The name of this plant, which likes damp grasslands such as wet meadows, has come from the fact that the seed heads look like bird's feet. Its seeds help it to spread in grassland but most of its propagation is by underground stems (rhizomes). Rhizomes are encouraged to spread by the action of cattle grazing in the late summer.

Cattle do not graze vegetation right down to the ground but sheep do. Do you think this Bird's-foot Trefoil would grow well if the Mead was grazed by sheep?



Marsh Bedstraw

Galium palustre

This is a plant that grows in wet meadows with acidic soil and it flowers from June until August. It provides a source of food for both the adult and larval stage of the Elephant Hawk moth.

Why do you think this plant was given the everyday name of bedstraw? What might people have done with it in medieval times? Was it because its flowers were used to curdle milk for cheese making?



Enchanter's Nightshade

Circaea lutetiana

This tiny plant that is not related to deadly nightshade likes moist shady areas in coppices, hedgerows and riversides. It gets its name from Greek mythology and is named after Circe an enchantress who used the plant in her magic potions. Its seeds are spread by sticky burrs which cling to passing animals with tiny hooks.

Can you see any of these tiny burrs on the plant you find?



Meadow Brown

Maniola jurtina

This butterfly likes a grassy habitat it likes grass of a medium height so grazed meadows such as Hocombe Mead are ideal. Plants that provide good sources of nectar for the butterfly are: bramble, Buttercups, Agrimony, Thistles and Knapweed.

Can you find any of the plants that provide nectar for the Meadow brown on Hocombe Mead? Which are they?

Photographs by David Cardinal and John Lankester