

LYCHPOLE HILL

Survey by members of the Sussex Botanical Recording Society
12 August 2012

The area surveyed

The area surveyed included the N end of The Seventeen Acres where there is good chalk turf on a moderately steep E facing slope. Lychpole Side Hill and Cradle Hill formed the focus of the survey with both the top and lower parts of the slope covered; dense scrub from around the middle of the slope to the top was not investigated very thoroughly. An arable field on top of Lychpole Side Hill was also recorded: the E margin of a barley (?) field and two wider areas of unsown arable. The pond at the foot of Lychpole Side Hill was included. Clearly this is not a comprehensive survey and a return visit in late Spring/early Summer should be the next target.

The species List

This is a simple list in alphabetical order of scientific names. No attempt has been made to group the species according to habitat. The Excel spreadsheet automatically highlights in yellow in the comments column those species which are not frequent in the county. The following explanatory notes provide more detailed observations.

Chalk turf (1)

The N end of The Seventeen Acres was in fine condition with a good array of typical species including a little *Filipendula vulgaris* which had not previously been seen in this tetrad (2x2 km square) and becomes scarcer in Sussex moving W from N of Brighton. This species was also noted with pleasure in one spot at the foot of Lychpole Side Hill. *Phyteuma orbiculare* and (apparently not frequent) *Gentianella amarella* also were pleasing indicator species. The slope would appear to have been too steep to plough when other areas were brought under cultivation.

Chalk turf (2)

There were some relatively small areas of chalk turf at the top of the slope of Lychpole Side Hill and Cradle Hill, the best being adjacent to the bridleway running northwards down the slope on Cradle Hill which yielded a number of flowering spikes of *Anacamptis pyramidalis*. Encroaching *Brachypodium pinnatum* is a problem above the line of trees and scrub: it had been mown along here but the cuttings had not been removed.

Chalk turf (3)

Along the foot of Cradle Hill and Lychpole Side Hill were patches of fine chalk turf varying in size. It was pleasing to find *Thymus pulegioides* here in at least one spot, and it is also present sparingly on The Seventeen Acres; this is another good indicator species. Only one plant of another indicator species, *Blackstonia perfoliata*, was noticed but it is likely that there is a little more about. All along the foot of the hillside *Brachypodium pinnatum* is again moving in on the finer grassland; and here too it had been mown but the cuttings, regrettably, left on. If this species cannot be controlled by grazing at

restricted times of the year, as I am sure you will know, it is vital when mowing to remove the cut grass.

The top of the slope

The group was very pleased to re-find *Anthemis cotula* in plenty here as it was noted in this tetrad in the Sussex Plant Atlas (1980) and is not at all common. *Centaureum pulchellum* both here and occasionally on the chalk slopes was also good to find.

Arable weeds

Aethusa cynapium was abundant and at least one species of *Fumaria* (*officinalis*), with just a very little quantity of two much less common arable weeds, *Euphorbia exigua* and *Chenorhinum minus*. *Fallopia convolvulus*, *Papaver rhoeas*, *Polygonum aviculare* and *Veronica persica* were frequent, with much *Chenopodium album* at the north end of the field.

Woodland

The succession through scrub to woodland is in progress and some genuine woodland species were noted on the bridleway running N down the slope of Cradle Hill, eg *Circaea lutetiana*, *Dryopteris filix-mas*.

The pond

The Pond is a boon for species diversity in general. It was in good condition and supported a pleasing selection of native aquatic and marginal plants.

Concluding remarks

The fact that much of this land has in fairly recent times been under cultivation was suggested by the very occasional presence of arable weeds among the chalk downland species, eg *Anagallis arvensis*, *Myosotis arvensis*. The areas of fine turf give the impression of increasing and improving in quality, and they will continue to do so if the coarser species (especially *Brachypodium pinnatum*) can be dealt with. A number of indicator species were not seen and should be looked out for: *Anthyllis vulneraria*, *Campanula glomerata*, *Hippocrepis comosa*, *Ononis repens*, *Thesium humifusum*; orchids such as *Coleoglossum viride*, *Gymnadenia conopsea*, *Spiranthes spiralis*; the sedge *Carex caryophylla*; the grass *Koeleria macrantha*.