

## Bedgebury BioBlitz 2016

**Ecologist Luke Wallace gives a summary of the findings at the Bedgebury BioBlitz which took place on 19 and 20 August 2016.**

Despite two days of rain and wind, our visiting public and wildlife experts weren't deterred at this year's 48-hour Bedgebury BioBlitz! It started with a fabulous bird walk and ringing session, where the highlights were the green sandpiper, a brand new bird for the site, and two marsh tits (right) that were caught in the mist net. Generally, August is a quiet time of year for birdlife but a total of 36 species were seen and more birds were added to the list later in the day, including the elusive crossbill.

While we had hoped to sweep the canopy for insects during the day, the rain meant that catching anything was very difficult. Although we didn't get any rarely-glimpsed canopy insects, everyone who went up in the cherry-picker managed to get some rarely-glimpsed and special views of the Pinetum (below). Back on the ground, it was possible to survey the meadows and heathland during the dry spells and several new insects were found, including two hoverflies, and some regular Bedgebury favourites like the brilliant emerald dragonfly.



Kent's Vice-County recorder for flora, Sue Buckingham, added two new species of wildflower to the site's list but the highlight had to be the devil's-bit scabious (right) which transforms our grasslands into a wildlife haven every August and September. The Pinetum plays host to numerous locally-rare plants, such as dodder and goldenrod, which were also recorded on Sue's guided walks.

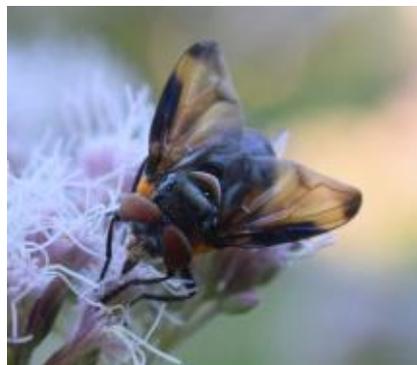


Meanwhile, Rob Liversedge was delighting audiences at Marshal's Lake with the microscopic freshwater organisms that, whilst easy to forget about, are some of the most important in the ecosystem. It is only with magnifying equipment that we can appreciate and comprehend this world.

Specialist equipment is also required for surveying nocturnal wildlife and, with the aid of bat detectors and thermal-imaging cameras, day one of the Bedgebury BioBlitz ended with an outstanding bat spectacle. Common pipistrelle, brown long-eared, noctule, natterer's and the 'fishing' Daubenton's bats were all heard or seen in the Pinetum, the latter actually scooping insects off the top of the lakes! A big thank you goes to Val Sutton and Jan Collins of the Kent Bat Group.



Day two of the BioBlitz started with the opening of moth traps and, although the weather during the night had not been conducive, some striking moths were found, such as this black arches moth (above). Chris Bentley, of Rye Harbour Nature Reserve, who carries out the moth trapping at Bedgebury, then went on to make arguably the best find of the BioBlitz later that morning. *Acinia corniculata* (See picture at the end) is a small fruit fly with relatively little known about its ecology in the UK. Chris also identified a nationally notable flesh fly, a nationally notable spider and a specialist snail-hunting beetle (left). This beetle (*Cychrus caraboides*) has an elongated, thin head for getting to snails within their shells!



An unusual fly (left) was seen on another of the Pinetum's wildflowers that blooms later on in the year, hemp-agrimony. *Phasia hemiptera* is a type of tachinid fly that parasitizes the forest shieldbug (right), of which we found lots around the moth traps in the morning.



It is always nice to find amphibians as they are having a tough time of it, both in the UK and globally. Common toads (right), which are not so common these days, were found on both days. Additionally, all of the site's reptiles were recorded by members of the public.



The interaction between skilful naturalists, staff and the public during the Bedgebury BioBlitz is fantastic for so many reasons. The experts have, once again, added an enormous amount to our understanding of the composition of Bedgebury's unique wildlife, which in turn, translates into education and increased interest among staff and the public. This is essential to help cultivate an interest in Bedgebury's botanical collection and tree conservation, to bring off-peak visitors to the Pinetum, and to manage the site in a way that promotes local biodiversity and ecosystem services. For example, Bedgebury's large area of meadow grassland and heathland provide 'meta-populations' of pollinating insects which can then disperse in to the surrounding farmland to pollinate our orchards and crops.



The nationally endangered *Acinia corniculata*

Bedgebury National Pinetum can boast both an internationally important collection of trees and now, thanks to events like the Bedgebury BioBlitz, a nationally important collection of wildlife. Indeed, much of our native wildlife will benefit from many of our exotic tree specimens and vice versa. BioBlitz events and the Friends of Bedgebury Pinetum's regular wildlife walks are an excellent way to discover the Pinetum's special animals and plants. By taking part, you not only support global tree conservation and local wildlife conservation, but also contribute to the wider health and economic benefits resulting from Bedgebury's ecosystem.

*"Bedgebury is cared for by the Forestry Commission for people, wildlife and trees".*

**Luke Wallace, Ecologist**

**August 2016**