Orchid Glade: January 2015 report

Waterlogged!

January eighth. The rain falling on the Boulder Clay soil of the Orchid Glade is going nowhere, because it can't. The reserve is waterlogged: ruts are full, the moss carpet is saturated, and the pond water level is so high it is spilling out across the reserve. Southern marsh orchids, marsh woundwort, hard rush and several sedges are abundant in summer around the pond, and inundations like this have been a regular event in the life of this old pasture that is now one of our nature reserves.

As always at the Orchid Glade, I keep my eyes on the ground because of the ruts and the many hidden stumps in the moss. Around my feet and as far as I can see are mosses in many shades of green: midwinter is a good time to see them, because they are evergreen and very noticeable. Richard Fisk, Suffolk county recorder for Bryophytes (which includes mosses) came here in March 2014 and recorded about 40 moss species. This soaking day in January is a good time to be a moss: they absorb moisture directly through their leaves rather than through veins like other plants. For them, this is a lovely day.

I have seen several twigs clipped cleanly through by something: the two brown hares that just lolloped off into the thickets may be the cause, although I have also seen rabbit droppings, and the slots of deer. They are large enough to be made by fallow, and if so, it is likely several were here as fallow deer are rarely solitary. The ash saplings are so dense in places that the woodcock I just disturbed had to ascend vertically before flying away.

Beneath my feet, flat leaf rosettes of all dimensions are prolific. The midsummer flora of the Orchid Glade has many species that are fairly rabbit-proof because they have adopted this form of growth to protect their leaves from grazers. The largest rosettes are marsh thistles. Many twigs of the small hawthorns and oaks are tipped with various lichens — many are yellow. Dr C B J Hitch surveyed the lichens of the Orchid Glade in July 2014. He found 28 species plus a few fungi, and nearly all of them are associated with trees, fallen branches and piles of cut brushwood. It poses SFPT difficult management decisions. Many lichens, mosses and fungi need trees, but the meadow flora of the reserve will decline if woodland tightens its grip.

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