

NEWSLETTER OF THE
POWDERMILL TRUST
FOR NATURE CONSERVATION



AUTUMN 2011

AUTUMN HEDGEROW FRUITS



'Elm leafhopper (*lassus scutellaris*)' by Ralph Hobbs



'Lesser hornet
hoverfly
(*Volucella inanis*)
on *Angelica*'
by
Ralph Hobbs



The Powdermill Trust is a registered charity that helps conserve wildlife and safeguards natural landscapes. The Trust has nature reserves at Powdermill Wood, Crowhurst and Rotherfield.

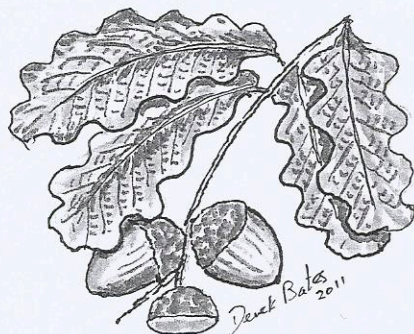
Members receive a well-illustrated newsletter twice a year. They are given guided walks round the reserves, to which they have free access at all times. Free advice is given on wildlife matters.

Registered Company No 3841637 Registered Charity No 1121510
Registered Office 79A Vale Road St Leonards-on-Sea East Sussex TN37 6PX
Affiliated to BTCV and Sussex Wildlife Trust

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The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the Editor, nor of the Powdermill Trust.

The eight hedgerow autumn fruits shown on the front cover are: holly, dog-rose hips, spindle, black bryony, ivy, hawthorn, bittersweet and blackberry.



Derek's Chat

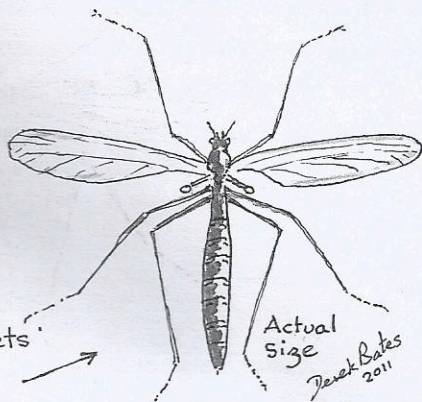
Dear Member,

Favourite food of
garden birds
especially
starlings



Dark brown larvae
called 'Leatherjackets'

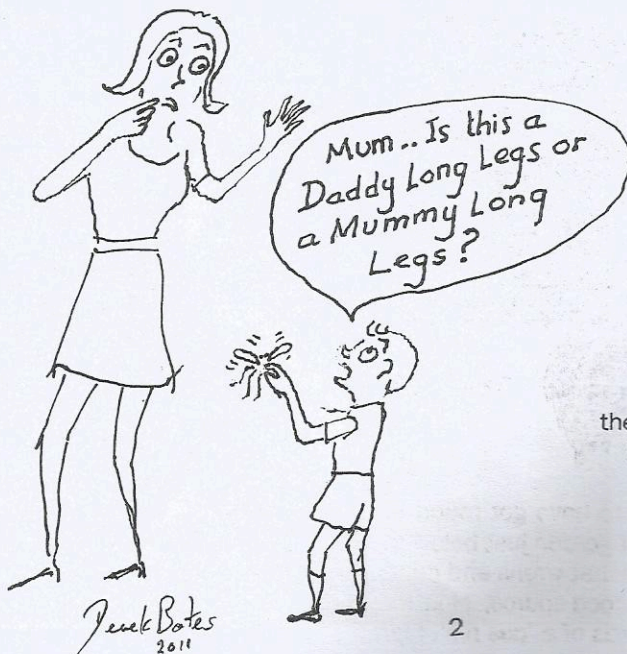
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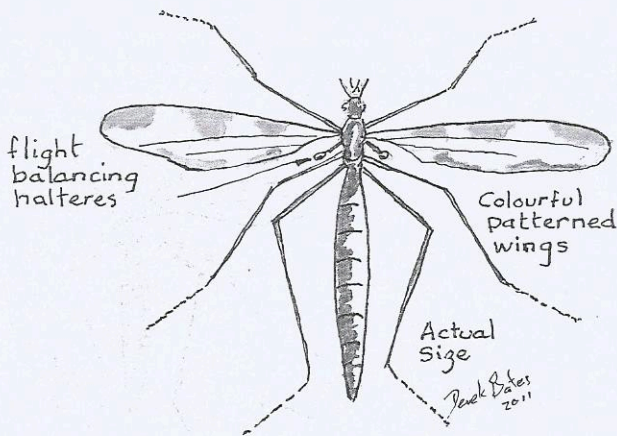
Actual
Size
Derek Bates
2011

Grassland Crane Fly *Tipula paludosa*

It's that time of year when the 'daddy long-legs' are about, you know... the flying insect with the gangly legs – proper name the crane fly *Tipula paludosa*, which flies up from the grass in swarms, certainly in prolific numbers this year. These are the commonest flying adults of the grubs called in the gardener's choice language 'pesky leatherjackets' because they are root-eating pests. Named supposedly for its tough leathery skin; perhaps sometime in the past somebody plucked up courage to eat one either in pursuit of science or by accident, describing it as chewy as leather? Anyway, before you are put off reading any further I must add that leatherjacket grubs form an important diet for our garden songbirds which find them very appetising, especially starlings which can be seen in flocks prodding the lawn for this pest throughout the year.

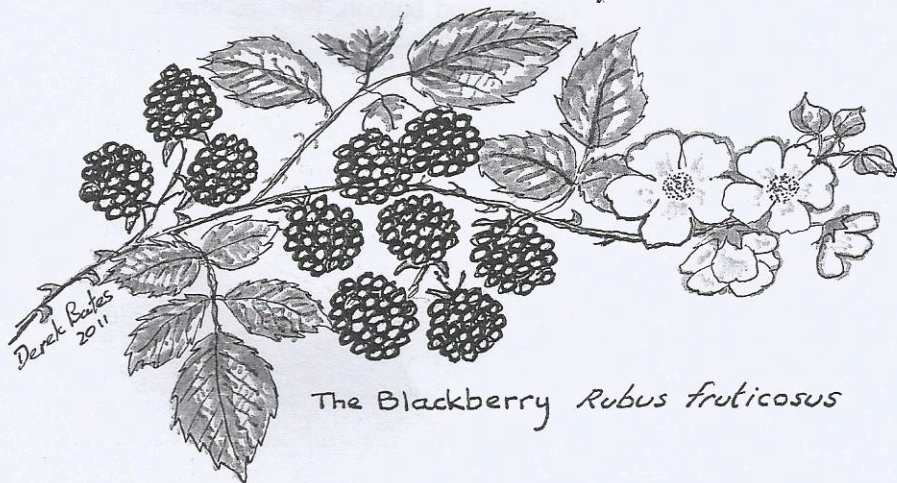


The garden spider at this time of year must have difficulty wrapping up these daddy long-legs in silk after being trapped in the web and trying to disengage the legs... must be like trying to put socks on a rooster! You are quite likely to find a daddy long-legs has somehow infiltrated the bedroom, cleverly hanging by two legs from the ceiling. It is worthy of close study as to how it does this.



Not so common Cranefly *Tipula maxima*
As found in Wet woodland - Powdermill Wood N.R.

I think we had our summer in April and May which was promising with the appearance of many butterflies, but all came 'to nowt' as the say in northern parts. We live in hope for an Indian summer in September and October to prolong the flowers and butterflies. One of the many joys of this time of year is sitting in your favourite sunny spot in the garden watching the red admiral and peacock butterflies basking in the sunshine or feeding on some over-ripe fruit put out for them – try squashy bananas. Creep up on them slowly and study them as close as you can... they are breathtakingly beautiful. You have now forgotten all about the daddy long-legs... oops!, sorry!



The Blackberry *Rubus fruticosus*

One of those jobs I meant to have got round to doing in the winter was to clear some thick bramble from my front garden just below my bedroom window (I live in a bungalow, I hasten to add), but I noted that wrens and dunnocks frequent this thorny leafy tangle as a good shelter and insect food-source, plus the ideal habitat for a nest. Reluctant to deprive these lovely little birds of a 'des res', I left the bramble untouched. The benefit of

leaving this bramble patch was an abundance of flowers for numerous bees, providing nectar followed by luscious blackberries in August and September which I shared with the blackbirds. For many weeks I revelled in the luxury of fresh blackberries with my breakfast cereal every morning and the joy of blackberries supplemented with custard for pudding at evening meals, and... all free! All my brambles are wild species but you can overwhelm your local garden centre to snap up cultivated thornless varieties before the rush.

Over the years at the Trust's Rotherfield nature reserve we have cleared large areas of brambles which had invaded the grass areas where horse grazing had once kept the brambles and coarse vegetation in check. The balance of bramble and flower-meadow is now perfect with the increased diversity of flora and insects achieved through mowing every October by dedicated conservation volunteers. Please do visit this haven and see the results of helping nature, and read Barry Hawkins' report for the reserve in this newsletter.

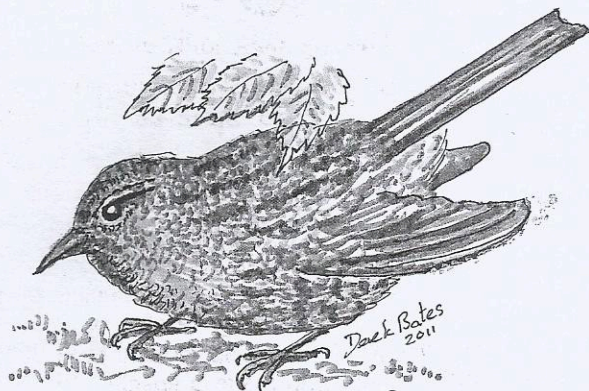
Changes in bird behaviour at the bird-table have given me some surprises this year with a pair of dunnocks (hedge-sparrows) which have nested in my (cottage) wild-garden raising at least two fledglings. For the past twenty years or more they have been resident, but these delightful birds have been very shy towards other birds, only mopping up food that has fallen from the bird-table onto the ground below. Naturally they are insectivores like the robin but are partial to McVitie's digestive biscuit crumbs as I may have mentioned in previous newsletters.

During the summer I spotted a large bin full of dried whole mealworms in a pet food store and thought 'my' robin would love these. I got a strange look from the lady at the cash till when I purchased a small bag of these dead mealworms (I am sure she would have preferred to handle the bag with a pair of sugar-tongs), saying they were for my tea tonight. Well that went down like a lead balloon. Perhaps she thought I was going to reconstitute and bring them back to life.

Crunching them up into little bits (close your eyes and they sound like cornflakes) in a polythene bag (otherwise starlings will gobble them up in seconds) and tipping them out on the bird-table has persuaded the dunnock family to stand up to the robin, who considers the table his property, and they now feed quite happily with him and all the other birds, even sunbathing with outstretched wings on the table when the food has gone. Extraordinary, after years of timid shyness!

May you find the study of nature
an ever-increasing delight.
Thankyou for being a member.

Derek Bates (blackberry fanatic)



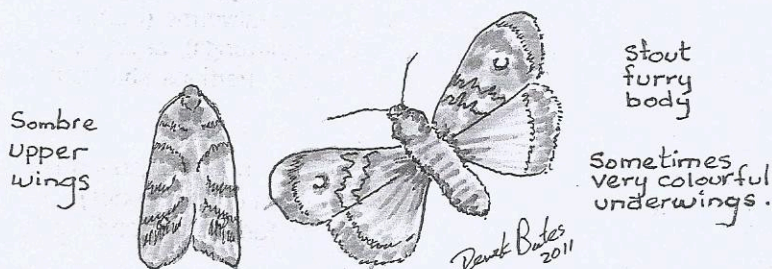
Dunnock or Hedge Sparrow
Originally called Hedge accentor

Wildlife Alarm

I was rudely awakened one night when my car alarm sounded. Scrabbling in the dark for my trousers, I eventually managed to stagger out into the night air and switched it off. Checking that all the doors were shut I went back to bed thinking that it was just one of those things that happen. Head returned to warm pillow... eyes closed... beep, beep, beep! Jumping out of bed like a panic-stricken jack-rabbit and getting my foot caught in the gusset and stubbing my toe, I finally made it outside again and silenced the car. Checking all possible causes and thinking that I had cracked it this time... waited a few minutes... turned to my front door... beep, beep, beep! with flashing lights and dogs barking, all it needed now was an air-raid siren! By this time my nerves were in ribbons, but the mystery was solved at last seeing a noctuid moth beating itself against the windscreen trapped inside the car and setting off the alarm sensors. I named the moth after releasing it... but you don't want to know! At least you know what to look for if this happens to you.

You have no doubt met a noctuid moth in the daytime when gardening; they are sombre-coloured, most being various shades of brown, and they will run mouse-like through the grass or plants when disturbed. Unbelievably they can hear a bat's sonar as a warning system and will immediately plummet to the ground for protection. In turn there is evidence they can also produce a high-pitched squeak to confuse bat predators.

Derek Bates (moth twitcher)



Always seen with closed rarely open wings.
Culprit! Night flying Noctuid moth.
over 300 species in Britain.

A Bramble ramble...

The bramble or blackberry, *Rubus fruticosus*, is represented in Britain by five main species. Some will say only one true species with many aberrant forms, others say twenty, while some decades ago Professor Babington, an authority on the species, divided the British *Rubi* into 41 species. At the last count there are over 400 subspecies according to botanists who make a special study of brambles and who have identified 2000 micro-species with more variants still being discovered. I did consider studying the brambles on our three nature reserves to record the different variants and then thought

better of it as it might open a can of worms. One thing I have discovered is that the fruit of brambles growing in separate sites have different although subtle tastes, which might indicate different varieties. Try it for yourselves and let me know. (The *Atlas of British and Irish Brambles* (A Newton *et al.*) was published in 2004.)

As already mentioned, brambles are most valuable to an enormous diversity of wildlife as a habitat and food-source, from flower to fruit and seed. One day I was picking blackberries and I froze when a slight movement near my hand caught my eye and was privileged to see a dormouse eating the berries.

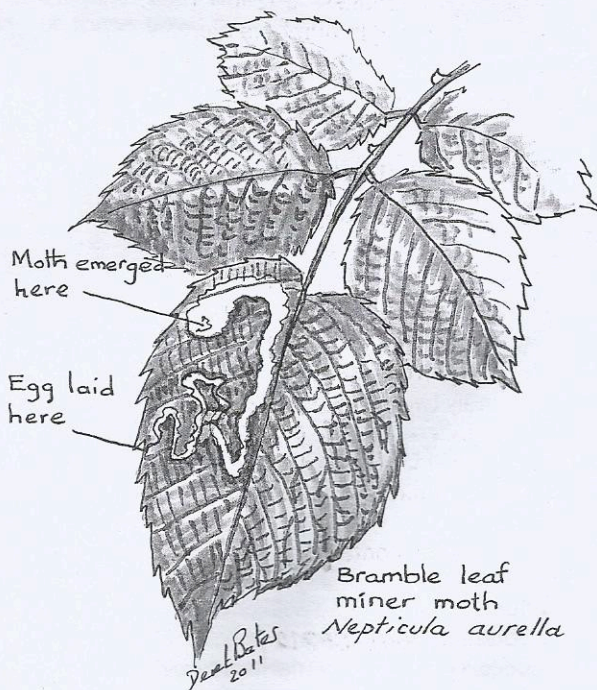
The bramble root-stock is long-lived, throwing up new long stems each year which overlay the previous year's canes and produce lateral branches, quickly forming a thicket. Long stems root where they touch the ground, thereby covering open ground in leaps and bounds. Once bramble has cast its leafy shadow, very few other plants can co-exist. One of the jobs of the conservation volunteer is to cut down brambles frequently, to maintain a diversity of grassland habitats with their associated flora and insects which would otherwise be lost. A question of keeping a balance.

The fruits are a magnet for animals, birds and insects, and *Homo sapiens* of course; seeds have been discovered inside Neolithic men. The familiarity of bramble to country people and their healthy regard for it is celebrated to this day by bramble jams, pies, jellies and wine... and best of all for me is freshly-picked blackberries and custard!

Derek Bates

'Serpents'

The tiny colourful bramble leaf-miner moth eats its way through the tissue in the thickness of a leaf. Its progress is marked by a white serpentine tunnel ever widening as the caterpillar grows. Look very closely at the end of the marking and a tiny hole can be seen where this larva has pupated and emerged as a moth.



News from the Reserves: Rotherfield

Spring/summer activities

The dry spring and early summer enabled various tasks to be completed with comparative ease. These consisted of re-aligning the Grubreed stream along the north-eastern boundary, where it had deviated and undermined the fencing. The boundary fence was also re-erected on the eastern side, where it had collapsed. A flight of steps was placed on the slope between the hawthorn tree and pond path, to improve an area which was always slippery. Two more rustic seats were erected, one on the main meadow and the other by the pond. The woodland path was re-instated, by cutting a section out of the fallen oak tree. A considerable amount of time was spent on pulling bracken, Himalayan balsam (mostly by the ladies) and in sycamore control. An area of scrub was cleared around the top of the Quarry and mowing has taken place on the landslip and meadow perimeters – ready for the big cut in September/October. General maintenance continued throughout the summer as and when required. Sandstone rocks were placed alongside the Grubreed spring to encourage the growth of algae and plant life.

Open day

The open day on 31st July was warm and sunny which encouraged butterflies and other insects to visit the main varieties of flowers in the meadows and woodland glades. Ralph Hobbs led two walks around the eleven acres, identifying many varieties of flora and fauna, some classed as rare. Five different species of grasshopper were spotted, along with dragonflies, grass-snakes, a fallow deer, voles, etc. Flowers such as betony and sneezewort are increasing in numbers along with the more common knapweed and other meadow flowers. Even though the visitor numbers were low, we felt it worthwhile to show off our valuable contribution to nature conservation. We thank all those who visited and helped on the day.

Autumn/winter tasks

September/October sees the most labour-intensive activity of the entire year, the mowing and clearing of the meadows. This is when we need most volunteers to help with this task. The grass is cut with a motor scythe and then has to be raked and carried to the meadow edges to prevent over-fertilisation of the soil and to create new habitats for various creatures. If anyone can spend an hour or two on the first Tuesday and third Sunday of the month, between 10am and 3.30pm, it will be very much appreciated as we have approximately two acres to cut and carry. As the winter progresses we will move into the woods for general scrub clearance, maintenance, tree-planting etc., before the bluebells appear. Please join us if you can. Bring stout footwear, warm waterproof clothing, food and drink as required. Tools will be provided.

For further information contact:

Barry Hawkins

Reserve Manager – 01892 852120

5th September 2011.

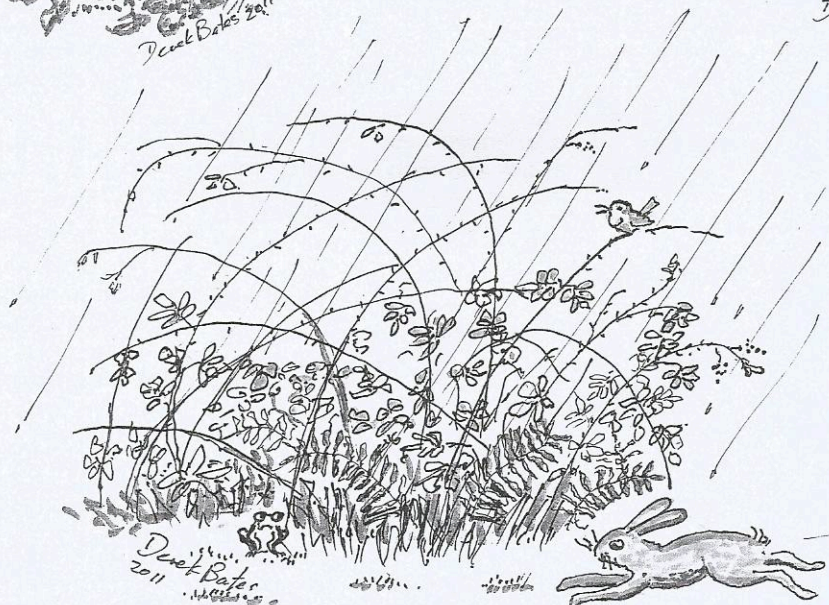
Maintaining and where possible enhancing the ecology of our nature reserves is the heart of the Powdermill Trust's activities. At each of our work parties there are things going on which are suitable for volunteers of all ages and abilities (though under 16s must be accompanied by a responsible adult). So please don't be put off by the fear that the work will be too demanding for you, or will require too much existing expertise, or that you cannot make a regular commitment. Even the odd hour each year will help the Trust to fulfil its commitments, and you will be led by expert conservationists and taught any skills you don't already have.

Work parties run from 10am to 3pm. Please bring suitable footwear, work-gloves, a packed lunch and something to drink. Tools are all provided. The reserve managers will be able to answer any queries you have:

Powdermill Wood Derek Bates (01424 425538)

Rotherfield Reserve Barry Hawkins (01892 852120)

Crowhurst Reserve Paul Johnson (01424 830304)



A dash for shelter of a bramble thicket.



'Holly Blue female' by Ralph Hobbs

'Rotherfield
Reserve'





'Lunch break for our record number of volunteers 'hay-making' on the Rotherfield reserve this autumn'.

By Ralph Hobbs

'Bronze Shieldbug adult about to go into hibernation in our Catsfield reserve 30 Oct 2011'.

**By
Ralph Hobbs**

