

### Breeding Brimstones!

*report by Paul Holmes*



An empty pupal case, back lit against the wood. The silk supporting girdle can just be seen. Caterpillar above.

In last year's Autumn newsletter we mentioned that a pair of Brimstone butterflies *Gonepteryx rhamni* had been seen in Ox Close during the summer and that we hoped they would breed. It seems very likely that they did, for earlier this year up to six adults, both male and female, were seen along the top ride and onlookers were rewarded by females laying eggs. It is just over seven years since the Alder Buckthorn *Frangula alnus* saplings were planted and some are now over 3m tall.

Favoured egg-laying bushes are those in sunny positions and sheltered from the wind. Bottle-shaped eggs are laid singly on the underside of young, juicy leaves.

Other eggs on the same leaf will be laid by other females. The eggs hatch between one and two weeks after laying and the caterpillars start to feed on the leaf. Although

well camouflaged the caterpillars are easy to find as they leave irregular holes in leaves and rest along the leaf's midrib. The caterpillars are easy prey for warblers, wasps (yes, they are carnivorous!) and parasitic flies; perhaps this is the reason for not many being seen. Those that survive normally move away from the foodplant to pupate. The chrysalis which hatches after about two weeks is suspended by a fine silk thread around its

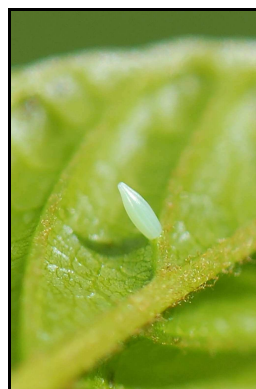
middle. This can just be seen in the photo, but for a better close-up view go to this latest newsletter at [www.ox-close.co.uk](http://www.ox-close.co.uk) and enlarge.

Contradicting textbook observations, both (empty) pupal cases that we found were situated along the underside of alder buckthorn stems!

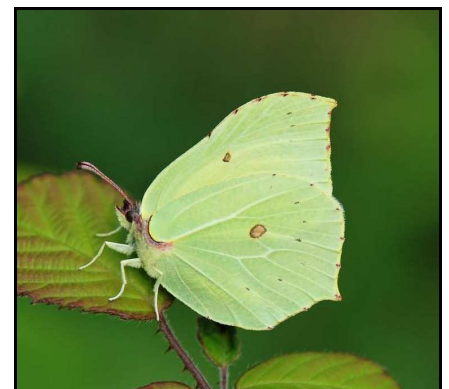
The Brimstone flies during the heat of the day, feeding on mainly purple flowers (it likes common knapweed) and tends to roost early; settling upside-down underneath leaves between 3 and 4pm. It is common throughout the southern two-thirds of England and its spread northward can be attributed more to the spread of its food plant (Common Buckthorn is the other) such as in amenity scheme planting than to climate change.

The species has one generation a year with the adult hibernating over the winter. Indeed, it is (reportedly) the only British butterfly to have been seen on every day of the year.

After this breeding success, perhaps we can look forward to seeing more of this large colourful butterfly.



A single Brimstone egg laid on a leaf vein



Adult Brimstone butterfly on Bramble... a favourite source of nectar.

### Autumn Talk

Wednesday  
17th November  
8.00 pm

East Keswick  
Methodist Church  
Meeting Room

Followed by a talk by  
Alan Braddock  
of the Yorkshire  
Fungus Group

Refreshments will be  
served and everyone  
is welcome.

If you would like to view a colour version of this and previous newsletters, please go to the "Newsletter" sub-menu of; [www.ox-close.co.uk](http://www.ox-close.co.uk)

# Seasons' Summary

by Paul Holmes

The weather this year has been much better for wildlife. OK... January and February were very cold with some areas experiencing record low temperatures and had the coldest mean temperature since 1978/9 (and didn't I know it after moving into a house with hardly any insulation and very poor central heating!).

But it was relatively dry. The problem comes when it is cold and wet.

Although birds suffer, snow doesn't count... it can actually protect many mammals and invertebrates that live at ground level. Winter turned to Spring with predominantly high pressure and associated fine, dry weather but still cold at night. This delayed our night-time moth trapping sessions by about 6 weeks until early May and it was mid-June before we were catching moths in any numbers. One moth of note caught in August in Ox Close was the nationally scarce Angle-striped Sallow with it's lovely orange-yellow wings.

The Trust's activities included a number of natural history surveys. We tried to identify which bumble bees were present in the parish.

Our Dragonfly and Damselfly survey on 10th July produced eight species of Odonata during the day. This was much better than the previous two years which were a wash-out.

A notable addition to the species of the Parish is that of the Black-tailed Skimmer *Orthetrum cancellatum*. One was seen on the bridle path down to the river and a group of about 25 were

found at a pond on land owned by David Cook (permission had been given). This dragonfly is unusual in that it prefers bare ground on which to perch rather than prominent branches and twigs. Their usual range is south of The Wash with scattered populations up to the Humber so our sightings have confirmed its expansion northwards.

Other species seen were Southern Hawker, a few of which were emerging from the Hirsts' garden pond, Emperor Dragonfly, Brown Hawker, 4-spot Chaser, Blue-tailed Damsel, Common Blue and Azure Damsels. During the day of the survey we did not visit Ox Close so did not see the Banded Demoiselles which had made their usual spectacular appearance.



Male Black-tailed Skimmer at rest on an old plank

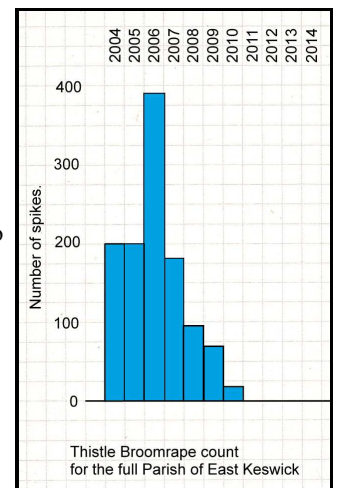
The annual count of Thistle Broomrape resulted in the fewest number of spikes since monitoring began. A total of 15 spikes was found in Ox Close with none being seen in Frank Shires Quarry. The reduced number of Thistles in Ox Close



Angle-striped Sallow

Wood may be a consequence of the dry weather during the early part of the year. It is hoped that having had some

grazing in Ox Close over the last 3 months will help to press the Broomrape seeds into closer contact with the roots of next year's thistles.



Besides the Brimstone success, the other pleasing butterfly news is that the White-letter Hairstreak has been seen again this year after a two-year absence. At least five separate individuals have been seen during the summer.



## Community Wildlife Big Lottery Fund

The Trust are applying for a Community Wildlife Grant to enable them to replace their notice boards, to repair the vehicle access track and to open up and improve the paths within the wood, . To keep the application cost down, they are planning to encourage the local community to assist with the projects. More information will be available in the next newsletter.

# Flora Recording for the '10 Year Natural History Project'

report by David Taylor

As part of the Trust's project to record as much of the Natural History of the Parish as possible, we have increased our work during the past year for the recording of Flora, that is non-woody flowering plants. The main areas covered in 2010 within the Parish were:- the bridleway from Harewood Avenue to the Green Bridge, Ox Close Wood including the river shingle bank at the NE end, the public footpath from Harewood Avenue to Keswick Fitts and upstream from there along the river bank. Up to five separate visits were made to some of these areas during the flowering season, and a start was made within Keswick Marsh.

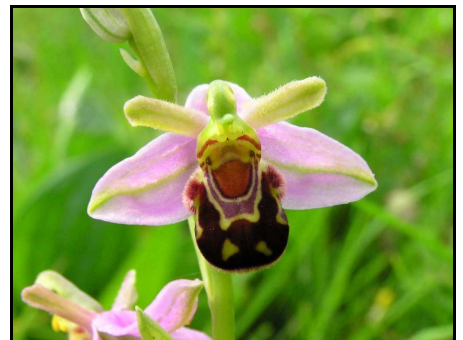
We are finding that there is significant variation in the number of species recorded from different areas. The habitat and its management seem to have a large effect. To the path along the river bank at Keswick Fitts where there is adjacent intensive agriculture we recorded 48 species,

whereas 86 species were recorded along the path down from Harewood Avenue to the Fitts where there is currently no management. Similarly, the unmanaged bridleway to the Green Bridge also recorded a high number of 74 species. Some management is desirable to maintain habitat and prevent a reversion to woodland, the natural cover in this area.

As further information is gathered, we may be able to see differences due to the underlying geology between the Limestone to the east and the acidic sandstone to the west.

### Some notable plants.

It is worth noting the following species:- Orchid, 3 species, Common Spotted, Early Purple and Bee. Violet, 3 species mostly in wooded areas; Early Dog, Common Dog and Sweet. There has been an increase to the locations of Moschatel; the delicate springtime woodland plant sometimes called 'Town Hall Clock' because of the construction of its flowers. This plant ranges close to the river from Collingham to Keswick Fitts. The shingle of the River Wharfe has Water Pepper and Fiddle Dock, both new records for the Parish. Amongst the woodland plants are the uncommon Yellow Star of Bethlehem and Goldilocks Buttercup (a delicate version of the familiar plant). Yellow Archangel is



Bee Orchid

an indicator of ancient woodland. It is common in Ox Close Wood which is not the case in many areas of the country. Two specimens of *Aquilegia vulgaris* were found in Ox Close.

Due to the size of the Parish we shall continue to cover additional areas in forthcoming years. During 2011 we hope to cover the urban areas of the village, Moor Lane and the sports field.



Moschatel has its tiny flowers arranged in a square with a fifth on top.



Aquilegia or Columbine



Before

### Additional work

has been done in the kiln area down in Ox Close Wood clearing more Sycamore to let yet more light into the glade. Up to 17th December there will be a weekly workparty, the intention is to go to Ox Close but this may change. Everyone is invited to take part. A good fire is promised, so bring some spuds. Please see the back page for details.



After

# The English Oak (Quercus Robur)

by Andy Turner

There are 35 native British trees and the English Oak (otherwise known as Common or Pedunculate Oak) is probably the best known and most widely revered of all trees. It is a tree of great longevity taking some 60 years to produce its first full crop of catkins and can grow up to 110 feet high with a girth of 30-40 feet. The oak can live to over 800 years, with only the yew living longer. It provides a habitat for more insects, lichens and birds than any other tree.

The oldest oak tree in East Keswick lies within a field boundary to the south of Moor Lane and is possibly up to 500 years old. Ox close wood has many oak trees with the largest and oldest specimens situated on the western boundary of the wood.

The name "pedunculate" originates from the fact that the acorns are on long stalks, or peduncles. This separates it from the other British native oak, the Sessile, which has its acorns growing directly on the shoot tip.

Traditionally oak wood has been used for several purposes. An interesting account of a great oak near Newport being felled in 1810 showed that it yielded 2426 cubic feet of sound timber, and six tons of bark. It was bought just as it stood for £405, and the purchaser had to pay £82 for labour and stripping, felling and converting into timber. Five men were employed for twenty days in stripping the bark and felling the tree and after that a pair of sawyers working six days a week, spent five months cutting it up. The timber and bark from this one tree were about equal to the average produce of three acres of oak coppice after fifteen years' growth.

The oak may be the most commonly used hardwood in England; it is resistant to decay, hard when seasoned, strong and bends well. Oak makes a good charcoal for providing sustained heat and was vital in the making of wrought and cast iron. Among other traditional uses of oak are: structural and ship building, barrel staves to

impart a tannin flavour to beers, wines and spirits, gates, ladder rungs wheel spokes and furniture. It was also coppiced and used in basket making, the bark used for tanning leather and the acorns used for animal feed.

Acorns are also a favourite food for jays, squirrels and deer. Many of these uses have ceased but it is still used in building (especially green oak structures), furniture (including veneers), flooring, firewood, fencing and gates. Ox Close wood does not have enough oak trees for us to use it in the charcoal burns; we tend to use sycamore, which is in plentiful supply. The edible Beefsteak Fungus (*fistulina hepatica*) is parasitic on oak, particularly ancient trees, and is usually found at the base of the trunk in late summer to autumn. Galls are the swollen brown balls that grow in response to parasitic wasp infection of leaf buds. There are two types of gall caused by different wasps; the more common oak marble (2cm diameter) and oak apple (2 to 5cm).

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## Forthcoming Events 2010 - 2011

**Work Party, 9th January 2011. Frank Shires.**

Meet at the Memorial at the entrance at 10.00.

**Autumn Talk Wednesday 17th November.**

with speaker Alan Braddock in the E.K. Methodist Church Meeting Room. 8 p.m.

**Winter Bird Survey. Friday 11th February.**

Part of the 10-year Natural History Survey of the parish. Meet the Post Office at 10.00

**Work party Every Friday 2010**

to Ox Close. Meet at Crabtree Lane car park 09.45. Contact no. is 01937 574140, culminating with 17th Dec.

**Work Party 20th February. Keswick Marsh.**

Meet at The Duke of Wellington at 10.00.

**Festive Work Party, 17th December.**

Crabtree Lane car park 09.45. Contact no. as above.

**Bluebell Walk. Wednesday 4th May.**

Meet at Crabtree Lane car park 7 p.m.

**Christmas Walk Sunday 12th December.**

E.K. - Bardsey - E. Rigton - Compton - Collingham. Leaving from The Duke of Wellington at 10.30

**AGM. Wednesday 18th May.**

In the Methodist Church Meeting Room 8 p.m.

A series of wildlife slides including An Introduction to the History of Ox Close by Margaret Moseley.

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## **We need your help**

**Volunteers are needed for conservation work, even if you only have half an hour to spare your help would be invaluable.**

**Please contact us if you would like to be involved in charcoal burning and/or work parties on the reserves.**

For updates of our events on the Web visit

**[www.eastkeswick.org.uk](http://www.eastkeswick.org.uk)** then click on **Wildlife Trust.**

Newsletter Editor tel: 01904 738854 or e-mail: [paul@ox-close.co.uk](mailto:paul@ox-close.co.uk)

For more details of any of the Trust's activities: tel. 01937 574140

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