

EXCITING TIMES IN A TRANSFORMED BARLEY FIELD

(Some records and four firsts in a young wood-meadow)

Words and photographs by Jesika and Jim Bone

In July 2015 we visited Three Hagges Wood-Meadow for the first time and were instantly enchanted by what we saw.

Three Hagges Wood-Meadow is set in the Escrick Estate, near Selby, owned by Charles Forbes Adam and was initially to be planted to commemorate the Queen's 2012 Jubilee. Rosalind, his wife and their son Beilby realised that simply planting trees and hoping the ground flora would just appear as if by magic wouldn't work. Tango Fawcett attends to the conservation aspects of the project. Lin Hawthorne, botanist, biologist, horticulturalist was designer & project manager and under her expert guidance 24 arable acres were transformed into a paradise. Rosalind wanted to develop an ecosystem which would help increase/restore biodiversity and create "Tomorrow's Ancient Woodland." Rosalind and Lin headed a team of volunteers and estate workers in planting 10,000 trees & shrubs of 31 native species in 12 copses. The grass & flower seeds were carefully selected & blended to replicate those once naturally occurring in the area. 40% of open space was left as a meadow.



From the onset of the transformation, detailed and careful records were and continue to be an essential part of the management of the site. Researchers from the University of York are involved studying below ground ecology, monitoring changes as the land transitions from arable to wood-meadow. The trees have been mapped, there is a monthly summer invertebrate survey, frequent reptile and amphibian checks and our own somewhat erratic butterfly records.

Equally important is OPAL (open air learning) an opportunity for young and old to engage with nature. The Meadow is open dawn until dusk and throughout the year there are many events which will allow visitors to learn and be inspired by what they see and experience. "Discovery Day", "Winged Wonders", "Learn to love spiders" are just a few. A registered charity Hagge Woods Trust (number 1151831) was set up in 2013 to manage the site, research and provide environmental education.

2018 has been a strange butterfly year with some species disappointingly low in number, recording peaks of one each of Peacock, Red Admiral, Painted Lady, and Brown Argus. We saw no Gatekeepers or Comma and only 85 Meadow Brown. The planned transect walk due to start in April next year should provide more accurate records.

There have been pleasant surprises too, with 61 Small Skipper on 4th July, more than either of us has ever seen at one site and an incredible 27 Small Copper 13th September.



The first of our Four Firsts was a Dingy Skipper, *Erynnis tages*, which amazed and delighted Terry Crawford as this butterfly which is usually found on chalky soil shouldn't really be in Escrick. However, a larval food plant is Birdsfoot Trefoil and there is a plentiful supply on site. I found it June 13th this year in the centre of the Meadow (on the proposed transect walk) resting on the short grass. I can only assume that no-one else has seen them or haven't reported sightings. A brief encounter, but welcome encounter.



We had hoped that Marbled White, *Melanargia galathea*, would find their way and on July 6th, there she was, followed by a second sighting the next day. She lays her eggs in a very haphazard manner, simply dropping them into the grass. Red Fescue & Yorkshire Fog are two of the abundant larval food plants.



Number three was a confirmation. A number of established Oaks overlook the Meadow and we were convinced that eventually we would find Purple Hairstreak, *Quercusia quercus*. On July 7th I walked the perimeter fence looking to the tops of the trees and suddenly I saw a tiny, greyish fluttering insect. Could it be the elusive butterfly I sought? It was. The photo is poor, the Hairstreak was too high for a good picture, but it's there, and when the tiny Oaks grow maybe a colony will be established on site.

But we've saved the best for last. 4th August 2017 I photographed an insect I had never seen before. I had no idea what it was so asked someone who would definitely know. The sighting was greeted with envy from one expert who had only seen one, attracted by pheromones and another who



despite his best efforts is still to see a Yellow Legged Clear Wing Moth, *Synanthedon vespiformis*. Charles Fletcher told us it was the only sighting in 2017 and one of not many since records began in 1883. We'd intended trying to attract more with pheromones this summer but that's deferred until 2019.



Three Haggis Wood-Meadow is in its infancy. Neither of us will see it mature but in the five years since trees were planted and seeds sown, there are over 200 species of flora and an incredible 900+ species of invertebrates. Jim & myself have seen 23 species of butterfly and I believe Clouded Yellow has been seen too, making the total 24.

If this experimental prototype site with its carefully detailed records can be replicated through the country, with linking corridors (councils take note, don't flay the hedges & massacre the grass verges) for wildlife, maybe the biodiversity decline can be halted and even possibly reversed.

Haggis Woods Trust is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (number 1151831) and was set up in 2013 to manage the site, carry out research and provide environmental education. More information can be found at www.haggewoodstrust.org.uk