

## NATURAL HISTORY SECTION

*Chairman*—MRS. A. D. HALLAM.

*Secretary*—C. A. COOKSON, O.B.E.

*Committee*—The Chairman with MISS Y. M. KERSHAW, DR. E. G. NEAL,  
H. W. BOON, G. L. FREWIN, W. A. WILSON, DR. H. M. CHAPPEL,  
L. A. HALDANE and I. I. JEFFRIES.

*Recorders*—

Botany—(Vascular Plants) A. D. HALLAM, Taunton Castle.

(Fungi) I. I. JEFFRIES, Rosemary Cottage, Clayhidon, Cullompton,  
Devon.

Entomology—(Lepidoptera) DR. H. M. CHAPPEL, The Old Rectory, Selworthy,  
Minehead.

(Coleoptera) W. A. WILSON, 16 Ballfield Road, Minehead.

(Other Orders) J. COWLEY, 15 Clarence Road North,  
Weston-super-Mare.

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### LECTURES AND INDOOR MEETINGS

Illustrated lectures were given by Dr. J. F. Hope-Simpson on "Mendip Flora" (with an excellent series of slides taken and presented by Mr. J. Eatough); by Mr. W. O. Copland on "Nature Conservation"; and by Mr. M. H. Robinson on "Animal Life in a Tropical Forest" (Panama Canal). The Annual Meeting was held on 5 March 1966 and was followed by a showing of the film, "The Vanishing Coast". At this meeting Capt. R. G. B. Roe R.N. spoke on plans for publishing a new flora of Somerset and invited assistance in carrying out a floral survey of the County. A very successful Social Evening, the first function of its kind organized for several years, was held in November 1965. Colour transparencies were shown by Mr. and Mrs. Cole (British wild flowers); Mrs. Colthurst (pictures of New Zealand, including the "Glow-worm" caves); Miss Mallet (British and Irish botanical photographs); Mr. Kitchingham (plants of Rhodesia and South Africa); Mrs. Neal (a selection of Dr. Neal's recent slides); Mr. Hallam (flowers of the Causse du Larzac in southern France). Also on exhibition were flower drawings by Miss Mallet and bird photographs by Mr. Young. Mr. Haldane had arranged cases of specimens to illustrate mimicry in East African butterflies, and Mr. and Mrs. Jeffries showed a "fungus garden".

## FIELD MEETINGS, 1965

ALLER WOOD, 22 May (Leader: Mrs. A. D. Hallam)

This is an oak/ash wood on a calcareous clay escarpment. A wide range of shrubs was seen including *Viburnum opulus*, guelder-rose, *V. lantana*, wayfaring tree, *Thelycrania sanguinea*, dogwood, *Euonymus europaeus*, spindle-tree, *Acer campestre*, maple, and *Daphne laureola*, spurge-laurel. A field maple was covered with *Dilophus febrilis* L., the so-called fever fly, a pollinator of fruit trees. Of the bedstraws *Rubia peregrina*, wild madder, *Galium mollugo*, hedge bedstraw, *G. odoratum*, woodruff, and *Asperula cynanchica*, squinancywort, were noted. *Lithospermum purpurocaerulea*, purple gromwell, grows well here on the borders of the wood and was in flower. In the wood itself *Panicum miliaceum*, millet grass, was abundant and some plants reached a height of 6 ft. Three species of plantain (*Plantago media*, *P. major*, and *P. lanceolata*) were found growing side by side. It was a little early to see some of the plants at their best. For instance, *Platanthera chlorantha*, greater butterfly orchid, found growing beside a fox's earth, was still only in bud and not one of the plants of *Blackstonia perfoliata*, yellow-wort, which dotted the fields outside the wood, was yet showing signs of coming into flower.

On the more open down on the Langport side of the wood *Helianthemum chamaecistus*, rock-rose was found in flower together with *Salvia horminoides*, clary, and quantities of *Poterium sanguisorba*, salad burnet. Two similar species of geranium (*G. dissectum* and *G. columbinum*) were distinguished.

No plants of the rare *Althaea hirsuta*, hispid mallow, could be found. This was first recorded near Aller at a field meeting in 1950. As it is an annual or biennial, it may appear elsewhere in the vicinity and should be looked for.

BRAUNTON BURROWS, 19 June (Leader: Mr. E. A. J. Buckhurst)

The small party of members was conducted for a fascinating walk over the dunes where something new and exciting came into sight every few yards. Even the most unbotanically-minded of visitors could not have failed to notice the magnificent spikes of *Echium vulgare*, viper's bugloss, and *Reseda luteola*, weld, but one had to get down on hands and knees to examine the tiny *Linaria arenaria*, Frenchman's toadflax, introduced here from western France, or those two seaside members of the Primulaceae, *Glaux maritima*, sea milkwort, and *Samolus valerandi*, brookweed.

Other delicate plants which repaid close inspection were *Linum catharticum*, purging flax, *Centaureum erythraea*, centaury, *Trifolium arvense*, haresfoot clover, *Phleum arenarium*, sand catstail, *Viola curtisii*, seaside pansy, and the rare *Matthiola incana*, sea stock. Some fine specimens of *Cynoglossum officinale*, houndstongue, *Melilotus officinalis*, common melilot, and *Lycopsis arvensis*, small bugloss, were seen and the visitors were delighted with the vivid

colours of *Euphorbia portlandica* and *E. paralias*, the Portland and sea spurges. Those common plants of inland areas, *Sedum acre*, biting stonecrop, and *Anagallis arvensis*, scarlet pimpernel, growing here in carpets, made an impressive sight. The spikes of *Epipactis palustris*, marsh helleborine, which grows abundantly here, were still crouching in their leafy rosettes in tight bud. Nor was *Verbascum thapsus*, great mullein, yet in flower.

An attempt has been made in recent years to render the dunes stable by the planting of *Ammophila arenaria*, marram grass. This effort is reinforced by the natural growth of *Carex arenaria*, sand sedge, whose tufts rise in ranks spaced out with military precision along the straight lines of underground rhizomes.

BREAN DOWN, 26 June (Leader: Mr. H. W. Boon)

Members enjoyed one of the few perfectly sunny days of this summer for their visit to Brean Down, where they went first to look at the many fine specimens of *Orobanche hederæ*, ivy broomrape, in flower among the ivy-covered rocks. In the same area *Marrubium vulgare*, white horehound, and *Inula conyza*, ploughman's spikenard, were observed, and *Hypericum montanum*, pale St. John's wort, was just coming into flower.

The party then moved to the rocky southern slopes which are the home of *Helianthemum apenninum*, white rock-rose; though the main flowering season was over, there were sufficient blooms for a photograph to be taken. Further west along the Down *H. Chamaecistus*, the common yellow rock-rose was blooming, but the hybrid between the two species, usually in evidence, was not found.

It was good to see that several plants of *Ophrys apifera*, bee orchid, had successfully survived to produce flowers, in spite of the increasing number of visitors walking the Down.

WESTHAY, 31 July (Leader: Mr. Colin Trapnell)

Mr. Trapnell spoke about the vegetational changes that have taken place in the area in the last 6,000 years. The main purpose of the meeting was to examine the flora and fauna of a five-acre plot of turf moor where peat has not been cut for about a hundred years. Since then the plot has been grazed and fired at intervals. The dominant plants are now *Molinia caerulea*, purple moor-grass, and *Myrica gale*, bog myrtle. It was too late in the season for most of the true sedges, but both species of beak-sedge, *Rhynchospora alba* and *R. fusca*, were seen.

Other plants noted were *Drosera rotundifolia*, round-leaved sundew, and *D. intermedia*, lesser long-leaved sundew, *Salix repens*, creeping willow, *Platanthera bifolia*, lesser butterfly orchid, *Scirpus caespitosus*, deer-grass, and two kinds of cotton-grass, *Eriophorum angustifolium* and *E. vaginatum*. *Galium palustre*, marsh bedstraw, and *Epilobium palustre*, marsh willow-herb, and *Carex pseudocyperus*

were found by a rhine at the edge of the plot. In another rhine were *Utricularia vulgaris*, greater bladder-wort, *Sagittaria sagittifolia*, arrowhead, *Butomus umbellatus*, flowering rush, and *Alisma plantago-aquatica*, water plantain, all in flower.

Several spiders including the raft spider were observed. Three beetles characteristic of the habitat were identified: *Reichenbachia impressa* Pz., *Rybaxis longicornis* Leach and *Oodes helopioides* F.—the last being very local in occurrence in Somerset.

COMBWICH, 21 August (Leader: Mrs. A. D. Hallam)

A fine afternoon and a little frequented habitat with many late-flowering plants made the excursion an enjoyable one. *Trifolium fragiferum*, strawberry clover, was plentiful in flower and fruit on the Common, and a few plants of *Trigonella ornithopodioides*, fenugreek, were seen. *Trifolium resupinatum* was seen in flower and in fruit. This annual is generally regarded as a casual, occurring chiefly near docks, but it seems to have become thoroughly established here. Other plants on the salt-marsh included the sea-spurries, *Spergularia marina* and *S. media*, *Limonium vulgare*, sea-lavender, *Beta vulgaris*, beet, *Suaeda maritima*, seablite, *Artemisia maritima*, sea wormwood, *Plantago coronopus*, stagshorn plantain, *P. maritima*, sea plantain, *Triglochin maritima*, sea arrowgrass and *Salicornia* sp., glasswort. Sea aster (*Aster tripolium*) occurred in two forms — one with a blue ray like a Michaelmas daisy, the other rayless.

The members walked by the left bank of the Parrett towards Steart Point, examining the flora of the grassy bank and hedgerow. Among the umbellifers in flower were *Bupleurum tenuissimum*, hare's-ear, *Apium graveolens*, wild celery, *Sison amomum*, stone parsley, *Torilis japonica*, upright hedge parsley, and *T. nodosa*, knotted hedge parsley. *Dipsacus fullonum*, teasel, and *Picris echioides*, bristly ox-tongue were plentiful and a few plants of *Senecio erucifolius*, hoary ragwort, were observed. *Phragmites communis*, reed, *Scirpus maritimus*, sea club-rush, and *Ranunculus sceleratus*, celery-leaved crow-foot, were growing in the brackish rhines behind the sea-wall. The rice-grass, *Spartina townsendii*, which now covers Steart Flats, has spread up-river to Combwich. Other grasses noted were *Hordeum murinum*, wall barley, *H. marinum*, sea barley, and *Agropyron pungens*, sea couch-grass.

QUANTOCKS, 9 October (Leader: Mr. G. L. Frewin)

The fungus foray took the form of a walk through Cockercombe with about 20 members taking part. Of some 50 species of fungus gathered the most interesting was *Pseudo-hydnum gelatinosum*, which resembles a lump of bluish-white jelly. An unusually large specimen of the handsome *Tricholomopsis rutilans* was found and some bare ground was brightened by a fine growth *Peziza aurantia*, the orange-peel peziza. The party also saw two of the most brightly coloured of

the *Cortinarii* — the deep crimson *C. sanguineus* and the ginger-coloured *C. cinnamomeus*. The importance of using one's sense of smell as an aid in identifying fungi was brought out in the cases of several species gathered: *Tricholoma saponaceum*, for instance, was readily distinguished by the smell of scented soap and *Lactarius glyciosmus* by the smell of coconuts. It was an interesting, but not a very cheerful, sight to see the destructive "bootlace" fungus, *Armillaria mellea*, in such abundance in these woodlands.

### NATURE TRAIL

Early in 1965 the Council for Nature asked the Natural History Section to co-operate in arrangements for National Nature Week from April 23rd to May 1st, 1966. The Committee of the Section agreed to do this by means of a nature trail to be set up in Prior's Park Wood, near Blagdon Hill. An *ad hoc* committee was formed, consisting of four members of the Society, the District Forest Officer and the Rural Science Organizer of the Somerset Education Department. The organizers met in the field and the committee room, a booklet was prepared as a guide to the trail, notices were posted in public libraries and museums and the local newspapers gave good advance publicity. Teachers and stewards met for a preliminary walk over the trail at the end of March.

The trail started at Curdleigh Farm, where leaflets were sold, tape-recordings of bird song were heard, and exhibits, diagrams, posters and books were displayed. From this point the route lay through a field into deciduous woods, past a small reservoir, through a young plantation of conifers and uphill to the top of the Blackdown escarpment. Pits had been dug to show the differences in soil on the following five geological formations: Keuper Marl, Rhaetic, Lower Lias, Upper Greensand and Clay-with-Flints. Attention was drawn to the change in flora between a calcareous clay and an acid sandy soil and to the factors that influence the forester in deciding what species of tree to plant. The trees were labelled and sections of wood displayed. Wild flowers, ferns and mosses were also labelled; diagrams illustrated the water supply system and the modification of the landscape by former quarrying. An occupied badger set was to be seen in the Greensand near the end of the trail. The weather was showery on the first two days, but fine and sunny for the rest of the week. Nightingales and several of the warblers were in full song; altogether about twenty species of bird could be heard.

Members of the Society took turns of stewarding for two hour periods at the exhibition shed, at the reservoir or as roving stewards. The trail was followed by 1,646 people. Of this number 767 came on the three days when it was open to the public and 879 in parties from 18 schools in 35 visits on five other days. There was no vandalism and nearly everyone obeyed the Country Code. The nature trail was the first to be arranged in Somerset, and it was much appreciated.