

Wild Things visit to Kiplingcotes Chalk Pit July 1st, 2024

Something's gone right with the weather this year; not for us maybe but certainly for the now rare species, Red Hemp-nettle, *Galeopsis angustifolia*, which we found in swathes at the chalk pit today. Described as 'critically endangered'* in 2021, attempts have been made to reintroduce this plant in various locations across the country, as in Plantlife's Back from the Brink programme [Here](#).



An annual with a tough seed coating that doesn't compete well with other plants, it needs perfect growing conditions to thrive. No one seems to know for sure what these are but it's found them this year on the bare slopes at Kiplingcotes. I've only seen it twice before, here and by another chalky railway line, but never in this quantity. Let's hope there will be enough insects arriving this summer to pollinate this beautiful annual. Its seeds are known to stay dormant for many years.

Even more exciting was the accidental find of a single example of what is likely to be another 'endangered' plant, Fine-leaved Sandwort, *Sabulina tenuifolia*, described [here](#) in another 'Back from the Brink' project. This hasn't been seen in our area since the late, great botanist Eva Crackles recorded it at Granny's Attic in 1985. It's a specialist of disturbed calcareous soils. Yet another plant that's a calcareous specialist is Basil Thyme, *Clinopodium acinos*, classified as 'vulnerable', which again can be found in some quantity at Kiplingcotes. Such a great site!



Above clockwise: Red Hemp-nettle, Basil Thyme and Fine-leaved Sandwort

Unfortunately, with my limited botanical skills I failed to recognise I'd spotted the rare Sandwort until the picture was seen by an expert on iNaturalist. I returned two weeks later, and a botanist buddy from the Hull Natural History Society also went to have a look, but neither of us was able to locate it again. Very frustrating, as my picture didn't reveal the leaves enough to firm up the record.

It's been a terrible year for butterflies and today was no exception. We spotted a couple of Marbled Whites, a Skipper and a Meadow Brown, but the weather wasn't favourable. We did have a poke at

an anthill of the Yellow Meadow Ant, another famous denizen of this site, and disturbed a few. These are only seen when you interfere with their mounds as they feed on plant roots underground so are not visible like their other ant cousins. The anthills can survive for hundreds of years and support a range of plant life. The predominant species on these anthills is Large Thyme, much less common than Wild Thyme and more fragrant. It's another chalk specialist.

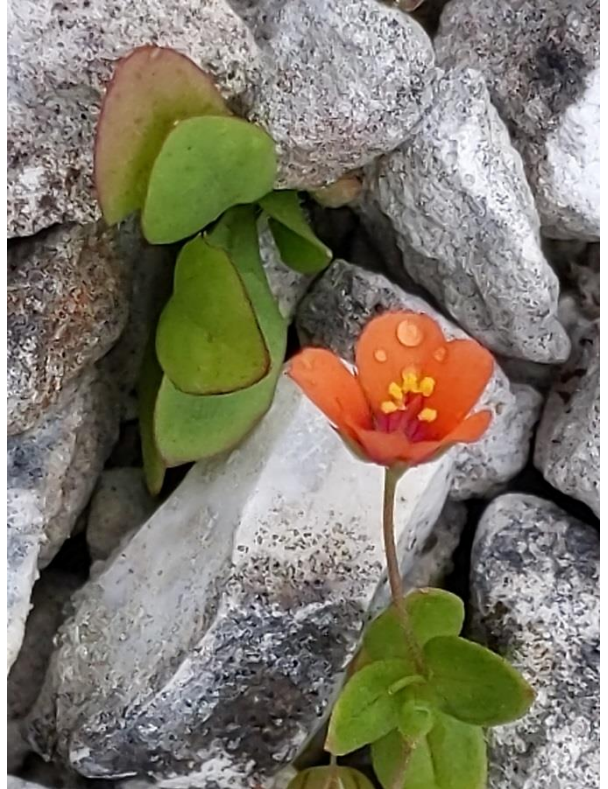


Thanks to John Coish for the bird list: swifts, swallows, skylark, magpie, wren, chaffinch, chiffchaff, wood pigeon, goldfinch, red kite, whitethroat, yellowhammer (left), long tailed tit.

Below are some of the other great flora at Kiplingcotes: this page clockwise from left: Pale Toadflax, Common-spotted Orchid, Field Scabious, Eyebright. Overleaf clockwise:

Bladder Campion, Scarlet Pimpernel, Pyramidal Orchid.







Above: Phil, Barbara and Angela examining the flora. Below: an Empid fly on Meadow Cranesbill and a beetle hiding in Burdock.



Report and pictures HK.

*The Red List of Threatened Species is produced by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which was founded in 1964 from a suggestion by Peter Scott. It's a global list of species which are at risk of extinction without efforts at conservation. *CR* = *critically endangered* and includes the Red Hemp-nettle we found today. It's the category down from *EW*, which = *extinct in the wild*. The Fine-leaved Sandwort is the next category of *EN* = *endangered*, indicating a very high risk of extinction in the wild. The Basil Thyme is the next category of *VU* = *vulnerable* which indicates a high risk.