

No.4 - Alderford Common (Grid Reference TG126186)

Alderford Common is an SSSI, the particular interest being the chalk grassland. A thin layer of glacial sands and gravels cover the underlying chalk which is exposed in abandoned marl workings. A diverse chalk flora has developed in the old pits and the site forms the only remaining example of species-rich chalk grassland in East Norfolk. The open area is surrounded by woodland and a stream from the River Wensum runs along one wooded edge. (I do believe I saw a Brown Trout in there the other day.) The Common itself has recently been fenced so that grazing can take place to maintain the habitat, kissing gates for access. The habitats represented include scrub, woodland, bracken heath, marshy grassland and ponds. The site can also be accessed as part of the Winch's Way Walk. A small car park is on the Reepham Road just east of Alderford village.

Bird species

All year.

Green woodpecker

Goldcrest

Common woodland species

Winter.

Bullfinch

Redwing

Fieldfare

Summer.

Garden Warbler

Whitethroat

Common summer migrants

Nightingale

Turtle Dove

Cuckoo

Blackcap

A visit in early August found the Common covered in wild flowers, particularly Knapweed and Bracken. Whitethroat were flying up from the ground and either perching on top of the bracken or fetching food for the young in low down nests. A Nightingale appeared in full view eight or so yards from where I was sitting on the ground, pecked around for insects and then shot off back into the undergrowth. Was he finding food for young and going back to a nest? He came out a couple more times. I also think there were two others further down the track, but was not well tuned into them. Meadow Brown butterflies, Common Blue butterflies and Silver 'y' Moths were in abundance. Hundreds of bees and other insects were going about their business. Brown Hawkets showed well and over a small pool in the wooded area a Southern Hawker and a Migrant. So this was a summer visit.

I have been in May. The bird song of Garden Warblers, Blackcaps and others filled the air. It was a joy to walk between the hedgerows of Hawthorn and Blackthorn listening and watching. One May two Turtle Doves rose up from a small pool edge, flew into a tree and gave absolutely first class views. Then both moved to the same branch and proceeded to bill and coo. Turtle Doves were also seen the following May along with Cuckoos.

Fieldfare and Redwing were in abundance one winter's walk. The only impressions in the 6" deep snow were those of small animals and birds until my great boots came by. It was peaceful and quiet, no other humans! I saw several Bullfinches, Chaffinches and Thrushes.

Alderford Common is enjoyable at any time of year and you never know what will be found. One thing I have not done so far is a visit at dusk. An old lime-kiln is used by bats both as a winter hibernating site and as a daytime roost during the summer months, according to info on the internet. That's for my next visit!

Liz Bridge

List supplemented by J Pett