

BUTCHERFIELD !

On a typically wet Sunday afternoon last summer I ventured down to Butchersfield in search of the elusive Blue-eyed Grass (*Sysyrinchium bermudiana*). Newtons' 'Flora of Cheshire' describes this member of the iris family as 'very rare' and gives only one location in the County (by the Bridgewater Canal). Still, here I was in pouring rain, in August, about to look for something which only opens its flowers in sunshine during July, and otherwise resembles grass.

Surprisingly I didn't rediscover our plant! Once familiar landmarks were missing. Sheltering under a JCB, I changed the film in my camera and surveyed the scene. The large meadows by the flood meadow had gone, as too were the other stands of smaller trees. Not swearing too much (it was Sunday) I wandered around the area in the hope that I could salvage something. Using a walling hammer I dug up some Musk Mallow (a large patch was discovered here in 1984) and collected a few Cinnabar Moth caterpillars from the nearby Ragworts. Finding just four orchids I showed them to the JCB operator who was just about to restart work after lunch. Trying not to sound like a 'woolly-hatted overemotional nature lover' I explained to him what he was destroying

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and that the Fragrant Orchid (*Gymnadenia conopsea*) I had just dug up from near to his caterpillar tracks was rare and the first to be found in the area. Obviously intrigued, his mate proceeded to skid the bulldozer around to join the discussion, sending herb-rich turves flying in all directions. I refrained from congratulating him on his method of seed dispersal, and mentioned that a Slow-worm had been found somewhere just about where the pile of willows now lay. "We'll burn that to clear the site," he explained "to tidy up.... site preparation"

Leaving the massacred field with my relic plants I went home to sulk and watch David Attenborough on television, with the consolation that orchids are colonisers and the retaining bunds of the tip were constructed with 'on site' material.....

Not all is pessimistic, however. A survey this year should reveal what colonises the mud after dredging deposition. Habitat diversity and succession is constantly being boosted by transplanting material from around the site (such as Butchersfield), or from the Warrington area. At this point I must emphasise that it is illegal to pick or remove plants from anywhere without the landowner's permission and that scattering a packet of commercial wildflower seed in the wild is strongly discouraged by the Nature Conservancy Council (in fact it is illegal on an S.S.S.I. without their consent). The seeds are better planted in the garden, in the wild few would survive and since they often contain seeds from foreign or non-local stock hybridisation with local stock could result in weakening of plants adapted to our particular environment, or conversely be more vigorous and oust other plants.

If you have any 'spare' wild plants, including trees or know of a local threatened site with plants which may be suitable for the Eyes then please contact Duncan or Rob Smith so we can find a suitable site for them - and keep our records straight. Sightings of plants are still welcomed, however dull, drab and common they may be. Spring on the Eyes this year may reveal more Primroses (*Primula vulgaris*) - at present known at only one location.

Duncan MacNaughton

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