

Hexton Chalk Pit, North Herts

Report and photographs by Steve Chilton, who visited on **23 June 2009**

The chalk pits form a tiny but fascinating nature reserve which is managed by Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust.



It is primarily a haven for chalk loving wild flowers. In fact the

range of wild flowers is quite similar to those I found recently at Steps Hill and Ivinghoe Beacon in Buckinghamshire but here they are concentrated in an area that can be explored reasonably well in an hour.

The visually dominant plant of the chalk hills was the lovely pink Sainfoin which carpeted some of the higher areas.

I found four species of orchid. Common Spotted were the most common and are easy to find at the sides of the footpaths.

Pyramidal Orchids (right) were also growing close to the paths but they were small young plants and less easily seen.

The Bee Orchids (left) were in beautiful condition but I only found a very small number of plants. They were growing towards the bottom of the main pit on a steep slope, under the overhanging branches of a bush.

I photographed a couple of Common Twayblades in the same area.



The photograph, right, shows the carpet of Sainfoin.





Some of the other notable flowering plants were:

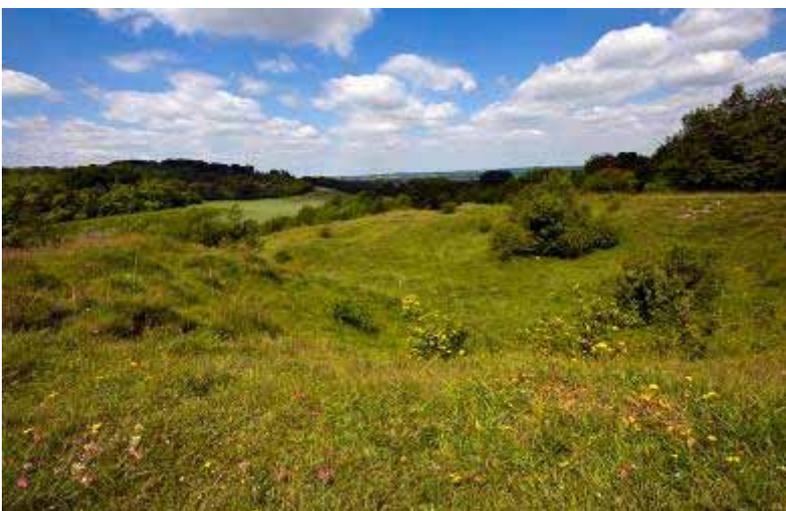
Yellow Wort (photographed left),
Hoary Plantain (below),



Spiny Restharrow (photographed left),
Quaking Grass and
Common Birdsfoot Trefoil

I failed to conclusively identify a tiny and lovely Milkwort flower but it was either Chalk or Common Milkwort (right).

I saw my first Marbled White Butterflies of the year but they wouldn't settle so I was not able to photograph them. I also saw Large Skipper, Ringlet and Meadow Brown butterflies.



The reserve entrance is about ½ mile south of Hexton Village on the minor road to Lilley, Grid Ref TL107299. There is space to park a car by a footpath sign on the right. Entrance to the reserve is a little further up the hill on the other side of the road. Look out for Green Alkanet and Speckled Wood butterflies as you walk through the narrow strip of woodland.