



Waterford Heath, near Hertford

Report and photographs by Steve Chilton who visited on 29th & 30th May 2009

I visit Waterford Heath at least once a month as it is a constantly changing landscape. To the south of Vicarage Lane (see photograph) the vegetation is lush and colourful.

Soon it will be a dense sea of white and lilac when Goat's Rue (photographed right) comes into flower. Nationally scarce, this naturalised plant is attractive but rather invasive here. Now is a good time to visit before the other wild flowers are swamped.

Hedgerow Cranesbill (photographed), White Campion,



Meadow Buttercups, Common Vetch, Birdsfoot Trefoil, Black Medick, and the scarce Houndstongue are all in flower now.



North of Vicarage Lane (photograph below) the heath can look rather barren in early summer but closer inspection produces a wide variety of fauna & flora.



The speciality of this area is the Grizzled Skipper butterfly (photographed).

Waterford is one of only a small number of locations in Hertfordshire where it can still be found. Look out for this tiny insect around the Wild Strawberries.





The two most abundant flowers in this area at the moment are both very small and low-growing. Wild Strawberry (above left) carpets much of the western side and Biting Stonecrop (above right) much of the Eastern side. The strawberry plants are now covered in tiny red fruit.



Other wild flowers in this section of the reserve included Scarlet Pimpernel (photographed), Wood Avens, Common Storksbill, Herb Robert and Small-flowered Cranesbill.

Viper's Bugloss (photographed right) is just starting to flower in sheltered areas near the road and bridge. Soon it will add a splash of colour everywhere.

A fun exercise is to count the number of different wild flowers that grow from cracks in the road and wall of the railway bridge. Moss and lichen enthusiasts will also find this bridge interesting.

During my visit there was a constant passage of Painted Lady butterflies. This is part of the well documented migration into the UK from North Africa involving millions of butterflies. (For more details see www.butterfly-conservation.org/) Unfortunately none of them settled for close views or photography.





The marshy areas in the centre of both halves of the reserve are good places for damselflies and dragonflies, though I only managed to see Large Red Damselfly on this occasion.

I did not see many birds on this visit other than our common garden and farmland species. But Waterford Heath is a good place to watch Kestrels, Green Woodpeckers and Warblers.

Waterford Heath is a Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust reserve located just north of Hertford on a former sand and gravel working. The reserve is accessible at all times and conditions are generally easy.

To approach via Hertford town centre, on the B158 northwards to Bengoe; about a mile from the town centre there is a mini-roundabout; take the first exit (Sacombe Road). In about 200 metres there is a small car park and access to the south end of the Heath; in about a further 200 m, Vicarage Lane turns off to the left and provides parking and access to both north and south part of the Heath. Further along Sacombe Road, Bulls Mills Lane leaves on the left and connects to the A119 and provides car-parking and access to the north end of the Heath. Although some of it is single-lane, there are well-placed passing places.

to approach from the A119, exit into Bulls Mill Lane, midway between Waterford and Stapleford villages. See above.

to approach from the A602, enter Sacombe Rd, which leaves the A602 between a roundabout signed to Watton-at-Stone/Hertford (A119) and another signed to Bengoe (B158). Bulls Mill Lane is about 3km, much of which is single lane but with passing places. See above, either of these routes is preferable.

For more information on the reserve see www.wildlifetrust.org.uk/herts/.