



## Waterford Heath, near Hertford

Report and photographs by Steve Chilton who visited on 29<sup>th</sup> & 30<sup>th</sup> 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/](http://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.

Take the A119 to Waterford, in the village turn onto Vicarage Lane and follow it over the railway bridge. You will find the car park on your left; Grid reference: TL 318150.

For more information on the reserve see [www.wildlifetrust.org.uk/herts/](http://www.wildlifetrust.org.uk/herts/) .