

# ***Account of Purley on Thames***

## **Barbara Mercer's Notes**

R200516 27/1/2018

*These are items published in the Project Purley Newsletters (60, 61 and 68) in which Barbara Mercer records the seasons unfolding in woods near Beech Road. Ex R000040, R000091 and R000096*

Following the death of Barbara Mercer in December 2001 and as a tribute to her, we printed extracts from the survey she carried out of the woodland to the west of Beech Road, an area bordered by the parishes of Tilehurst and Sulham. She visited the area at roughly fortnightly intervals to note the changes and the following is the final extract from her diary.

### ***April 23rd 1983 - Sunny with showers, fairly warm.***

There have been high winds and heavy showers during the past week and the path was muddy and more dead branches had fallen. The previous week had some hot sunny days and they advanced growth so that the whole area is now more leafy. The bluebells are not quite in full bloom yet, but the cherry trees are. Wild arum is in bud. Dandelions, hedge garlic, white deadnettle, celandine, violets, ground ivy, stitchwort, forget-me-not and lesser mouse-eared chickweed are all in bloom. Dock leaves have appeared. Horse chestnut still in bud, but sweet chestnut and beech showing no leaf yet. There is not much "second layer" shoot growth in this area – probably why few birds are seen here.

### ***May 5th – Sunny and warm.***

The weather has continued with heavy showers and sunny periods and a few warmer days, otherwise continuing cold for late April and May. The birds have nested late this year but the cuckoo was heard in late April. All the flowers noted last visit are still apparent – celandines are going over and speedwell is now blooming copiously. One or two flowers out on the large horse chestnut and wild arums have unfurled. Beech trees now in leaf and leaves are just opening on sweet chestnut. One strange thing – a branch on a fallen or felled dead elm has burst forth in clusters of flowers in small bunches. No leaves can be seen and it is not possible to see whether the roots of the tree are still in contact with the ground, but this is obviously an effort to reproduce with the depleted resources. There are one or two similar spindly branches in the dead elm area. Saplings of elm are in leaf but they may wither again as they did last year. Everything is growing apace now in spite of not much warmth.

### ***May 8th – Sunny and showery.***

On a walk three days after previous visit, the first herb robert flower was seen and hawthorn is in bud. Two friends returning from Sulham Woods reported having seen two deer in the wood above Purley Hall. We saw a kestrel "quartering" the field on the west side of woodland. The bluebells are at their best now and many walkers were out to see them.

### *May 22nd – Showers and sunny periods.*

It has been the wettest April and May (so far) for many years. The past few weeks have had thunder storms with a little sunshine and it has remained cold. On the visit today, a jay was seen flying into the wood as I approached. Blackbird, great tit and two squirrels were also seen in the oak area. Maple trees showed blossom and the hawthorns are in bloom including one hawthorn that is broken down to the ground. One old hawthorn must be 50 ft. high and is about 2 ft. in diameter. Oak tree blossom is falling and holly and spindle are in bud. Flowers in bloom: dandelion (and “clock”), white deadnettle, bluebells, ground ivy, stitchwort, herb robert, hedge garlic, hedge parsley, buttercup. Bracken fronds are quite tall now and nettles! It is impossible to penetrate the dead elm area as it is completely overgrown.

### *June 3rd – Milder, humid, sunny periods later.*

June commenced with a violent thunderstorm and heavy rain. There has been rain nearly every day since my last visit – consequently the paths are muddier than they have ever been. A few bluebells are still in bloom. All the foliage is extremely lush after the wet weather. Herb bennet (geum urbanum) leaves and holly are the only new arrivals on the flower scene. Small ash keys are now visible. One wood pigeon seen.

### *June 16th – Cloudy and mild.*

There has been hotter sunny weather recently but most nights are still cool. Elder trees are now in full bloom and the spindle has a lot of blossom this year. Horse chestnut flowers have faded and hawthorn is nearly over. Hedge parsley and nettles have grown so tall they almost obscure the path. Blackbird seen. No new flowers seen but those noted on last two visits are still apparent. Bluebells are over now and hedge garlic is going to seed. Fields on both sides of the wood are planted with barley this year.

### *July 3rd – Very hot, sunny.*

After a lapse of three weeks, the footpath has almost been taken over by the “jungle” in places. It is much more overgrown, in spite of more frequent use, than I remember seeing it in previous years. Elder trees form quite a “tunnel” in one place and they are still in bloom. One young robin seen and one brownish butterfly (probably silver-washed fritillary). A feature of this walk was the innumerable flies. Young conkers are forming. Blackberry brambles blooming. The spindle and some other trees have dead or dying twigs – storm damage or drought – we have had both. Most previously noted flowers in bloom can still be seen. Green hawthorn berries formed.