

## Spring Flowers at Boundary Brook 2021

Camilla Lambrick from the Ashmolean Natural History Society (ANHSO) is helping with our plant surveys this year. Camilla has written about a selection of spring flowers you can expect to find at Boundary Brook and added poetry inspired by them.

Which ones can you discover on your visit to the Nature Reserve?

*Oxfordshire's Threatened Plants, A Register of Rare and Scarce Species*, H E Erskine, H J Killick, C R Lambrick and E M Lee

### Daisy

The name Daisy comes from Day's eye because the flowers open by day and shut at night. The flowers are edible!! Daisy has a composite flower head; if you pull the flower head in half you will find short yellow florets in the middle and long florets round the outside which are white, sometimes with a touch of pink on the underside. To make a daisy chain use your fingernail to make a slit in one stem and poking the stem of the next flower through it.



**The Daisy Fairy by Cecily Mary Barker 1923**

Come to me and play with me,  
I'm the babies' flower;  
Make a necklace gay with me,  
Spend the whole long day with me,  
Till the sunset hour.

I must say Good-night, you know,  
Till tomorrow's playtime;  
Close my petals tight, you know,  
Shut the red and white, you know,  
Sleeping till the daytime.

## Dandelion

The name comes from the French dents de lion meaning teeth of a lion referring to the shape of the edges of the leaves. It also has a French name pis en lit (piss in the bed) from its diuretic effect. Like Daisies the flower heads are a tight mass of tiny florets each with tiny stamens and stigmas.



### The Dandelion Fairy by Cecily Mary Barker 1923

Here's the Dandelion's rhyme:  
See my leaves with tooth-like edges;  
Blow my clocks to tell the time;  
See me flaunting by the hedges,  
In the meadow, in the lane,  
Gay and naughty in the garden;

Pull me up—I grow again,  
Asking neither leave nor pardon.  
Sillies, what are you about  
With your spades and hoes of iron?  
You can never drive me out—  
Me, the dauntless Dandelion!

## Lesser Celandine

The name Celandine comes from Greek, *Chelidon* - swallow, though the flowers come out long before the swallows arrive! Also called pilewort from the small tubers that resemble piles. The flowers can predict weather as they close before rain. Buttercup family.



### To the Small Celandine by William Wordsworth 1802/7

Pansies, lilies, kingcups, daisies,	Comfort have thou of thy merit,
Let them live upon their praises;	Kindly, unassuming Spirit !
Long as there's a sun that sets,	Careless of thy neighbourhood,
Primroses will have their glory,	Thou dost show thy pleasant face
Long as there are violets,	On the moor and in the wood,
They will have a place in story:	In the lane; - there's not a place,
There is a flower that shall be mine,	Howsoever mean it be,
'T is the little Celandine.	But 't is good enough for thee.

## Coltsfoot

The flowers of this member of the Daisy family usually come out before the leaves. Both the stems and underside of the leaves are protected by woolly hairs. The leaves, which wither and die in early summer, are food plant for caterpillars of several moth species.



### The Coltsfoot Fairy by Cecily Mary Barker 1923

The winds of March are keen and cold;  
I fear them not, for I am bold.  
I wait not for my leaves to grow;  
They follow after: they are slow.  
My yellow blooms are brave and bright;  
I greet the Spring with all my might.

## Bittercress

Like the cultivated cress and Watercress the leaves of this little cress are a tasty addition to any salad. Also called Lamb's Cress and Hot Weed. Bittercress is often a weed in flowerpots and can set seed only a month after germinating. The seed pods explode sending the sticky seeds up to a metre away.



### Near Tyrellesspass by Jon Ennis 2006

I walk the gravelled arteries  
of the Split Hills  
and the Long Hill Esker;  
all 5k, with scarce grass  
thinning like a scalp,  
touch in my passing  
ash, hawthorn, oak, an Irish whitebeam;  
finger primrose,  
kneel to bluebells,  
bittercress.

Pungency, and its babies,  
with narrow leaves  
appear, then disappear  
among the esker stones.

On the old and active faces of hillsides  
yellow-wort and carline thistle  
beam in midland weathers.  
Millennia like children  
hear the polar torrents cease,

watch the arctic ice retreat  
till the gravels layered like the couples over there  
settle into hills.

All that celtic entourage with kings  
righting their broaches  
across warring centuries  
on their speeding chariots  
sweeps across the esker.

Here, years ago, Tyrrell and his men  
sabotaged the British.

The land shrugs them off for pity's sake  
like night mists, like recurrent nightmares  
wakes in a pristine lake with yellow gorse  
blackthorn blooms, a marsh with slender sedge.

Not many walking all over it, like heralds  
slim students like botanicals  
where it's hazelled on the knolls.



## Primrose

The name means the first rose, of spring! A woodland plant abundant in the west having flowers of two types (heterostylous); the pin flowers have the stigma visible like a small pin in the centre of the flower and the stamens hidden near the base of the flower tube, while in thrum flowers the stigma cannot be seen and is near the base of the flower, with the stamens near the top. Thus pollen from one type is mostly delivered to the other, promoting out crossing and genetic diversity.



### To a Primrose by John Clare 1820

Welcome, pale primrose, starting up between  
Dead matted leaves of oak and ash, that strew  
The every lawn, the wood, and spinney through,  
'Mid creeping moss and ivy's darker green!  
How much thy presence beautifies the ground!  
How sweet thy modest, unaffected pride  
Glow on the sunny bank and wood's warm side!  
And where thy fairy flowers in groups are found  
The schoolboy roams enchantedly along,  
Plucking the fairest with a rude delight,  
While the meek shepherd stops his simple song,  
To gaze a moment on the pleasing sight,  
O'erjoyed to see the flowers that truly bring  
The welcome news of sweet returning Spring.

## Daffodil or Narcissus

There are many different species and cultivars of daffodil. The wild one in Britain is pale yellow and smaller than many of the cultivated forms. In Greek mythology Narcissus was a youth who fell in love with his own reflection. The plant is poisonous and was formerly used medicinally.



### **The Daffodil Fairy by Cecily Mary Barker 1923**

I'm everyone's darling: the blackbird and starling  
Are shouting about me from blossoming boughs;  
For I, the Lent Lily, the Daffy-down-dilly,  
Have heard through the country the call to arouse.  
The orchards are ringing with voices a-singing  
The praise of my petticoat, praise of my gown;  
The children are playing, and hark! they are saying  
That Daffy-down-dilly is come up to town

## Wood Anemone or Windflower

Anemone was a name used by Theophrastus the Father of Botany. There are many different anemone species with vivid colours found in gardens; the woodland one is white and the chalk downs have a purple; the Pasque flower as it flowers at Easter.



### Revels the Moon did Light by Madison Julius Cawein 2012

I could not understand how these  
    Could hide so near to me,  
When by the whispering of the trees  
    I knew the wood could see. ----  
    Until, all breathless with its joy,  
    The Wind, that could not rest,  
Ran past me, like a romping boy,  
    And bade me look my best.----  
And there I saw them clasped in bliss  
    Beneath an old beech tree:  
And - here's the flower born of their kiss  
    This wild anemone.

The thorn-tree waved a bough of May  
    And all its branches bent  
    To indicate the wildwood way  
The Wind and Sunbeam went----  
I knew its joy had filled with song  
    The high heart of the bird,  
    That rippled, rippled all day long  
In dells that hushed and heard----  
All were in league to help me find,  
    Or tell to me the way,  
Which now before me, now behind,  
    These two had gone in play.



## **Ladies-smock or Cuckoo Flower**

This is a flower of damp meadows, and the four petals indicate it as a member of the Cabbage family, Brassicaceae. The petals are pale mauve to white, with lilac veins. It is a food plant for the caterpillars of the Orange-tip Butterfly. Look for the orange eggs on the flower stalks in May, and green caterpillars that look like the seed pods in June.



### **From a 15th or 16th Century Irish poem**

Tender cress and cuckoo-flower:

And curly-haired, fair-headed maids,

Sweet was the sound of their singing

## Cowslip or Paigle

The cowslip grows in meadows and pastures on dry or damp, and lime-rich or neutral soil. It is closely related to the Primrose, with which it will hybridize. The name cowslip comes from cowpat! It was changed by the Victorians to be more polite. Everyone's favourite, the poets have often sung its praises.



### Here is one of Shakespeare's tributes:

And I serve the Fairy Queen  
To dew her orbs upon the green.  
The cowslips tall her pensioners be.  
In their gold coats spots you see;  
Those be rubies, fairy favours;  
In those freckles live their savours.  
I must go seek some dewdrops here,  
And hang a pearl in every cowslip's ear.

## **Blackthorn**

This hedgerow shrub is related to the plums, and has similar white blossom, but the flowers open in April before the leaves, moreover the branches are spiny. The dark blueish fruits called sloes are used to flavour gin; they are too astringent to eat fresh.

Blackthorn is the food plant of caterpillars of the Black and Brown Hairstreak Butterflies, the eggs are visible over winter as white specks in the axils of young twigs. These rare butterflies have strongholds in Oxfordshire. Brown hairstreak butterflies are spreading in the county and the eggs have been found at Boundary Brook Nature Park.



### **The Blackthorn Fairy by Mary Ciceley Barker 1923**

The wind is cold, the Spring seems long a-waking;  
The woods are brown and bare;  
Yet this is March: soon April will be making  
All things most sweet and fair.

See, even now, in hedge and thicket tangled,  
One brave and cheering sight:  
The leafless branches of the Blackthorn, spangled  
With starry blossoms white!

### **White Dead-nettle**

The leaves of this plant are woolly and harmless unlike the Stinging Nettle. The tubular flowers have curved hood and spreading lip. If you pull out the flower you can taste the nectar at the base of the tube; bumble bees love it. The stem is four angled, and the leaves come out in opposite pairs, as in all member of the Dead-nettle family. The young leaves are edible and can be cooked or eaten fresh.

### **Loddon Lily or Summer Snowflake**

This strikingly elegant plant was chosen as the Berkshire County flower. It flourishes in wet alkaline, extremely high nitrogen soils.

The herbalist John Gerard described it as wild in Italy and popular in 16<sup>th</sup> Century London gardens. In 1788 it was found wild “between Greenwich and Woolwich”. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was recorded in Reading and in Oxfordshire, just downstream of the city, though it is now lost from this area.



Loddon Lily has buoyant seeds, dispersed by water-fowl, and continues to spread to new sites. It was seen in about 2000 at Lashford Lane Nature Reserve near Abingdon, and a survey along the Thames in 2012 located it near Chimney in the west. A spectacular display can be appreciated at Withymead Nature Reserve near Henley at Easter-time. There is an improved cultivar that is frequent in gardens, that sometimes escapes, and the earlier flowering Spring Snowflake is occasionally naturalized, it has only one or two flowers in a head and the petals are tipped with yellow, whereas in Loddon Lily there are three to four flowers and the petals are green tipped.

### **Town-hall Clock or Moschatel**

This tiny woodland plant is named Town-hall Clock because four of the five flowers in each cluster face outwards like clocks on the sides of a clock tower; the fifth flower points upwards.



Moschatel means musk scented, which is how the flowers attract flies and night-flying moths for pollination. In the wild Town-hall Clock has a circum polar distribution – growing in northern Europe and Asia and north America. The leaves are similar to those of Wood Anemone, but paler and softer, and they die back in summer.