



## **RINGWOOD NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY**

### **Town Common and St. Catherines Hill Field Study**

Date: 7<sup>th</sup> September 2023  
Weather: Sunny and hot  
Walk Leader: Richard Sharp from Reptile and Amphibian Conservation  
Attendees: 11

Richard Sharp, works for Amphibian & Reptile Conservation. Back in January he gave the Society a talk on amphibians & reptiles, he very kindly offered to follow this up with a walk. Town Common is located on the outskirts of Christchurch and is managed by Amphibian and Reptile Conservation. The reserve is dominated by St Catherines Hill which runs north to south through the site, the other half of which is managed by BCP Council. Town Common is 128 hectares in size, designated as SSSI, SAC, SPA and Ramsar and owned by the Malmesbury Estate. We met Richard at the gate at top of Sandy Lane, which is off Fairmile Road, we drove up a gravel track to reach the top where the water towers are. Richard explained about the archaeology and history regarding the site, we were stood by Hens Ditch which runs across the hill. Four Bronze age tumuli are positioned around the edge of the hill, the area was also used by the Romans as lookout towers. Located to the south east of the reserve is the old site of a military rifle range dating from the late 1800's which was still active up to the 1950's. The southern end of the site and the top of the hill was used for gravel extraction from the 50's up to 1966. The hill was initially chosen as the site for Christchurch Priory but the building materials were moved each night to the church's present location by 'unknown forces'.

The reserve gives tremendous views out to Hengistbury Head and the Isle of Wight as well the New Forest. It mainly consists of dry heath on the hillside running down to wet heath with areas of acid bog running into the Avon Valley. Town Common is steeped in history due to its height, tactical position and the lack of tree cover. The coniferous woodland consisting mainly of Maritime Pine that now covers the top of the hill is a recent introduction from the early 1960s onwards.

From the top you can look down towards Dudmoor Farm Road which was originally the Ringwood & Christchurch Railway Line opened in 1862. Most of the land along the railway route was owned by Lord Malmesbury including St Catherine's Hill, he lived at Avon Castle near Ringwood and had a station built called Avon Lodge, now a private house. Another station was at Hurn and this is now the Avon Causeway Pub which still has the platform along with a railway carriage. The line closed in 1938 due to lack of use.

Many thanks to Richard and ARC for giving us his talk followed up by a walk. Unfortunately after some searching we did not find any reptiles hiding under their shelters but the site does hold all six of the native British reptiles.

<b>Flowering Plants</b>	<b>Fruits</b>	<b>Birds</b>	<b>Butterflies</b>
Marsh Cudweed	Rose Hips	Firecrest	Speckled Wood
Ling	Rowan	Goldcrest	Red Admiral
Bell Heather	Blackberries	Spotted Flycatcher	Small White
Cross-leaved Heath		Wood Pigeon	
Catsear	<b>Fungi</b>	Carrion Crow	<b>Dragonflies</b>
Dwarf Gorse	Common Earthball	Long-tailed Tit	Common Darter
Common Ragwort		Common Buzzard	Emperor
Common Evening Primrose		Red Kite	Golden Ringed
Common Storksbill		Chiffchaff	

Daisy			<b>Bumblebees</b>
Water-pepper			Buff-tailed
Prickly Sow-thistle			