

## 2013 Autumn Equinox – Lower Tamar Lake to Virworthy area 23<sup>rd</sup> September

The autumn equinox has just passed. Summer was to have come to an end but nature has not yet recognised that autumn has arrived. The weather was hot and muggy but damp underfoot.

I was on the lookout for newly emerged fungi and although not disappointed, there was not yet the abundance I expected the season to have produced.



Branched Bur Reed  
*Sparganium erectum*

Many plants were setting seeds – Meadow Sweet seed heads were abundant along the aqueduct trail with some in flower. Bur Reed also had both seeds and flowers but Water Mint was still flowering vigorously in the damper patches of the canal and being enjoyed by a range of invertebrates – bees, flies, craneflies, ladybirds and wasps. They in turn were being preyed on by dragonflies, an Emperor and Common Darter as well as



Cranefly *Tipulidae sp.*

many garden spiders.

I watched two Emperors hawking over the open water of Virworthy Wharf.

The trees were bearing their autumn fruits. There was an abundance of Hazel nuts, Rosehips, Elderberries, Haws and Blackberries ready to feed the birds as well as attracting foraging humans.

There were late butterflies about too, Speckled Wood, Green-veined White as well as a Small Tortoiseshell in sunny but sheltered areas. Butterflies need a windless day, with a temperature of around 16°C for their muscles to be warm enough for flight.

Birds were heard rather than seen as the trees were still fully clothed in their leaves. Many tits were heard but of those that I was able to visually identify were Great, Blue, Long-tailed and Willow Tits. As usual, there was a wren near Virworthy Mill.

After the recent rain, there was standing water in some of the canal areas and where the sun shone through there were masses of Water Crickets skating on the surface tension in the warmth.

A surprising visitor was on Lower Tamar Lake. A Red-necked Grebe was seen along with the expected family of Great-crested Grebes. This was most unusual and widely reported. I was looking out for the seasonal fungi and was not disappointed although there was not an overwhelming number. At the start of the Aqueduct trail a couple of Blushing Brackets were on a tree in the thicket. Much further on, one tree showed King Alfred's Cakes and Porcelain Fungus. However, the star of the walk was seen on the way to Virworthy Mill. I was astonished to identify Hazel Gloves (*Hypocreopsis rhododendri*) a Biodiversity Action Plan species which shows just how important this site is and how sensitively it is being managed.



Hazel Gloves *Hypocreopsis rhododendri*