

## 2013 Winter Equinox Moreton Park Bridge to Vealand 21st December

The equinoctial storms abated long enough for me to complete my walk but they had left evidence – a sapling had fallen across the path near to Puckland Bridge but was easily negotiated.

I started at Moreton Park Bridge to walk to the start of the Vealand reserve. I had little hope of many sightings in mid-winter but was to be pleasantly surprised on this bright warm day.

There is usually some water below the many bridges which are fairly clear of vegetation as they provide a deep shade limiting growth.

Below Moreton Bridge were a dozen very active Water Crickets, whilst on the roadside were the green growth of Wood Vetch, Polypody, Hart's Tongue and Buckler Ferns. Apart from Gorse in flower on Dunsdon Reserve the only other plant in flower, was, as usual, Red Campion here and there.

My first bird sighting was a Jay followed by Blue Tit and Robin at Moreton Mill Bridge. Dormant Hazel catkins were abundant waiting for spring to release their tiny flowers and a small patch of Polytrichum (Hair moss) brightened up the area near Puckland Bridge. Here too was the first of the many fungi to be found, Witches' Butter *Tremella mesenterica* and later Clouded Funnel *Clitocybe nebularis* and Candle Snuff fungus *Xylaria hypoxylon*. Two Grey Squirrels bounded along the tow path and towards Dunsdon Reserve, more birds were apparent – Magpie, Dunnock, Wren and Long-tailed Tits.

The newly-watered section of canal alongside Dunsdon Reserve is already being colonised by Water Crowfoot and Common Spike Rush and promises much for the future. Close by the path was a Witches' Broom high in a tree. I saw another Jay, Treecreeper, Nuthatch and more Long-tailed Tits. Beyond the Reserve, a Peregrine Falcon sailed out over the fields.

Walking towards the junction with the Holsworthy Branch I entered another habitat, a conifer plantation with more fungi Blushing Bracket *Daedaleopsis confragosa* and Turkey Tail *Tremella versicolor*. The Branch held a flock of Starlings and a flock of Mallard. Around the plantation were more birds, Great Tits, a Marsh Tit a pair of Bullfinches, Chaffinches and Carrion Crows. Finally, the sighting of the walk, a Brimstone butterfly in December!



Blushing Bracket *Daedaleopsis confragosa*  
Above new below old growth



Candle Snuff Fungus *Xylaria hypoxylon*



Witches' Butter *Tremella mesenterica*