

## 2014 Spring Equinox Lower Tamar Lake to Dexbeer Bridge 23<sup>rd</sup> March

It was a cold and windy day but dry with occasional periods of bright and warming sunlight.

For most of the length of the canal, Lesser Celandine, Dog's Mercury and Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage lined it with occasional areas where Primroses lingered on but all the Snowdrops had gone with just leaves and fruits forming. Peeping through the grass were the tiny stars of Barren Strawberry on many stretches. Willow was showing the soft grey cushions "Pussy Willow" and "May" blossom of Hawthorn was starting to show. The wet areas of the canal had new abundant Hemlock Water Dropwort with spikes of Water Horsetail poking through. The open water had Water Starwort (*Callitrichia stagnalis*) and Lemna species floating. Spectacular bunches of Marsh Marigold (*Caltha palustris*) were an welcome and most unexpected flash of gold in some of the damper parts of the canal. Towards the limit of the walk were huge tussocks standing in water of Giant Carex (*Carex pendiculata*)



Marsh Marigold *Caltha palustris*

It was very much a fungi walk with many tiers of Blushing Brackets (*Daedalopsis confragosa*) still showing freshly amongst last year's paler washed out brackets. They were contrasted by the many newly appeared Scarlet Elf Cap (*Sarcoscypha austriaca*) in the drier parts of the canal itself nestling amongst the mosses on fallen dead branches. On some of the dead trees were occasional groups of Honey Fungus (*Armillaria* sp.) and King Alfred's Cakes (*Daldinia concentrica*).

The few leaves on the trees, made visibility very good but birds were not apparent either visually or audibly. The Goosander on the Lake were a surprise – they have been there all winter but I had expected them to have been gone by now. The squeaking gate sound of a Bullfinch was instantly recognisable even if he did not become visible. It was good to identify two Marsh Tits by their "Tzee tzee" wheezing call. There are peacocks at Virworthy Wharf; their raucous penetrating call followed me almost all the way round on my walk.



Buff-tailed Bumble Bee *Bombus terrestris*

Invertebrates were not apparent at all until emerging from cover at the same time as the sun broke through, out came bees – I had frequent sightings of lone Buff-tailed Bumble Bees; Queens searching out the pollen in the recently opened "pussy" willow flowers.

I had given up all hope of any mammal sightings until on my return to the car park, being careful in the hope of seeing the reputed Tree Sparrows, I saw a Grey Squirrel raiding the peanut feeders.