

## 2016 Summer Solstice – Moreton Bridge to Vealand Bridge 21<sup>st</sup> June

After two days of torrential rain the weather had changed to dry and very warm. Walking along the aqueduct was like walking through a verdant, dim green tunnel. The canal had standing, and some running, water in it from Puckland Bridge almost continuously to the re-watered Dunsdon section. The bankside vegetation was so luxuriant that it almost obscured the view. And it was wet! Although our dedicated volunteers have been busy strimming the path, the grasses were so wet that the soggy seed heads were bending into the path drenching my trousers – but it was well worth the wetting.

In this green twilight world there were few invertebrates. But, where there were clear open patches, the abundant umbellifers were attracting masses of flying insects: bees, flies and hover-flies were taking advantage of these lush white frothy flower heads full of nectar. These invertebrates seemed only to require the weather to be dry and warm to encourage them to fly.



**Marmalade Hoverfly**



**Pair of mating Meadow Browns**

As the morning warmed further and the sun peeked out then the butterflies began to appear. Speckled Wood were almost over, but a few tattered individuals were about and they didn't mind a bit of shade. But in the sun, there were lots of Meadow Browns and the occasional Green-veined White, Small Tortoiseshell and Large Skippers. Also taking advantage of the sun, particularly near Vealand Bridge and along the Dunsdon canal side, were many Azure Damselflies busy mating as well as a newly-emerged Common Darter.

Quite a few small birds were busy caring for their new fledglings – particularly Warblers – Chiffchaffs, Willow Warblers a Sedge Warbler and many tits and Wrens. A Buzzard's plaintive call was heard over Dunsdon Reserve and then seen quartering the air no doubt trying to encourage its own fledging.

Marsh Valerian is beginning to flower but apart from a few individuals Meadowsweet is not quite out. There is flowering Meadow Vetchling showing yellow and the pink of Herb Robert, but what a contrast with the abundant violet blue of the Tufted Vetch flowers. The meadows at Dunsdon were abundant with Southern Marsh Orchids and Devil's-bit Scabious and a nice group of Marsh Cinquefoil in the edge of the canal.



**Marsh Cinquefoil**



**Woody Nightshade**

It is always rewarding to sight mammals along this walk. Seeing one is good, seeing two a bonus. One was a repeat, a Grey Squirrel in the trees at Dunsdon but the star of the walk was a species new to me on this walk. I saw it quite early in the walk in the foliage by the side of the path near Broomhill Bridge. No bigger than a £1 coin, with pointed nose and long tail it was a Pygmy Shrew! I was so entranced that I did not want to risk missing a second of the sighting to even try to get a photograph – what a sighting to add to the species list!