

Over The Fence

The West Malvern Garden & Nature Club News Letter

Spring 2022



A garden visitor

Hello and welcome to the first 'Over the Fence' for 2022.

After a good start in July with the Open Garden, and then managing three meetings, we had thought that we would be up and running. Unfortunately, we had to cancel the December meeting, which was a shame, as Jim had managed to book someone after we decided it might be difficult having a Christmas party. We also had to cancel in January but hopefully the COVID restrictions will ease, and people will feel less worried about mixing with people.

On our walks we are bombarded with bird song, and, entertained by squirrels and deer looking for mates. Spring was suddenly with us, and sunshine cheered us after a gloomy February. The fox visited us in the garden and can often be heard calling in the nearby field.

Walks in Elim grounds have been 'A host of golden daffodils,' as well as primroses, cyclamen, celandine, wood anemones, daisies and the greenery of bluebells and wild garlic. A magical time of year.



We also faced the difficulties presented by the road works on the West Malvern Road and the February meeting was held in St James's church (the heated pews are an experience, if you've never tried them!) Peter Garner talked to us about the 'Natural Wonders of Herefordshire. Peter was Plant Recorder for Herefordshire and introduced us to some rare and beautiful examples to be found nearby.

The Ghost Orchid was the rarest plant found in Herefordshire. So tiny we could hardly spot it growing in the grass in the photograph. Mark Jannink, the person who found it had searched for 10 years, such dedication.



From **'The Ghost Orchid Project'** (www.ghostorchidproject.co.uk/ghost-orchids)

Ghost Orchids (*Epipogium aphyllum*) lack chlorophyll, so do not need sunlight to survive. Instead, plants are fully dependent on a type of fungi throughout their life cycle, only needing to appear above ground to flower and set seed. Flowering is also thought to be linked to weather patterns, namely wets springs and cold winters, mimicking those found on the continent, as well as being related to light and moisture levels of the surrounding woodland. Without the correct conditions, many years can pass without any flowers being produced, so there is no trace of the plant above ground. There are also reports that the Ghost Orchid is capable of flowering underground, buried in the leaf litter - another factor that makes locating one all the more difficult.

.Shortly after being rediscovered in 2009, in Herefordshire by Mark Jannink, the Ghost Orchid was declared extinct by Plantlife. It is currently classed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN red data list and is included under Schedule 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. This means it is illegal to pick or dig up any plants.

Added to its few remaining sites will be the stanza

I compose about leaves like flakes of skin, a colour

Dithering between pink and yellow, and then the root

That grows like coral among shadows and leaf-litter.

Just touching the petals bruises them into darkness.

The Ghost Orchid - Michael Longley (1995)

March saw us back in the church and this time Tom Mabbett from Naturetrek. He is the Operations Manager for Naturetrek and took us on a tour of Scotland and England illustrating the tours available with his company. As they say, 'We have been committed to operating our holidays in a responsible manner. Ours is a wildlife travel company run by naturalists, for naturalists. Every member of our office team and every one of our tour leaders has a passion for conservation, wildlife, and wildlife tourism.' He sent links to these free shows if you are interested.

<https://www.naturetrek.co.uk/news/naturetrek-online-winter-roadshow> - Free Online Talks to sign up for if you wish.

<https://www.naturetrek.co.uk/tour-focus/virtual-tours> Free Virtual Tours!



A Brambling

Wild Boar



Some of Tom's photos

His enthusiasm and knowledge were evident. He finished his talk by telling us how to set up cameras to record visitors in our gardens.

In April we were invited to go ‘Slowly Down the Ganges,’ which was an illustrated talk, with sound as well as pictures by Andrew Gagg. This was one of the postponed talks from 2019/20. An unusual look at life for people living alongside this sacred river.

We managed to run the R.H.S. Spring Show creche in May for the first time since 2019. Thanks to Tiggy for organising us and thanks to all of you who worked a shift on Friday and/or Sunday. It’s good fun and the chance to see the show as well. Helping with the creche supports our club as it is our major source of income. We also collect donations for Acorns Children’s Hospice and below Chris Hall, our Treasurer, is handing over a cheque for £570. We may be asked to do the Autumn Show. So, watch this space!



May also saw us swapping plants. Although we were not over busy there was a lot of enthusiasm from those who brought plants and swapped them. We had a chance to have refreshments and have a chat with people that we hadn’t seen in a while. We also were pleased to acquire some new members. If we make a plant and seed swap part of the club year, what did you like and how can we improve it? One suggestion was to have it on a non-club night, perhaps a weekend afternoon/morning. Have a think and let me know.

We hope to have a full programme of meetings for 2022/2023 but in the meantime, there are several things to look forward to in the summer:-

Margaret Cross has kindly offered to open her garden for the club. Refreshments available. She doesn't live in the village but is nearby in Alexandra Avenue. Date and directions to follow. Although the event is free, we ask for donations to club funds.

August 10th is the Treasure Trail and Picnic, organised by Chris Hall. We had to take a break from this activity because of lockdown. It is always good fun and Chris has previously organised this event. He is enthusiastic and sets a challenge. As someone who always gets lost, I don't compete, I just enjoy the day and the picnic afterwards. If you haven't been before you must try it. Chris will send details later.



Enjoying the picnic at Pershore Abbey

August 20th is the club's Annual Show, another event cancelled due to the pandemic. It's a showcase of the many talents held in the club. Not only growing vegetables, fruit, and flowers; but craft and creative skills, cookery, and photography. Everyone can take part and you may be pleasantly surprised at your success. There are club trophies for members to compete for as well. Schedules outlining the classes and instructions will be available in June. Online at wmgnc.uk and at

various places around the village. Support the club by taking part. If you would like to help on the day, we are always happy to have people to steward, help with refreshments and setting up and taking down the tables etc.



Some of the wonderful entries at the 2019 show



The children's entry is designing a miniature garden. (Also an adult challenge) After seeing the efforts at the Well Dressing this year we hope we can attract a large number of entries. So, encourage your children, grandchildren, etc. to enter! Children can enter any of the other items on the schedule, the children's entries will be judged separately from the adults.

THE GOAT'S-BEARD SAGA

Hilary Ward

The native Goat's-beard (*Tragopogon pratensis*) grows in our meadow and has seeded into the garden. Other common names include Meadow Salsify and Jack-Go-To-Bed-At-Noon (this refers to the plant's habit, on sunny days, of closing the flowers by noon).

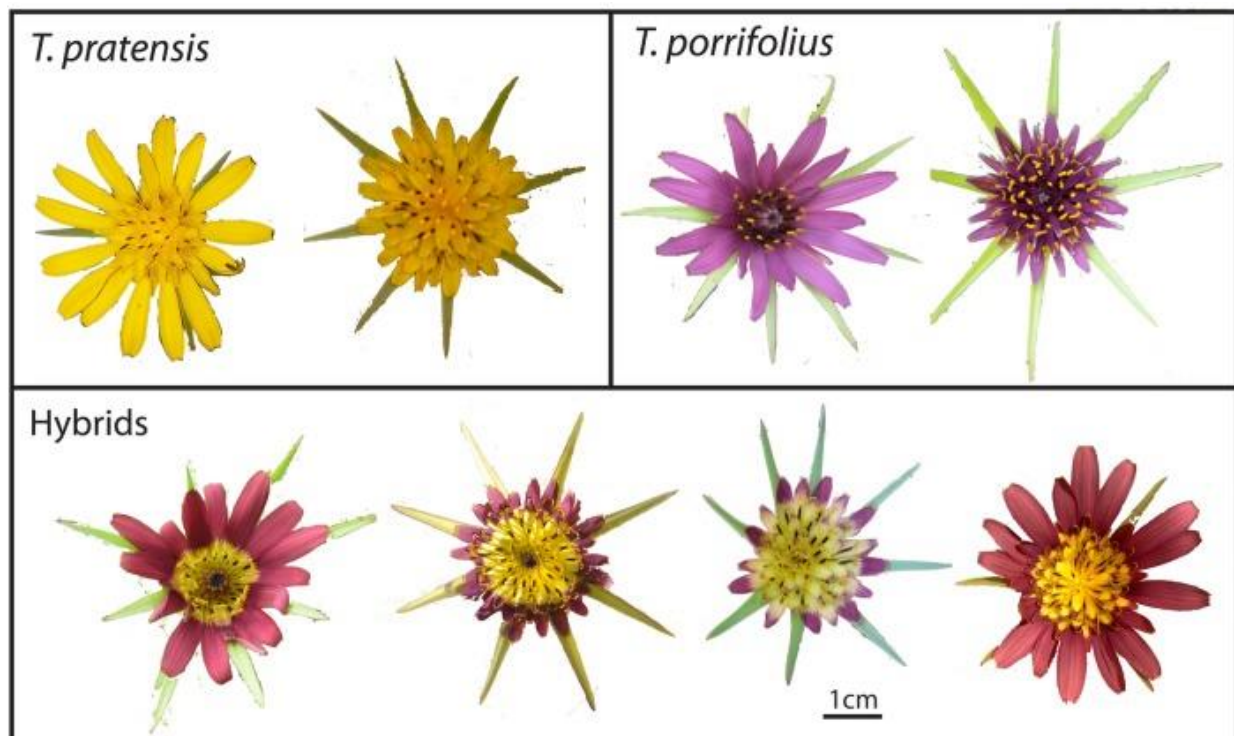


Some years ago I acquired a plant of the delightful Purple Goat's-beard or Salsify (*T. porrifolius*) from Chan Crawford.



This year I discovered that the two had hybridised to produce this attractive flower.

A paper published in [AoB Plants](#), 2015; 7: plv081 states that hybrids between *Tragopogon pratensis* and *T. porrifolius* have been studied in experimental and natural populations for over 250 years. During this time, the hybrid has not established as a new species. Records also show *Tragopogon* species seed from Mid-Roman middens in York, dated between 150 and 200 AD. Carl Linnaeus experimented with crossing these two species in 1759. The table below shows the variety of colour and form.



Footnote from Hilary.

I've done a bit more research and the hybridised plant could be more exciting than I thought. The National Biodiversity Network Atlas has only 10 records, mostly SE and 2 in Monmouthshire

Thanks Hilary keep us up to date with your research.

We hope to have a ‘proper’ paper magazine rather than an electronic message this Autumn.

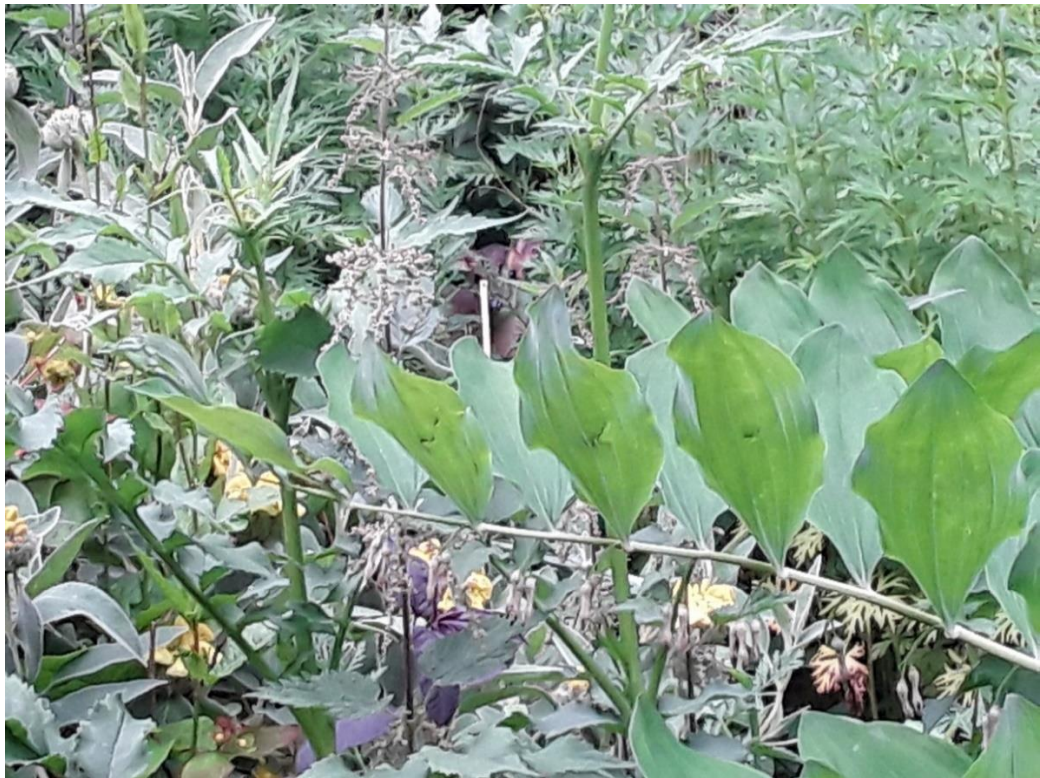
So, I am looking for photos from the Margaret Cross Open Garden, Treasure Trail, and Annual Show. Articles like Hilary’s. Visits you have made to gardens (and a few notes!) Animals that have visited your garden (camera traps?) or you have seen on your walks. Gardening tips, we aren’t all experts! Gardening problems you have solved or your garden design ideas/changes.

How you feel about the environment in prose (200 words) or poetry. Have you got a quiz for us?

I look forward to seeing you at various events

Don’t forget the website is www.wmgnc.uk.

I started with a photo of a deer and end with this one. ‘Spot the baby deer’ (no prizes) in a photo Chan took in her garden. Thanks Chan!



Carole Houghton