

Dimminsdale Nature Reserve

Natural History



Dimminsdale Nature Reserve is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and lies partly in Leicestershire and partly in Derbyshire. It extends over some 16 very rugged acres (6.5ha) and it takes little imagination to realise that here is a man-made landscape.

Dimminsdale was once a secluded valley where a small stream cut a course through rolling heath or grass covered hills. Then mining of the underlying limestone began and later lead was discovered. The toil of generations of miners has produced a wild landscape of pits, pools, cliffs banks and tips. When mining and industry ceased over a century ago the site was all but abandoned to nature.

Today it is in the care of Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust who manages it on behalf of Severn Trent Water for its wildlife, geological and archaeological interests.

The numbers below refer to marker posts found along the paths.



FLORA

The high degree of disturbance of the landscape at Dimminsdale over a long period has resulted in the creation of new habitats, a fact which is reflected in the wildlife which has colonised the site. In this respect it is interesting to realise that at present some of the richer wildlife sites in other parts of Leicestershire such as Browns Hill Quarry, Holwell, near Melton Mowbray, were also created under conditions of great change and upheaval at the hand of man.

Plants of wet areas

The interrupted drainage at Dimminsdale, the neglect of drainage channels and the inevitable flooding of the quarry workings have benefited water and damp loving plants.

The **Lemon-scented Fern** which is a plant of banks and ditches is classed as scarce and is known from only twenty other localities. Its relative, the **Hard Fern**, is a plant of woodland and shady places on acid soils and is almost confined to the Charnwood Forest.



Common polypody

Recently epiphytic **polypodys** have been found growing on the trunks of an ash tree and an alder tree. Although not a rare plant, it is rare when it grows on trees.



Ramson (wild garlic)

In spring, the **Wild Garlic** or **Ramsons** can be smelt long before its small white flowers and deep green leaves are seen growing in masses in low lying areas. The yellow-flowered **Marsh Ragwort**, a typical ragwort, is also found in damp places. The bright yellow leaves and flowers of

the perennial **Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage** brighten the gloom of the damp, shady places where it grows.

Look in the open water for the **Great Yellow Cress** with its shallow tall thin stalks and yellow flowers. The distribution of this plant in the county faithfully reflects the course of the main waterways. Around the margins of the open pools is the familiar **Bulrush**.



Opposite-leaved golden saxifrage

Pendulous Sedge, which may grow to five feet tall, grows in old woodlands on acid soils. It is locally frequent in west Leicestershire. **Remote Sedge**, also grows in old woodlands on damp soils, especially along wet rides.

Plants of woodland

Trees have been present on this site for many centuries but the present extensive woodland cover is newly arrived. About half a dozen species can be said to be true woodland dwellers. For centuries, if not millennia, Leicestershire has been short of woodland which has been, and to some extent still is, restricted to well defined areas of the county although the creation of the National Forest will change this.



Giant bellflower

The graceful **Lady-fern** resembles **Bracken**, its coarser and very familiar relative. **Lady-fern** is scarce away from the north-west of the county and reflects loosely this historic pattern of woodland. The handsome and lofty **Giant Bellflower**, with its purplish blue flowers is another such and at Dimmingsdale finds its home in the low lying areas of the non-acid soils.

Three species also loosely associated with ancient woodland are **Woodsorrel**, **Wood Speedwell** and **Moschatel**. The first, with its small white flower and bright, Shamrock-like leaves, comes into bloom in spring in



Moschatel

Yellow Archangel, which blooms in May as the **Bluebells** fade, is one of the most interesting species at Dimmingsdale. Elsewhere in Leicestershire it is strongly associated with truly ancient woodland. Its presence at Dimmingsdale may possibly indicate that woodland was here before man began to change the landscape. Alternatively, it may have arrived by some unknown means from another ancient woodland site.



Yellow archangel

Plants of acid grassland



Acid grassland

Seven species present are more at home on acid grassland than in the mad-made wilds of Dimmingsdale.

The **Common Centaury** with its small pink flowers, and the delicate blue **Harebell**, are well known.

Creeping Soft-grass is

certainly a plant of the west of the county and also one of acid soil.



Harebell

Two other acid-lovers are the **Wavy Hair-grass**, which produces graceful bunches of flowering heads between May and July, and **Wood Sage**, a relative of the mints and nettles.



Bird's-foot trefoil

Patches of **bird's-foot trefoil** add some lovely colour to the meadow.

Adder's-tongue fern can be found in the meadow and is an unusual fern that grows in old grasslands. It usually appears between June and August, spending the rest of the year underground as a rhizome. It is considered a good indicator species of ancient meadows.



Adder's tongue fern

Finally, there is the grass called **Sheep's-fescue** which grows in dense, pale green tufts and which is locally frequent in the county.

Garden escapes



Snowdrops

One might reasonably expect to find plants which have 'jumped the fence' or simply crawled under it from the former gardens into the 'wild'. There are seven such species.

Pride of place must go to the **Snowdrop**. The ancestors of the present plants spread confidently in to the woods. The early springtime carpets of white flowers are among the finest floral spectacles in the county.



Snowdrops

Two other species of escapers are very familiar but not quickly recognised in a woodland background. The **Gooseberry**, catching most interest when fruiting, has small red-tinged green flowers but is not too common. The **Daffodil** is usually only noticed when in flower.

Another species is most often associated with rockeries. It is low-growing and in late spring and early summer produces dense masses of white flowers, hence its descriptive English name, **Snow-in-Summer**. The **Lesser Periwinkle**, too, tends to carpet the surface of shady banks with its glossy green leaves and sprinkling of white-eyed blue flowers. **Purple Toadflax** concludes the group. It has violet, snapdragon-like flowers borne in a spike-shaped cluster on top of an 18 inch stem.



Lesser periwinkle

LICHENS, MOSSES & LIVERWORTS



Lichens

LICHENS are those often brightly coloured powdery or crustose plants that grow on the bark of trees and on other exposed surfaces such as fences, walls, roofs and stones. They have no flowers, are very susceptible to air pollution and seldom have English names. At present there are few species at Dimminsdale although some, such as **Parmelia revoluta**, have reinvaded the county as a result of a decrease in levels of sulphur dioxide.

The most spectacular lichen on the reserve is the yellow **Coniocybe sulphurea**. Look out for it on old elder but be warned, you will need a x10 lens to make out much of its structure!

Dimminsdale has a rich bryophyte flora (mosses and liverworts) because it is

sheltered and has a high humidity. Therefore it is particularly good for epiphytic bryophytes that grow on trees and scrub in the reserve.



Stream running through woodland

Not all mosses require damp conditions. ***Plagiomnium cuspidatum*** likes growing on limestone turf in ancient mine sites. In general it likes base-rich habitats and grows on soil, rock stumps and tree bases – as well as in turf in open ground. There are only 10 recent records and has declined because of habitat destruction.

Another moss found here is ***Hypnum cupressiforme***, the **cypress-leaved plaitmoss**, which is a common and widespread species of moss belonging to the genus *Hypnum*. It is found in all continents except Antarctica and occurs in a wide variety of habitats and climatic zones. It typically grows on tree trunks, logs, walls, rocks and other surfaces. It prefers acidic environments and is fairly tolerant of pollution. It was formerly used as a filling for pillows and mattresses; the association with sleep is the origin of the genus name *Hypnum* (from Greek *Hypnos*).



Hypnum cupressiforme



Metzgeria consanguinea

The rare liverwort ***Metzgeria consanguinea*** was found here in 2010. It may be abundant on the trunks or twigs of alder (*Alnus*) trunks. It is more at home in western parts of Britain.

FUNGI



Jelly ear

All **FUNGI** including the familiar mushrooms and toadstools, lack flowers and green chlorophyll. Many species growing on dead wood live in Dimminsdale including the purple and fleshy **Jelly Ear** and the **Scarlet Elf Cup** which bring some welcome colour in February.



Scarlet elf cup

Some species such as the **earth stars**, the **Cep** and the **Morel** grow on the soil.

There are also a few grassland fungi in the meadow such as ***Clitocybe rivulsa*** and ***Hygrocybe reidii***, ***Rickenella fibula*** and ***Stropharia caerulea*** which are all indicative of good quality unimproved grassland.



Clitocybe rivulsa
www.first-nature.com

INVERTEBRATES

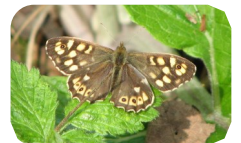
Butterflies and moths.



Small elephant hawk-moth
© Andy Banthorpe

The modest list for Dimminsdale probably reflects the low level of recording rather than a lack of species present. Most are found in many other parts of the county but at least seven species, including the **Triple-spotted Pug** and the **Small Elephant Hawk-moth**, can be described as 'local' i.e. they are found in a limited number of places. One moth, the **Silvery Arches**, is rare enough to find its way into the county's Red Data Book of endangered species.

In the more open and sunny parts of the reserve the



Speckled wood

Speckled Wood and **Brimstone** butterflies brighten up what can often be an otherwise shady and sombre scene. On the grassland, especially that of the adjoining park, there are **Small Coppers**, **Meadow Browns** and **Ringlets**.



Ringlet

Beetles

Dimminsdale is in a transitional stage for beetles. Years ago, when the quarry was active, large areas of bare and partly vegetated ground were ideal for a whole suite of species which made their living by colonising newly disturbed sites. When the quarry closed down the disturbance ceased and the beetles disappeared. Now woodland has taken over most of the site.



Abax parallelepipedus
David Nicholls ©
Naturespot

Other beetle species prefer the conditions found in ancient woodland, but few of these have yet reached Dimminsdale. Nevertheless, the woodland floor provides a home for woodland specialists, such as the ground beetle, **Abax parallelepipedus**, which has keels on the shoulders of its wing cases.

The Laundry Pool is too steep-sided and too free of vegetation to be attractive to many species of water beetles. However, a whole community of ground beetles and rove beetles live around the edge, especially on shallow shelves of mud. Twenty species have been recorded so far, including the rove beetle **Stenus bimaculatus**,



Stenus bimaculatus
© Flickr.com

which is black with yellow legs and with a red spot on each wing case. In addition, several species feed on the yellow-cress including the weevil **Poophagus sisymbrii** which has a rather attractive grey and white chequered pattern.



Poophagus sisymbrii
© Wikimedia

It will be interesting to see what beetles are attracted to Laundry Pool and also to the smaller woodland pools as they mature by

silting up and becoming more vegetated. We can expect a much richer community to develop.

The woodland fauna will probably change more slowly as the current generation of trees matures over a long period of time.

BIRDS

In the areas of mature woodland trees the **Chiffchaff** sings from the tops of the tallest twigs and lower down, among the trunks and branches, live the **Green Woodpecker** and **Great Spotted Woodpecker**. **Nuthatch** hunt for insects on the bark and the tiny **Tree-creeper** spirals its way up the trunks in a 'now you see me now you don't' movement.



Nuthatch
© Richard Bowler



Long-tailed tit
© Jon Hawkins

Shrubland and the newer woodland are the domain of the **Blackcap** and, for those who can tell the species apart by their songs, the **Garden Warbler**.

The tit family is also here: **Great Tit**, **Blue Tit**, **Marsh Tit**, **Coal Tit** and parties of **Long-tailed Tits**. **Robin** and **Wren** also sing from the shady parts.

A tawny owl

and chicks has been seen and heard as the chicks have been practising flying from tree to tree.

The open water of the pools attracts **Moorhen** and **Coot**. **Mallard**, **Tufted Duck** and **Canada Goose** may be found at any season.



Laundry pool

Mandarin ducks can be seen overwintering here most years.

Along the stream the **Kingfisher** and **Heron** find a living.

Very often the number of birds at Dimmingsdale seem to be very low; perhaps more study and recording would change this view.

MAMMALS



At dusk **bats** can be seen feeding on insects emerging from the still surface of the pools. Bats recorded so far are **Daubenton's** and **Soprano pipistrelles**.

Daubenton's bat feeding

One survey counted 85 **soprano pipistrelles** coming out from a single wooden bat box.



Soprano pipistrelle



Evidence of deer, most likely **Fallow** and **Muntjac** can regularly be seen by their hoof prints and droppings which they leave behind along the footpaths. **Rabbits** and **wood mice** have also been recorded on motion sensor cameras.

Muntjac
© Elizabeth Dack

This leaflet is dedicated to the memory of Tom Gilfoyle, a Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust member and North West Group Committee Member. Tom spent many hours on recording flora and practical management work at the Trust's nature reserves in North West Leicestershire.

Visitors to Dimmingsdale Nature Reserve are reminded that this site is potentially very dangerous, especially around the margins of the pools. You are urged to remain on the footpaths marked on the accompanying map.

LRWT would like to thank the hard work of the North West Friday Group who carry out practical work on this nature reserve for the benefit of wildlife and visitors and to Volunteer Reserve Officer Bas Forgham.



Some of the North West Friday Group volunteers

Further information about the nature reserve or to volunteer with the North West Group:

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