

**Worthy Down Station
Conservation Project
February 20th 2006**

Worthy Down Station has developed what I consider a rather special natural environment which I have been observing on and off for the past 5 years or so. In particular the area to the west of the platform has some rather exceptional features largely because of the shelter afforded by the platform and the barrier of Birch trees and the very dry nature of the rail bed. This is enhanced by the openness of the site to the west and also by the presence of the tarmac which still lies beneath a thin layer of soil in an area near the fence.

The tarmac area has developed a rather unusual flora more suited to dry sandy and slightly acidic soils than to the Hampshire chalk.

The table below lists some of the species I found during one visit in July last year. I am sure that there are many more. I have marked some of the surprise plants in bold.

On top of these there is an impressive ground cover of lichen and other lower plants as well as a number of fungi including Earth Stars etc.

<i>Taxon</i>	Common name
<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	Sycamore
<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	Yarrow
<i>Aesculus hippocastanum</i>	Horse Chestnut
<i>Anagallis arvensis</i>	Scarlet Pimpernel
<i>Arum maculatum</i>	Cuckoo Pint
<i>Astragalus glycyphyllos</i>	Wild Liquorice
<i>Carduus nutans</i>	Musk Thistle
<i>Centaurea scabiosa</i>	Greater knapweed
<i>Chamaenerion angustifolium</i>	Rosebay Willowherb
<i>Clematis vitalba</i>	Old Man's Beard
<i>Clinopodium acinos</i>	Basil Thyme
<i>Clinopodium vulgare</i>	Wild Basil
<i>Cornus sanguinea</i>	Dogwood
<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>	Hawthorn
<i>Dactylorhiza fuchsii</i>	Common-spotted Orchid
<i>Digitalis purpurea</i>	Foxglove
<i>Epipactis helleborine</i>	Broad-leaved Helleborine
<i>Erodium cicutarium</i>	Common Stork's-bill
<i>Euphrasia nemorosa</i>	Common Eyebright
<i>Fragaria vesca</i>	Wild Strawberry
<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>	Ash
<i>Galium verum</i>	Lady's' Bedstraw
<i>Geranium dissectum</i>	Cut-leaved Crane's-bill
<i>Geranium molle</i>	Dove's-foot Cranesbill
<i>Geum urbanum</i>	Wood Avens
<i>Hypericum perforatum</i>	Perforate St. John's Wort
<i>Lamium album</i>	White Deadnettle
<i>Leontodon hispidus</i>	Rough Hawkbit
<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>	Common Bird's-foot-trefoil
<i>Medicago lupulina</i>	Black Medick
<i>Odontites verna</i>	Red Bartsia
<i>Origanum vulgare</i>	Marjoram

<i>Phyllitis scolopendrium</i>	Hart's-tongue Fern
<i>Potentilla reptans</i>	Creeping Cinquefoil
<i>Prunus avium</i>	Wild Cherry
<i>Pteridium aquilinum</i>	Bracken
<i>Reseda lutea</i>	Mignonette
<i>Rosa canina</i>	Dog Rose
<i>Sambucus nigra</i>	Elder
<i>Scabiosa columbaria</i>	Small Scabious
<i>Sedum acre</i>	Biting Stonecrop
<i>Senecio jacobaea</i>	Common Ragwort
<i>Senecio vulgaris</i>	Groundsel
<i>Silene latifolia</i>	White Campion
<i>Stellaria graminea</i>	Lesser Stitchwort
<i>Symphytum X uplandicum</i>	Russian Comfrey
<i>Tamus communis</i>	Black Bryony
<i>Urtica dioica</i>	Nettle
<i>Verbascum nigrum</i>	Black Mullein
<i>Verbena officinalis</i>	Vervain
<i>Viola odorata</i>	Sweet Violet

The habitat, though impressive and botanically interesting, could be further improved by judicious clearance of some of the scrub at the southern end of the platform as well as at a couple of other spots. This would help to bring back several further plants which were certainly there several years ago but have subsequently been shaded out. This does however highlight a major problem.

The area of tarmac which has the interesting dry-land flora, which ought to be protected, is currently an open invitation to motorbike riders who seem to use it as a skid-pan. Horse riders also seem to divert through here at a gallop from time to time. This is gradually removing the thin top-soil and doing possibly irreparable damage to the habitat. Any clearance we do to improve the area near the platform is likely only to increase the efforts of the bikers to destroy the habitat!

Ideally I would love to see the entire station area fenced off, but this clearly isn't possible. Alternatively fencing off the western side of the platform, with a relatively short length of fence at either end would be eminently practical as it would involve at most about 20 metres of rough fencing. A squeeze stile or similar at each end would keep out the riders but allow walkers free access. As the main path and bridleway runs along the opposite side of the platform this should present no insuperable problems.

As it happens the Wild Liquorice plant lies outside of the area which could easily be fenced off and so this would need a bit of thought.

If this seems like a good idea, or if it could possibly get approval from the Hampshire Paths Partnership, I would be very happy to draw up a detailed plan for presentation.

I believe that the chap from the Paths Partnership is intending to be at the next task on the 19th March and that you were going to take him along to the station. Obviously I would be very keen to be there too but unfortunately I am on holiday that week. What to do?

Michael