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A note of the wildlife of Speckled Wood, Ore, Hastings

Patrick Roper, 17 October 2012

Speckled Wood (previously an area known as the Olla, Holla or Hollow) is an area of woodland around a small stream in the Ore Valley towards the north east of the borough of Hastings. Its greatest length is 468 metres (512 yards) from north east to south west and its greatest width 175 metres (190 yards) from north to south. It is wooded virtually throughout with a mixture of broad-leaved trees many of which will have arisen naturally while others have been planted. All of it is, according to cartographic evidence, secondary woodland. Various parts of the area have in the past been used as gardens, as allotments, as plant nurseries and for grazing. On the 1873-1875 Ordnance Survey map, the land on either side of the stream is shown as open fields and gardens or allotments with a small line of trees towards the north eastern end. By 1925, it was still an open area but no trees at all are shown.

The area along the stream is on the sandstone of the Ashdown Beds and this is surrounded by clays and mudstones, also of the Ashdown series, all laid down in the Cretaceous Period. This is an important Wealden formation very well represented in Hastings. Several valleys run from The Ridge to the sea from the Marline Wood area in the west to the Hastings Country Park in the east. As sandstone gills, often wooded, on a generally south facing aspect near the sea they represent a unique habitat in the British Isles and contain many rare and interesting species, including some that can be considered relicts left behind in the cool, moist conditions as the climate warmed and the main populations moved northwards. The Speckled Wood valley is part of the catchment that includes St Helen's Park and Old Roar Gill and, despite urban development, there may still be scope for flora and fauna to move between these conjoined valleys. The Hastings area is also an important landfall and departure point for migrant birds that often rest and feed in small woodlands and bushy places near the coast before moving on. Unfortunately the valley is heavily infested by the highly invasive Japanese knotweed and some other alien plants.

An ecological study of the area was undertaken by WSP Environmental Ltd. and the Speckled Wood stream is mentioned, but categorised of only moderate ecological significance. This appears to be based, at least partly, on the lack of emergent vegetation, although the majority of species-rich Wealden gills have little or no emergent vegetation. To understand the value of the stream the water quality would need to be tested and studies done on the flora and fauna, particularly the mosses, liverworts and invertebrates and WSP do not appear to have done this. On a brief field trip to the area in October 2012 by the author of this note a number of aquatic insects associated with the stream were recorded including the meniscus midge *Dixa nubilipennis*. This is a species typical of Wealden gills and the early stages need good quality water indicating that the Speckled Wood stream still retains its ecological value. Another insect, a sawfly *Metallus lanceolatus*, was found mining leaves of wood avens (*Geum urbanum*) and is the first record of this species from Sussex.

With appropriate management Speckled Wood could continue to act as a valuable wildlife reserve with gradual improvement as time went by. Indeed an urban site like this can sometimes be more productive than similar places in the countryside that may be quite seriously affected by spray drift and other pollutants from agriculture. It would continue to be part of the green network in Hastings and remain one of the semi-natural areas around a spring-fed stream, streams that are among the most interesting aspects of the Borough's biodiversity (Marline Valley, Old Roar Gill, St Helen's Park

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and the Country Park streams, which are all examples of this kind of habitat, are important on a national and international scale).

A list of species recently recorded from Speckled Wood is given below. It only represents a very small number of the plants and animals that will occur here, but gives some illustration of the biodiversity and character of the area. Species outlined in grey are not British natives.

<i>Rhytisma acerinum</i>	Sycamore Tarspot
<i>Xylaria hypoxylon</i>	Candlesnuff Fungus
<i>Crepidotus mollis</i>	Peeling Oysterling
<i>Armillaria mellea</i>	Honey Fungus
<i>Pluteus salicinus</i>	Willow Shield
<i>Trametes versicolor</i>	Turkeytail
<i>Lunularia cruciata</i>	Crescent-cup Liverwort
<i>Brachythecium rutabulum</i>	Rough-stalked Feather-moss
<i>Eurhynchium pumilum</i>	Dwarf Feather-moss
<i>Fissidens taxifolius</i>	Common Pocket-moss
<i>Phyllitis scolopendrium</i>	Hart's-tongue
<i>Dryopteris dilatata</i>	Broad Buckler-fern
<i>Dryopteris filix-mas</i>	Male-fern
<i>Polystichum setiferum</i>	Soft Shield-fern
<i>Athyrium filix-femina</i>	Lady-fern
<i>Taxus baccata</i>	Yew
<i>Arum italicum</i> subsp. <i>neglectum</i>	Italian Lords-and Ladies
<i>Carex pendula</i>	Pendulous Sedge
<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	Sycamore
<i>Aethusa cynapium</i>	Fool's Parsley
<i>Anthriscus sylvestris</i>	Cow Parsley
<i>Heracleum sphondylium</i>	Hogweed
<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>	Holly
<i>Hedera helix</i>	Ivy
<i>Hedera hibernica</i>	Atlantic Ivy ¹
<i>Cirsium vulgare</i>	Spear Thistle
<i>Eupatorium cannabinum</i>	Hemp-agrimony
<i>Lapsana communis</i>	Nipplewort
<i>Picris echioides</i>	Bristly Oxtongue
<i>Senecio jacobaea</i>	Common Ragwort
<i>Sonchus oleraceus</i>	Smooth Sow-thistle
<i>Taraxacum officinale</i> agg.	Dandelion
<i>Impatiens glandulifera</i>	Indian Balsam
<i>Corylus avellana</i>	Hazel
<i>Alliaria petiolata</i>	Garlic Mustard
<i>Cardamine hirsuta</i>	Hairy Bitter-cress
<i>Coronopus didymus</i>	Lesser Swine-cress
<i>Buddleja davidii</i>	Butterfly-bush
<i>Lonicera periclymenum</i>	Honeysuckle

¹ The origin of this species is uncertain.

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<i>Sambucus nigra</i>	Elder
<i>Symphoricarpos albus</i>	Snowberry
<i>Viburnum opulus</i>	Guelder-rose
<i>Euonymus japonicus</i>	Evergreen Spindle
<i>Hypericum androsaemum</i>	Tutsan
<i>Calystegia sepium</i>	Hedge Bindweed
<i>Quercus robur</i>	Pedunculate Oak
<i>Geranium robertianum</i>	Herb-Robert
<i>Aesculus hippocastanum</i>	Horse-chestnut
<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>	Ash
<i>Ligustrum ovalifolium</i>	Garden Privet
<i>Ligustrum vulgare</i>	Wild Privet
<i>Epilobium</i>	A Willow Herb
<i>Plantago major</i>	Greater Plantain
<i>Fallopia japonica</i>	Japanese Knotweed
<i>Persicaria maculosa</i>	Redshank
<i>Rumex obtusifolius</i>	Broad-leaved Dock
<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>	Hawthorn
<i>Geum urbanum</i>	Wood Avens
<i>Prunus domestica</i>	Wild Plum
<i>Rubus fruticosus</i> agg.	Bramble
<i>Rubus idaeus</i>	Raspberry
<i>Galium aparine</i>	Cleavers
<i>Populus</i> sp.	A black poplar
<i>Salix cinerea</i>	Grey Willow
<i>Salix fragilis</i>	Crack-willow
<i>Scrophularia nodosa</i>	Common Figwort
<i>Tilia</i> sp.	A Lime
<i>Urtica dioica</i>	Common Nettle
<i>Entomobrya nivalis</i>	A springtail
<i>Ectopsocus briggsi</i>	A barklouse
<i>Empoasca vitis</i>	A planthopper
<i>Issus coleoptratus</i>	A beetle bug
<i>Rhagonycha fulva</i>	Common Red Soldier Beetle
<i>Coccinella septempunctata</i>	7-spot Ladybird
<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>	Red Admiral
<i>Polygonia c-album</i>	Comma
<i>Pararge aegeria</i>	Speckled Wood
<i>Stigmella aurella</i>	Golden Pigmy Moth
<i>Limonia nubeculosa</i>	A short-palped crane fly
<i>Dixa nubilipennis</i>	A meniscus midge
<i>Micropsectra atrofasciata</i>	A non-biting midge
<i>Lonchoptera lutea</i>	A lonchopterid fly
<i>Eristalis tenax</i>	Drone Fly
<i>Myathropa florea</i>	False Drone Fly
<i>Phytomyza ilicis</i>	Holly Leaf Gall Fly
<i>Hylemya nigrimana</i>	A wood fly
<i>Metallus lanceolatus</i>	A sawfly

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<i>Bufo bufo</i>	Common Toad
<i>Anguis fragilis</i>	Slow-worm
<i>Larus argentatus</i>	Herring Gull
<i>Columba palumbus</i>	Common Wood Pigeon
<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	European Robin
<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	Eurasian Jay
<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	Red Fox
<i>Meles meles</i>	Eurasian Badger
<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>	Eastern Grey Squirrel