

In Search of the Lindisfarne Helleborine **Saturday 15th July, Leader Phil Davey of English Nature**

On Saturday 15th July, Phil Davey of English Nature led a walk on Holy Island in search of the above. Searching on our part, but he knew the way. Berwick Wildlife Group had asked him to arrange the walk, which he very kindly did, but it was open to non-members and was well-attended. Before we started the walk he explained how the geology of the island and the fact that the sea regularly covers part of it affect the plants which grow there. This in turn influences the animal life as insects, for example, have particular food choices.

Common cats-ear, scarlet pimpernel, purging flax, brookweed, marsh pennywort, ladies' bedstraw, orchids all around us. They flourish on the lime-rich soil of the island. We walked over a carpet of bog pimpernel and creeping willow, watching six-spotted burnet



moths on the blue and pink flowers of viper's bugloss. My wildflower book describes bog pimpernel as pale pink, but in the strong sunlight the petals looked as if they were carved in ivory. The dark green fritillaries were every where. They are, strangely, bright orange butterflies with black patterning on all four wings. It is the underwings which are thickly dusted with green, giving the insect its name, and the hind-wing spots are silver. The caterpillars, not in evidence as far as we could see, are velvety black with red spots and a yellow stripe along the back. They feed on violets in spring. Looking closely, we could see the violet leaves growing near the ground, the flowers long past. The fritillaries were making the most of the hot sun, fluttering around, and the number of pairs suggested that mating was very much on the agenda.



Helleborines are flowers of the orchid family, much more attractive than their name would lead you to

believe. First of all we saw marsh helleborines, spikes of small, creamy-white flowers touched with pink. These were growing in their hundreds.

Then we went looking for the Lindisfarne version. Not so long ago this was not recognised as a separate species: my flower books consider this to be an example of the very similar dune helleborine. To the untutored eye they are identical. However, in the last few years the Lindisfarne version has been recognised as a separate species, found only on Holy Island. The scientific name of the dune helleborine is *Epipactis dunensis*. In a rather nice tribute to the history of Holy Island, the Lindisfarne version has been named *Epipactis sancta*. We are indeed fortunate to live in an area with such a rich diversity of wildlife.



Molly, 31st July 2006