



RINGWOOD NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

St Catherine's Hill Walk

Date: 4th February 2020
Weather: Sunny 10 degrees
Walk Leaders: Sonia Wilkinson and Judy Thomas
Attendees: 12

St Catherine's Hill covers 86 acres (35 hectares) and is 173ft (53 metres) above sea level with spectacular views, it has an area of heathland and coniferous forest sandwiched between the floodplain of the Avon Valley and the suburban sprawl of Christchurch and Bournemouth. It is bordered by Town Common Nature Reserve and is home to a large number of important wildlife species including the Dartford Warbler, Woodcock, Nightjar, damp loving plants such as Sundew, Dragonflies, Heath Grasshopper and Silver-studded Blue Butterfly. All six species of native British reptile occur on the heath, the site is managed by the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust and leased from the owners, the Malmesbury Estate. The site is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), RAMSAR, Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Area (SPA).

St Catherine is the patron saint of spinsters, lawyers, librarians, teachers, and theologians, her legend says she was clever at argument. Her cult was founded in the 4th century at the foot of Mount Sinai, which she supposedly ascended on her death, hills or mounts would come into the legend early on. There is also a legend which relates how when Christchurch Priory was first being built, the hill was the originally chosen site. When the workers carted the foundation stones up the hill, the next day they found them back down at the foot of the hill again. After this happened twice, it was taken as a hint by unnamed supernatural forces that the church should be built down below and subsequently it was built in Christchurch.

Our walk started from the car park situated off Fairmile Road with the junction of Marsh Lane which leads to Dudmoor Farm Road, walking along what was the Ringwood & Christchurch Railway Line opened in 1862. Most of the land along the route was owned by Lord Malmesbury including St Catherine's Hill, he lived at Avon Castle and had a station built called Avon Lodge now a private house. Another station was at Hurn and this is now the Avon Causeway Pub which still has the platform along with a railway carriage. The line closed in 1938 due to lack of use. After turning off the road we walked over the heathland trying to avoid the waterlogged areas. Towards the top we had a beautiful view of the Avon Valley floodplains, flooded due to our very wet winter. Returning back down over the heath to St Catherine's Hill Lane and our cars.

Birds	Birds cont.	Flowering Plants
Blackbird	Cormorant	Three-cornered Garlic
Blue Tit	Buzzard	Hazel Catkins
Carrion Crow	Herring Gull	Gorse
Long-tailed Tit	Black-headed Gull	Lesser Celandine
Wood Pigeon	Jay	Crocus
Mallard		
Great Tit		
Robin		
Wren		
Mute Swan		
Shelduck		
Grey Heron		



Lesser Celandine by Lyn Traves



Flooded Avon Valley by Lyn Traves