

Wildlife of Troopers Hill - June 2006.

Nick Hudson.

Troopers Hill is well known for its beautiful displays of colour from the Gorse, the Broom and from the Heathers but mixed in amongst these showy shrubs are some colourful little plants which are well worth investigating.

Some of the most obvious plants in flower at the moment are members of the Daisy family. While initially all looking rather like “dandelions” a closer inspection soon reveals some striking differences. Many have several characteristics that mean they can be mistaken for no other and can be recognised with or without flowers.

One of the commonest of these dandelion types is the small **Mouse-ear-hawkweed** *Pilosella officinarum*. This little plant is one of those which can easily be recognised whether in flower or not. When in bloom its pale yellow flowers sit at the top of un-branched stems and the undersides of the petals are usually striped with red. When not in flower it is the leaves which give it away. They do look rather like hairy mouse’s ears! This is a “rosette” forming plant which often spreads low over the ground in dense patches.



The pale-yellow flower of Mouse-ear-hawkweed with conspicuous red striping on the undersides.



The long-haired leaves of Mouse-ear-hawkweed.

Another plant to look out for is **Cat's-ear *Hypochaeris radicata***. This is generally bigger than Mouse-ear-hawkweed and has longer, often branched flower stems with larger, rich orange-yellow flowers which have many undeveloped little "leaflets" just below the flower. The wavy-edged leaves are quite distinctive, being rather fleshy with denser, shorter hairs. Again, it is a rosette-forming plant and can be picked out when not in flower by the distinctive nerve running down the centre of the leaf which becomes very broad at the base of the leaf.



The deep-yellow flower of Cat's-ear.



A side view showing the "leaflets" below the flower.



The rosette leaves of Cat's-ear.



The leaf midrib is much broader at the base.

And now for something completely different!

Another of the unusual plants found on the hill is **Wavy Hair-grass *Deschampsia flexuosa***. This grass is scarce in the Bristol area and is usually found only in acidic grasslands and open woodlands. This is a good time of year to see the flowering heads which have a beautiful silvery look to them. Wavy Hair-grass can be found on most parts of the hill growing in dense tufts of shiny, bright green leaves.



Wavy Hair-grass in the wind.



A close-up of the minute flowers of Wavy Hair-grass.