

Ledbury Naturalists Field Club

**Field Survey  
of  
Ledbury Cycle Track and Riverside Walk  
1999**



## **Acknowledgements**

**Project Coordinator:** Peter Garnett

### **Document, Data Collation**

**And Photography:** Janet Parry

**Graphics:** Alan Parry

### **Members who carried out the survey, whose expertise and help was vital to the success of the project:**

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## **Objective**

At the A.G.M. in December 1998 it was decided to conduct a baseline survey of the wildlife in two areas of Ledbury.

1. The Riverside Walk from the Hereford Road to the Ross Road.
2. The Cycle Track from the Station to the Ross Road.

## **Rationale**

### **The Riverside Walk**

When the Ledbury by-pass was constructed in the late 1980s, it was found necessary to divert the course of the River Leadon. The stretch from Dickenson's factory to just beyond the Little Marcle roundabout was re-channelled. A great deal of earth moving, tree planting and re-seeding followed. At the Hereford Road end a gravel path has been laid and re-laid after the floods of Easter 1998. This is much used and is undoubtedly an asset for local people and other walkers.

We were interested to discover how the river had settled in its new bed and how successful the rehabilitation of the riverside areas had been especially the colonisation by wild life. The survey would also produce baseline data for future surveys, enabling changes to be monitored.

### **The Cycle Track**

The Cycle Track, laid two years ago after considerable controversy, is well used by walkers and cyclists alike and is a very popular feature. Collecting data along the track would show its added importance as a wildlife habitat, and enable changes to be monitored in the future.

The route of the track follows the line of the Canal and the Gloucester to Ledbury Railway.

## **Historical Background**

### **The Gloucester to Hereford Canal**

The Grand Opening took place on the 30<sup>th</sup> March 1798, when the first barge along the canal reached Ledbury from Gloucester in 4 hours. The price of coal in Ledbury fell from 120p to 67p a ton. Moves to complete the canal from Ledbury to Hereford started in 1837 with the appointment of Stephen Ballard as engineer. The basin at Ledbury was enlarged to take increased traffic. Five locks were built between Ross Road and Bye Street, which raised the water level 65 feet to the summit point. A few remains of a lock wall can be seen between Woodleigh Road and Little Marcle Road. The canal was completed in 1845.

### **The Gloucester to Ledbury Railway**

The canal was already in difficulties with competition from the railways. With the construction of the Worcester to Hereford Railway in 1861, much canal trade was lost, and it is not surprising that, in 1863, the canal was leased to the Great Western and Midland Railway Companies for £5,000 a year.

In 1881 the Great Western Railway began building the Ledbury to Gloucester Railway, which followed the line of the canal. It was necessary to fill in the bed of the canal and little remains of its existence.

The railway was opened to traffic on 27<sup>th</sup> July 1885. The Ledbury Town Halt was opened on 26<sup>th</sup> November 1928. It was sited near the Bridge Street entrance to the Recreation Ground. The line was closed to passenger traffic under the Beeching Axe on 11<sup>th</sup> July 1959. The rest deteriorated until 1985 when the



**Fig. 1 Old canal / railway track - (C2)**

Manpower Services Commission, Ledbury Town Council, and Malvern Hills District Council, employed 11 unemployed people to clean up the Recreation Ground and the railway line. It became the Town Trail. In 1998 it was upgraded to a cycle track by improving the surface and clearing back the vegetation in places. Although the Cycle Track finishes at Little Marcle Road, a footpath to the west of the sewage works leads the walker or cyclist to the Ross Road.

### **Conducting the Survey**

From March to October 1999 a group drawn from 16 willing volunteers recorded the wildlife in the two areas. These were divided into 4 zones as follows:

- Riverside 1 (R1)      Hereford Road to Dickenson's Factory on the by-pass
- Riverside 2 (R2)      Dickenson's to the Ross Road Picnic Site
- Cycle Track 1 (C1)    The Station to Bridge Street
- Cycle Track 2 (C2)    Bridge Street to the Ross Road

The Riverside zones vary in habitat. R1 is formally maintained with mown grass, gravel paths and groups of newly planted shrubs.



**Fig. 2 R1 - Hereford Road End**



R2 is more natural with long grass and a track along the stream side. This is the area most affected by the alterations to the bed of the river.

**Fig. 3 R2 - New cut for River Leadon**

The two zones of the Cycle Track also vary. C1 passes on a high embankment through a recently built up area of town mainly along the old rail track. It is shaded by tall trees and well drained. Glades have been opened to the light to encourage insect life.



**Fig. 4 C1 - Old railway embankment**



C2 is more sheltered than C1 with a mixture of habitats, going through a deep damp cutting, across a more open grassy area and through newly planted woodland.

**Fig. 5 C2 - Newly planted woodland**

The volunteers met on the last Monday of every month and divided the areas of observation between them, covering the full length of the paths described. Records were made of all flowering plants, grasses, trees, fungi, mosses, ferns, birds, insects, spiders, slugs, snails and other invertebrates that were found.

We were fortunate to have the assistance of several well-known experts in their field, and great trouble was taken to verify each record to ensure the reliability of the survey as far as possible.

This report has its limitations in the number of times that each site was visited and that the survey only covered 8 months of the year. Records of birds, insects and other invertebrate in particular are likely to under represent species in the area. However, it will provide a yardstick to check the management of the sites in 2 or 3 years from now.

## **Results and Comment**

The species recorded were collated for each observation zone. Complete details can be found in the appendix to this report.

In summary the following numbers of species were noted:

	<b>Flowers</b>	<b>Grasses</b>	<b>Trees</b>	<b>Fungi</b>	<b>Birds</b>	<b>Butterflies</b>	<b>Other Insects and Invertebrates</b>
<b>Riverside</b>	154	31	25	13	43	18	108
<b>Cycle Track</b>	183	23	35	40	35	15	75
<b>Total Species</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>148</b>

It was pleasing to see such a large range of flowering plants, grasses and trees, many common to both the Riverside and Cycle Track. Many botanical groups were represented including five types of Willow. The notorious Japanese Knotweed was also found in both sections. The club listed the flora on the old railway track in 1969, and while some of the plants recorded then, such as Dark Mullein and Evening Primrose, are no longer present, the current number of species is much greater. A good range of fungi was recorded, especially on the Cycle Track. Parts of the Riverside are too new to have a wide range of species at this stage.

Despite limited observation time, 46 species of bird were seen. The kingfisher, skylark and barn owl observations were particularly pleasing. The Riverside in particular, yielded 18 species of butterflies, reflecting the good range of flowering plants. The rest of the insect group is large and includes flies, crickets, damsel flies, bees and wasps, frog hoppers, bugs, beetles and weevils as well as a range of other invertebrates such as spiders, earwigs, millipedes, centipedes, woodlice, slugs and snails. It is suspected that this is only a small selection of the true range of species, and if time had allowed, many more would have been found.

Evidence was found of moles and rabbits. Dr. Birks, a local mammals expert, found otter spraints near Little Marcle bridge, maybe a visitor. The presence of a kingfisher suggests a fish supply.

The Hereford Road end of R1 is still in its infancy in terms of colonisation. Many plants that flourish on disturbed land, may well disappear as the area matures. Currently it is popular with birds such as willow warblers, common whitethroat, finches, chiffchaffs and yellow hammers. The skylark is still heard here, about the only place left in Ledbury, as this bird has suffered a drastic decline nationally in recent years.

On the wilder R2 section of the Riverside, towards the Ross Road, the seed mix used on the resurfaced land is successfully colonising and attracting a variety of invertebrates. It is hoped that it is left in its natural state and does not become a substitute for a park. This will be monitored in future years to see if the flora settles and maintains its successful beginning.

Along the Cycle Track, the damper sections through town attracted a range of moisture loving plants. Most of the birds were those usually associated with a suburban garden, such as robins, blackbirds, tits, finches and sparrows although blackcaps, goldcrests and chiffchaffs were heard. Occasionally buzzards, swallows, swifts and house martins passed over. The Ross Road end of C2 is still in the immature stage. The flowers attracted plenty of insects but whether these will thrive as the trees shade them out in future years is doubtful but should be monitored.

Unfortunately, the Cycle Track suffered in places from litter, vandalism and garden refuse dumping, which greatly detracts from this attractive town resource.

This initial survey has shown the value to the biodiversity of wildlife in Ledbury of these two areas which contain many different habitats. Given sympathetic treatment with flora and fauna in mind, the Cycle track and Riverside will prove to be valuable areas for the people of Ledbury to enjoy both now and in the future.

### **Recommendations for future management and improvement**

1. Maintain the hay meadow regime on Riverside 2 which is already attracting many insects including 18 varieties of butterfly.
2. Monitor the prevalence of Japanese Knotweed.
3. Provide steps where the track crosses the Little Marcle Bridge, as the track is steep, slippery and dangerous.
4. Attend to the wet nature of the Cycle Track from Bridge Street to Oatleys Road.
5. Discourage the dumping of garden and other refuse onto the cycle track and clear as necessary.
6. Clear the litter bins more often and encourage their use.
7. Provide information boards at the Hereford Road end of the Cycle Track.

## **Distribution**

1. The County Green Spaces Unit.
2. Ledbury Town Council.
3. Herefordshire Nature Trust.
4. English Nature.
5. British Trust for Ornithology.
6. Herefordshire Ornithological Club.
7. Ledbury Naturalists Field Club.
8. Sustrans.
9. Ledbury in Bloom Committee.
10. Ledbury Library
11. Holme Lacy College Local Records Centre

## **Appendix**