

Kent is particularly well blessed with a wonderful array of wild orchids. Out of the 50 or so species that grow in Britain, about 25 different varieties can be found in Kent in any one season. Some are woodland species whilst others favour chalk down land or dune slacks. The sheer elegance and beauty of these plants hold an enormous fascination for botanists and general naturalists alike and many partake in an annual pilgrimage to photograph some of their favourite species.

Some are common and can be found in most counties in the UK whilst others are rare and are restricted to just one or two counties and then, such as the Monkey and Lizard Orchids in Kent, to just one or two sites.

Fortunately orchids are now protected and many can be found on Nature Reserves. It was just a few decades ago that children would pick whole bunches of orchids (including Lady Orchids) to present to their mothers.

Our orchids are perhaps not in the same league as some of their tropical cousins, but they are still incredibly beautiful and to find them growing wild in some piece of woodland or in a flower meadow still creates a sense of joy and excitement.

This season has been particularly exciting at the Bay with some very large numbers of some of our species being found. On the other side of the coin there have been some disappointments too. Lizard Orchids were well down in numbers and those that did flower were mostly burnt off or broken by strong north easterly winds in late May and early June.

Although not yet the flowering time for Broad-leaved Helleborine, it looks as if the scrub-clearance on the golf course has destroyed much of the only colony of this species in our area. Three plants have been found, so there is hope that the numbers may increase again in years to come.

On a more positive note 4 Fragrant Orchids have been found. This species has not been recorded since the 1950s and in the same field the second only ever Spotted Orchid appeared. This too has not been seen since the mid 1970s.

Green-winged Orchids did well albeit most specimens remained small in the cold weather, Marsh Orchids are abundant and Pyramidal Orchids are present in huge numbers. Twayblades did well in two sites and Marsh Helleborines are just coming up to the flowering stage (end June) in three sites.

I would ask people looking for the latter species to be extremely careful as they are very easy to miss and every year we lose some to trampling. Photographers please take special care.

Bee Orchids are present on one of the golf courses but unfortunately we don't have permission to look for them but there are plenty in sites nearby. A particularly good show in fact.

No Man Orchids showed up in public areas this year but they almost certainly will be flowering on the golf course but out of reach.

We hope Autumn Lady's Tresses will show their tiny heads in August and that will complete the year of orchids at the Bay.

So twelve species, two almost new, one not seen this year within our area and one more to come. Not bad for effectively just one type of habitat.