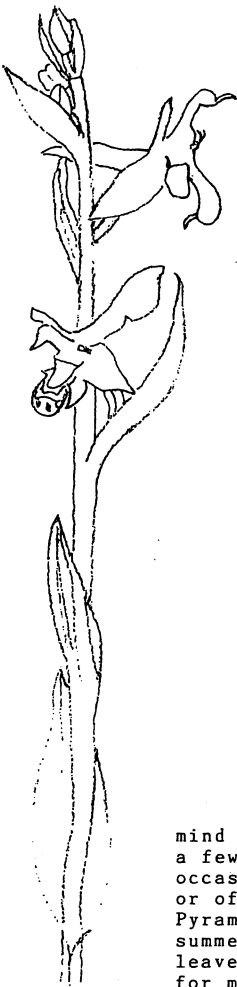


The Orchids of Turvey and hereabouts

This seems a fitting subject for article number 50 in this series, which, at four per year, means that we've had over twelve years now to gather enough material to make a respectable attempt at a difficult subject. My local list now numbers seven species with at least one other known of nearby. In usual order of appearance these are :

- Early Purple Orchid - late April & early May
- Common Twayblade - early May to early June
- Common Spotted Orchid - late May to late June
- (Early) Marsh Orchid - 23 May 2002 at Harrold
- Bee Orchid - early June to mid-July
- Pyramidal Orchid - mid-June to mid-July
- Broad-leaved Helleborine - leaves only 31 August 2002 near Odell.

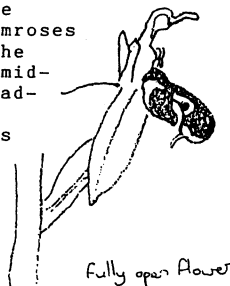


Bee Orchid

The missing one is Green-winged Orchid which occurs over the county border in Northamptonshire at a well-known site yet to be visited by me. None of these is particularly rare but they are always exciting to find if only because of their unusual life styles and uncertainty of appearance. They can take anything from five to fifteen years to flower after germination and so one can never be sure whether they will appear in just ones or twos or in hundreds. The dust-like seeds are also small enough to be carried virtually anywhere which makes new finds always a possibility, especially as we are now in a period of rapid climate change.

Most of these orchids are pollinated by insects and go to ingenious lengths to make sure that they first attract insects and then to make sure that the insects carry away the pollen to fertilise another plant. If you want to be convinced of this poke a sharp pencil into the mouth of a Common Spotted Orchid and withdraw it gently. You may well find two bundles of pollen masses attached in a vertical position to the pencil tip. If you wait a moment these often pivot forward into a horizontal position ready to do their job at the next flower. Strangely, the Bee Orchid, which seems ideally suited for such an operation, has become self-pollinating!

Each of our orchids carries with it a host of associations. The Early Purple, for example, brings to mind the first flush of flowers beneath hazel or ash coppice, a few red spikes in a sea of Bluebells with the occasional flash of yellow from a clump of Primroses or of white from a cluster of Wood Anemones. The Pyramidal and Bee Orchids are redolent of hot mid-summer days in grassy clearings, while the Broad-leaved Helleborine, in contrast, always has, for me, a touch of sadness about it as it comes late and is a plant of deep shade signalling the shorter days of autumn fast approaching. If this has whetted your appetite now is the time to start looking. Happy hunting.



Fully open flower