

An everchanging menu on Troopers Hill

As the months pass, different flowers blossom on Troopers Hill. This month we are focusing on two very different yellow-flowered plants.

The most noticeable by far is Golden rod (*Solidago virgaurea*); this tall plant seems to have really benefited from this year's weather. It is flowering all over the Hill sometimes in swathes, elsewhere in small groups. A leaflet from Butterfly Conservation focuses entirely on this plant because of its importance for moths. "Nine species feed solely or almost entirely on the plant, with species eating different parts." Over 30 other moth species have been reported feeding on the plant. Gall flies and leaf-mining flies, including some very rare species, are also associated with Goldenrod.

Goldenrod is reported as declining in some areas, "probably due to loss of habitat and appropriate management". The advice on appropriate management is "stands should be protected from invasive scrub" which is exactly what volunteers from Friends of Troopers Hill at their conservation management work parties. It is a perennial plant which means it continues to grow from its roots every year.

Here and there on the Hill you will clusters of St Johns Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) plants with a mass of five-petalled, yellow flowers. If you hold up a leaf you will see the sun shining through what look like perforations in the leaves but are oil glands.



Herbal remedies can be found on sale that contain St John's Wort but beware, there are a number of medications that interact very badly with St John's Wort. The blood thinner, Apixiban, often prescribed after bad limb fractures, operations or strokes, comes with warnings not to take St Johns Wort. It also counteracts the effectiveness of the contraceptive pill.

St Johns Wort is self-pollinating so does not need to be visited by bees or other pollinators to create seeds. The word to describe plants that self-pollinate is apomictic. Despite this you will see the flowers being visited by hoverflies and bees.

It is a food-plant for the caterpillars of the Treble-bar (*Aplocera plagiata*) moth which, as its name suggests, has three wavy bars crossing its wings. Look out for the small, purple iridescent beetle *Chrysolini hyperici* feeding on the flowers and leaf tips of St Johns Wort. The beetle larvae feed on the shoot tips and basal and developing leaves. As each female beetle can easily lay several hundred eggs it is clear why it and the Treble-bar have been introduced to other countries to act as a biological control for St John's Wort where it is considered to be an invasive weed. The plant is not a problem in this country where it will quickly vanish when it is dug up and we have at least another four species of moth that eat the plant.

If you want to want to keep Troopers Hill blooming and learn more about plants and wildlife, the Friends always need more volunteers. So, if you have 2 hours to spare, please come along to any of our conservation work parties . **There is a conservation work party on the 1st Saturday and 3rd Thursday of every month, starting promptly at 10am and finishing at noon. The volunteers meet by the red slide on Troopers Hill Field.**