

## WAKEHURST PLACE COACH TRIP

In July a coach full of members and friends went to Wakehurst Place, Nr. Ardingley, West Sussex. The Wakehurst Place house and estate is owned by The National Trust, but the grounds consisting of gardens, woodland and lakes are managed and funded by the Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew. Some people walked as far as the Wetland Conservation Area where there were many Damselflies, but there was not time to include the nearby Loder Valley Nature Reserve (still part of the Wakehurst Estate). In the wildflower meadows and in the woodland areas was an abundance of the Common Spotted Orchid, *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*. "The Slips" contained these Orchids and other wild flowers, some quite rare: the practice of late summer mowing after the seeds of the wild flowers have fallen, has enabled the various species to multiply. In the Himalayan garden giant Himalayan lilies, *Cardiocrinum*, and Japanese Iris *ensata* can be seen in July, and the Water Garden had many species of *Astilbe*. In the Southern Hemisphere Garden the beds still contain many specimens that were introduced as far back as 1903 when Gerald Loder (later Lord Wakehurst of Ardingly) acquired Wakehurst Place.

Also at Wakehurst is housed the Millennium Seed Bank where virtually all of the UK92s native plants are stored. Within the vaults of the Seed Bank are over one and a half billion seeds from all over the world, representing 30,000 wild plant species. This is where our native plants are saved and safely stored ensuring that future generations will always be able to enjoy the beauty of the flowers, wild and cultivated, common or rare, from past centuries. It will save our plants from the threat of extinction and make them available for use in the future.

OWLS members enjoyed a film and an inter-active exhibition about this amazing project, and were able to see some examples of the types of plants being saved for the future.

At the end of the day everyone agreed that Wakehurst was a fantastic place to visit with such a wide variety of flora and fauna to see.

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