



## Plants to look out for in June



### Sanicle (*Sanicula europaea*)

This demure plant of shady woodland places sits in the carrot family – so it is related to cow parsley and is a close relative of a favourite garden plant, *Astrantia major*. While cow parsley will come towards the end of its flowering time later this month, Sanicle is only just getting started – and can be found in flower up until late September. I first came across this delicate plant on the edge of woodland close to Chequers Knapp, and since then I have spotted it in many places – including within most of the woodlands around Prestwood. It favours chalky / base-rich soils.



Sanicle is a small plant – apparently it can grow up to 60cm tall, but around 30cm is more typical. Its leaves resemble those of a geranium, and its pompoms of tiny white / pale pink flowers clumped tightly together measure about 1cm across. Its name is derived from the Latin ‘*sanus*’, meaning healthy, as this plant has been used for centuries for its healing properties.

### Speedwells

Speedwells are now in the midst of flowering... and with at least 10 species found in our area, identification can seem overwhelming. So, start simple! Here are 4 of our most common species, and each has a distinguishing feature that will allow you to tell it from the rest. One thing they all have in common is a similar flower structure (although colour varies significantly). **Each flower has 4 sepals, 4 petals and 2 prominent stamens** (each tipped with an obvious ‘blob’ - the anther), and a single stigma. The **fruit capsules that develop from the fertilised flowers are all approximately heart-shaped**.



#### Germander speedwell (*Veronica chamaedrys*)

Notable for its **bold, deep blue / indigo flowers**, the germander speedwell favours hedge banks and edges of woodland. Its overall appearance is slightly more robust than the other 3 species included here. Stems (below the flowering stalks) are **square in cross section, with 2 lines of white hairs on opposite sides**. This species favours well-drained, calcareous soils.

#### Thyme leaved speedwell (*Veronica serpyllifolia*)

The clue is in the name! Leaves of this generally more delicate species are **small and oval with smooth edges - closely resembling those of thyme**. Its **flowers are very pale blue or even white in colour**. It tends to grow in open places, such as short grassland and it is a common garden weed. This species can be found on damp, acid soils and is widespread and common throughout the country.





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### Common Field speedwell (*Veronica persica*)

Probably one of the first flowers that I learned to recognise, on the playing field of my primary school, this species can be distinguished from the others by its flowers. They are **generally bright blue, with the exception of the lower petal, which is always much paler - almost white**. Its leaves are toothed, resembling those of the Germander speedwell, and it can be found flowering at any time of year.

### Ivy-leaved speedwell (*Veronica hederifolia*)

Probably the hairiest of the 4 species included here, the clue is once again in the name – the slightly thickened, **lobed leaves of this species resemble tiny ivy leaves**. Its **flowers are pale lilac** – quite different in colour to the other 3 species. Flowering time is almost over for this plant now – it tends to flower from April to May. It is a weed of cultivation, found in arable fields, gardens and waste ground.



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### Horse Chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*)

Often thought of as a British tree, the Horse Chestnut was brought to England from Turkey by John Tradescant the Elder in 1612. Instantly recognisable throughout the seasons, it bears sticky buds in late winter, candles of flowers in spring / summer, and conkers in autumn.



But have you ever taken a really good look at the flowers? Each individual flower has yellow blotches ('nectar guides'), at their centre when they first open. These turn red once pollinated – signalling to its pollinators that the flower is not worth visiting, since it has been pollinated and is no longer producing nectar. **You can tell, at a glance, whether each flower has been pollinated or not.**

Horse chestnuts are currently challenged with a range of diseases. These include 'Bleeding Canker', an infection that causes growths and cracks on the trunk, and visible 'bleeding' of the trunk and branches. It can infect, and ultimately kill, trees of any age. The 'Horse Chestnut Leaf Miner' is the caterpillar of a leaf-mining moth, which feeds within the leaves, destroying the leaf tissues. **If you carefully open the cavity that**

**these larvae create, you will find them wriggling away inside.** It can cause severe damage to horse chestnut leaves on an annual basis, with discolouration and defoliation before normal autumn leaf-fall. This pest does not significantly impair tree health on its own, and trees usually grow leaves normally the next spring, but the long-term damage of this possibly weakening the tree is not yet known, and in combination with other diseases it could pose a significant threat to our conker trees.



### Another word on the buttercups

If you enjoyed studying the buttercups last month, why not take another look at them now? **Notice how their flowers are gradually being replaced by their spiky, spherical fruits.**



### And finally...

June is the month in which many of our glorious native orchids come into flower. One of my favourites, the Bee Orchid, can be found in a surprising number of sites around our area, so keep your eyes peeled!