



Toothwort

**Start at the Car Park as shown and turn right (R) into Biggin Hill Recreation Ground; keep R following hedge for 200m.**

**1** Continue through to the woodland with its big oak trees, beech and hazel: a remnant of the semi-natural ancient woodland which the

Darwins called 'The Big Woods'. In spring look for toothwort, parasitic on the roots of hazel, as you turn right onto the tarmac path. Darwin explained how as the sap rises in the tree, the toothwort takes in water from its host which it secretes from its underground, scale-like leaves, moistening the soil so its arched shoot can more easily push through the ground.



Hazel catkins in spring



Chalk Milkwort

**5** In May and June notice patches of yellow crosswort on the western side of the fairway, and as you walk up the eastern slope, bright blue patches of chalk milkwort which Darwin described as, 'almost equal to an alpine gentian'. He observed how milkwort flowers were often not visited by bees when they first opened, but many bees visited together as soon as the weather warmed. He suggested that this was because secretion of milkwort nectar depended on temperature and the bees were attracted by its scent.



Crosswort

**At Jail Lane, turn left (L), take footpath opposite**



Midland Hawthorn

**2** You are walking into the Downe Valley. The hedgerow on your right with its midland hawthorn, yellow archangel and greater stitchwort, is another remnant of semi-natural ancient woodland. Darwin recorded how greater stitchwort was pollinated by flies. In spring look for brimstone butterflies pollinating other early flowers whilst searching for nectar.



Brimstone butterfly



Yellow Archangel

**6** You have reached 'The Terrace'. In summer look for rock-rose here.

**Turn L to continue. To take a short cut, turn R (south), and go to trail note 14.**



Rock-rose

On your right is a strip of woodland left when trees were cleared long ago and known in Kent as a shaw. Many shaws, like this one, include a woodbank with great old trees growing along the top, and marked boundaries. When you reach the road, the woodbank along it is marked by an ancient beech tree.



Beech flowers

**3** As you reach the wood look for bluebells in spring, later in the year look for foxgloves whose flower structure, wrote Darwin, 'made insects almost indispensable for their fertilisation'.



Bluebells

**'Please follow Public Footpath closely through Golf Course and beware golf balls'**

**4** The rough on the right supports some good chalk grassland. Look for greater knapweed and hedge bedstraw in summer. In the autumn look for male goldfinches on teasel in the weedier areas. Darwin noted how the slightly longer beaks of the males enable them to reach teasel seeds, 'whilst the females more commonly feed on the seeds of the betony or Scrophularia.'



Hedge Bedstraw



Meadow Brown butterfly on Greater Knapweed

**Cross road, take footpath opposite. Turn R at junction of paths**

**7** Look right to see the 'Arts and Crafts' design house built in 1931 on land bought by George Buckston Browne. He also bought Down House for use as a museum in 1927. As you walk through the fields look for red clover in summer. Darwin observed how its flowers only set seed when pollinated by bumble bees who are able to transfer pollen between flowers, because they have a proboscis (tongue) long enough to reach the nectar.



Bumble bee on red clover

**When you reach the road turn L, walk into Downe Village and turn R passing the 13th century Church on your left, and on your right the old Village School (now the Village Hall) built in 1855 by Sir John Lubbock of High Elms. After Christmas Tree Farm turn R onto footpath**

**8** Ancient oak trees mark an old wood boundary.

Foxglove



Teasel



Goldfinch