

Cambridgeshire Flora Group

NEWSLETTER Spring 2007

Report on excursions in 2006

The first excursion of the year 22nd April was to **Kennett**, northeast of Newmarket. We saw some of the characteristic Breckland species in the old Kennett gravel pit and although we were too early to spot any *Herniaria glabra* we did find a plant of *Ornithopus perpusillus* which The Catalogue last records here in 1954; pure white *Myosotis ramosissima* was also a variant few of us had seen before. Walking down to the River Kennett we noted a large population of *Onopordon acanthium* along a field margin: this was the much shorter, less grey variant typical of the Breckland and rather distinct from the tall, grey-white plant seen in gardens. We then walked along the dry bed of the river northwest following the county boundary and able to record only species that we saw to our left. By the B1085 river bridge we admired a large old *Populus nigra* under which there was a large mixed population of *Galanthus nivalis*, *G.plicatus* and hybrids between the two. In a field beside the B1085 we failed to find the possible *Hypochaeris glabra* rosettes seen on an earlier visit but instead found many large patches of *Campanula rapunculoides*.

At **Waterbeach** on 13th May we somehow managed to avoid the very heavy showers and started at the village green where we soon spotted the characteristic leaves of *Rumex pulcher* in the short, species-poor grassland. Then on to see the long-established naturalised population of *Aristolochia clematitis* along a field edge on the western margin of the village. A lane in the village produced the true Spanish Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides hispanica*) as well as the more common hybrid *H. x massartiana* and a clump of *Dracunculus vulgaris* known here since 2002. In the stretch of Car Dyke south of the village we fished in the water for specimens of *Ranunculus aquatilis* and what proved to be *Veronica catenata* with unusually hairy stems. Later, in the planted hedgerow bordering the grassland on the western side of the Dyke, we examined specimens of a couple of the 'look-alike' species highlighted by Peter Sell in Nature in Cambridgeshire No 48 2006: firstly, *Acer campestre* var. *leiocarpum* which has hairless not hairy fruits. Further along in the same hedge we looked carefully at the hairs on the undersides of the leaves of the dogwood and were able to determine that what had been planted here was the alien *Cornus australis*, rather than native *C.sanguinea*. In the grassland alongside we saw two variants of *Trifolium pratense*, var. *sativum* and var. *americanum*, both of which one assumes were sown here. Being a large parish we managed to see only a small part of it and never ventured north of the village or on to the fen; however, Jonathan Shanklin undertook to carry on recording here over the summer and was rewarded with a number of interesting finds, including a first vc record for *Oenanthe pimpinelloides* on the old airfield.

On 10th June we met at Newmarket to look at the grasslands around Warrenhill Plantation, notably those on Warren Hill, Side Hill and Long Hill – or at least those parts that fall within the parish of **Cheveley**. Our main aim was to try and refine the set of calcifuge species recorded here in the 1980s by David Coombe who detected acid sandy patches in stripes and polygons in this area, in particular at the east end of Long Hill. His records included *Calluna vulgaris*, *Viola canina*, *Veronica officinalis* and *Stellaria graminea*: none of which is common in the county. Sadly we were unable to find any of the first three and had to be satisfied with plants of *Stellaria graminea* which we detected not only on Long Hill but also in the turf at the eastern end of Side Hill. Where once there was at least one dense strip of *Viola canina* 10 x 2m long we could find nothing and it looks as though management of the turf

has removed these interesting species, as it also appears to have done in stretches along the Beacon course that also used to sport the *Calluna* and *Viola*.

However it was not all doom and gloom as we had admired nice calcareous grassland on Side Hill with plenty of *Filipendula vulgaris* and rockroses, whilst at the bottom of the hill we admired a fine old bush of *Berberis vulgaris*. This had only been noticed for the first time here by Enid Hyde in 1984 and is a species overlooked by many recorders. It does not have many pretensions to be a native but has a long recorded history in the county and has a record of great persistence at many of its sites. At the top of the hill just outside the corner of the Plantation the banks of the reservoir were still supporting a fine colony of *Geranium sanguineum* (first noted here in 1977) and on a bit of waste ground nearby was an alien spurge which has been known here for almost as long: it is generally recorded as *Euphorbia x pseudovirgata* but seems closest to *E. esula* if one follows the key in the 1998 Plant Crib.

We were delighted to find several patches of *Astragalus danicus* in very short turf just to the west of Claypit Plantation, but were unable to refind any *Thesium humifusum* on the verge of Moulton Road just to the south. However as our thoughts were turning to making it back to our various modes of transport (and more liquid refreshment – it had been a very hot day!) we walked along the western margin of Warrenhill Plantation, finding not only a population of *Diplotaxis tenuifolia* but masses of *Rubus britannicus*, which runs into the woodland along the rides. This was where this species was first recorded for Cambridgeshire by Alec Bull in 1989. Since then it has been found in several other places around Newmarket and in the south east corner of the county and has perhaps been overlooked in the past.

Christchurch is a poorly-recorded, large fen parish in the far northeastern reaches of the vice-county and our visit on 8th July trebled the number of species in the CFG database. We confirmed Ron Payne's recent record of *Epilobium obscurum* at the churchyard (and at Elm churchyard in the morning) and it would be worthwhile other recorders in fen parishes keeping a lookout for this easily overlooked species. In Cambridgeshire it is otherwise known only in wet meadows at Gamlingay. Another pleasing find was a moderately sized population of the rapidly declining and now Nationally Scarce arable weed *Torilis arvensis* along the footpath near Christchurch Farm and further west. An old brick wall nearby yielded a single plant of *Polystichum setiferum* together with a few *Asplenium trichomanes* and many hartstongue and male ferns. On field borders we also noted a variant of *Sisymbrium officinale* which has glossy green hairless pods (var. *leiocarpum*) and in the village saw two apparently self sown plants of *Angelica archangelica*.

At **Swavesey** on 12th August we re-found *Eleocharis palustris* ssp. *palustris* at its known site on Middle Fen and found a second population not far away on the margins of a flooded gravel pit on Mow Fen. Surely this subspecies is more widespread than records so far reveal. *Salix* species and hybrids were a particular feature of the day and we had *Salix cinerea x caprea x viminalis (x calodendron)* and *S. triandra x viminalis (x mollissima)* subsequently confirmed by referee Desmond Meikle. Alan spotted *Mentha aquatica x arvensis* in grassland near the river and the flood embankment produced *Petroselinum segetum* as it often does. As our visit was after the hay cut there was no sign of *Oenanthe silaifolia* at its usual site on Middle Fen but this was more than compensated for by the highlight for the day, a first vc record of *Oenanthe crocata*, which was present as a single plant on the river margin beside Middle Fen. Amazingly, this means that two first vc records for *Oenanthe* species have been made in a single season; vc29 Cambs now boasts the full set of seven. Another feature of the day was the number of *Prunus* varieties. The weather earlier in the year had evidently favoured excellent fruit set in this genus and it seemed that most trees and bushes were heavy with fruit; much tasting needed

to be done and Alan applied himself to this onerous task assiduously. Besides fruit colour variants of cherry plum the commonest fruiting hedgerow plum turned out to be *Prunus domestica* subsp. *insititia* var. *fruticans*, which has rounded, black, palatable fruits. In spite of the frequently wet and windy weather we considered that we had had a very rewarding and enjoyable day.

Wentworth is a rather small, obscure, poorly-recorded fen edge parish and on 16th September we wandered widely over the fen areas in the north of the parish and did not visit the village itself. We had a chance to practice our alien grass identification with *Setaria pumila*, *Echinochloa crus-galli* and *Phalaris aquatica* in an arable margin seeded strip, which we then realised was just over the parish boundary in Witchford. Again just over the border into Witchford, along a footpath just to south of the bypass we found *Stachys sylvatica* var. *subsericea* with leaves distinctively very silky hairy. Despite making a good contribution to the species recorded for this parish there is still more useful recording to be done, particularly in areas away from the village itself, which was well covered by Robert Payne in the late nineteen-eighties.

Excursion programme for 2007

At **Coldham's Common** in April we will join up with CNHS for their second visit to the Common which is part of their programme of eight visits during 2008. This is a varied site with some calcareous influence still evident in the flora in places and some of the less common aquatics still present in the brook.

Langley Wood is a moderate-sized boulder clay woodland SSSI in the far southeast of the county which seems to have attracted rather few visits from botanists. However Messrs Warburg, Gilbert-Carter and Tutin recorded *Galium odoratum* there in 1932 and we would like to be able to refind this in one of its very few potentially native sites in the county. We will visit in May by kind permission of Thurlow Estates.

At **Wimpole Park** in June we will explore some of the more promising areas of the Park, including a look for the transplanted *Cirsium tuberosum* population at the Folly. We visit by kind permission of the National Trust. If time permits we will also visit **Orwell Clunch Pit** to look for a possible *Campanula patula* recently reported.

In July at the Forty Foot Drain at **Horseway** we hope to refind the *Rubus boraeanus* recorded here as new for the county by Alan Newton in 1986, whilst at the eastern end of this stretch of the drain *Alisma gramineum* has recently been recorded at its former site by **Welches Dam**. We also hope to spend some time on the Washes looking for *Sium latifolium* and other characteristic species of the ditches.

At **Bourn** in August the attraction is to see a new site for *Inula helenium* and to chase records for the *Mentha* hybrids – *x smithiana* and *x gentilis*. *Chenopodium glaucum* was also recorded here in 1976 and it would be good to see if we could refind this elusive goosefoot.

At **Whittlesey** in late 2006 both *Eleogiton fluitans* and *Juncus bulbosus* turned up again after absences of many years; in September we would like to look for them in and around other former sites. Perhaps neither species is quite as rare as the lack of recent records suggest. The *Erigeron acer x Conyza canadensis* hybrid *Conyzigeron huelsenii* should be in evidence along the railway line near Whittlesey.

Date	Locality	Meeting point – 1.30pm unless otherwise stated
SUNDAY April 29th	Coldham's Common, Cambridge	A joint meeting with CNHS on Sunday , meeting at 2.00 pm at the eastern entrance to the common off Barnwell Road at the lay-by opposite Camgas PLC. TL 479584.
Sat May 26th	Langley Wood, Castle Camps	Start of footpath running west from corner of minor road in Camps End at TL613423
Sat June 23rd	Wimpole Park	Main carpark near the Stable Block. TL337509
Sat July 21st	Forty Foot Drain, Horseway to Ouse Washes	Horseway Bridge over Forty Foot Drain, B1098, TL426871, east of Chatteris
Sat August 18th	Bourn	Meet by parish church, TL324563
Sat September 15th	Whittlesey	Blackbush Drove by junction with Ives Drove, TL257944, south of Whittlesey town

NO DOGS PLEASE

Please note that there is no guarantee that you will be able to park directly at the meeting points listed and should leave time to find a parking place and walk to the meeting point.

ALL ENQUIRIES REGARDING CFG EXCURSIONS TO NPM, PLEASE:

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