

Cambridgeshire Flora Group

NEWSLETTER Spring 2008

Progress with the Flora

Significant progress has now been made in preparing accounts for the new Flora of Cambridgeshire as outlined in the 2006 Newsletter. Accounts of conifers (26 species) and ferns (38 species) have been written and the long journey through the dicotyledons has now begun. Inevitably the work throws up all sorts of questions and the Recorders are grateful to those who have begun helping to answer some of these in time for incorporation in the finished work. This list of queries will only continue to grow, so if you feel willing and able to lend a hand, perhaps in just chasing up an individual site, do let one of us know.

Report on excursions in 2007

Coldhams Common/Barnwell Nature Reserve

In the morning the alders at Barnwell East LNR came under close scrutiny and Alan identified one coppiced sapling as *Alnus cordata* x *A. incana*; this is the first v.c record and apparently first British record. Self-sown saplings of both parents were also present. Another self-sown sapling proved to be *Alnus glutinosa* x *A. incana*. Again this was the first v.c record for a self-sown plant of this hybrid which has been recorded previously as a planted alien in Cambridgeshire; self-sown plants of both parents were also present and the hybrid may well have arisen *in situ*. In the afternoon most of us wandered over the Common and added a modest number of further records to the considerable list accumulated on earlier CNHS visits to the site; meanwhile Alan put on his wellies to determine the full extent of the population of *Polystichum setiferum* first seen by David Price and Steve Hartley in 2005 in a deep drain running along the east side of the Common. The result was the discovery of what appears to be the biggest population of this fern in the county.

Langley Wood, Castle Camps

Our aims for this visit in May were to check that *Galium odoratum* was still present at one its very few native stations in vc29 and to provide an up to date plant list for this rather seldom visited wood. Unusually for a Cambridgeshire wood, albeit one on the Essex border, it has quite a quantity of Hornbeam, both as scattered trees and, in some small areas, as the predominant tree. Generally the flora was fairly typical of a Field Maple-Ash woodland on boulder clay, with the addition of less frequently encountered species such as *Milium effusum*, *Carex divulsa* and *Moehringia trinervia*. Taxa that we appeared to add to the list for the wood included *Allium ursinum*, *Carex* x *pseudoaxillaris* and *Veronica montana*.

Towards the end of the afternoon a few of our number had to leave and the remainder decided to carry on recording for a while. We had not gone far when finally we spotted our main target species, *Galium odoratum*, along a main ride; the only section of this ride that we had not traversed earlier - having chosen to walk along the margin of the wood instead. *Dryopteris affinis* was also spotted in a shady ride-side spot further northwest along the same ride.

Wimpole Park

On this excursion we wandered quite widely over the Park, guided by Simon Damant. A low, species-rich bank by the Folly supported a characteristic Chalky Boulder Clay flora with typical

species including *Trifolium ochroleucon* and *Anacamptis pyramidalis*; though the *Thymus polytrichus* here is known to have been introduced from a nearby site. This small bank exemplifies what much of the grassland flora of the Park may have been like in the past before suffering improvement. We searched the *Cirsium tuberosum* re-introduction site at the Folly but could find no suitable looking flowering plants or leaf rosettes. Given the recent history of this site, as described by Simon, it seems unlikely that *C.tuberosum* has been present here for some time. The 1999 record by J.Greaves in the Flora Catalogue is most likely a hopeful error for a common *Cirsium* species.

In the morning some of us briefly visited Orwell Pit, but we were unable to find the *Campanula patula* recorded the previous year, despite the recorder taking us to the exact spot. A chance encounter with a nearby resident informed us that the same species had 'spontaneously' arisen in her garden the previous year as well; so perhaps the origin of the plant in the pit was also horticultural.

Horseway/Forty Foot Drain/Welches Dam/Ouse Washes

Despite a reasonably thorough search along the roadside and likely looking scrubby margins by the Forty Foot Drain we were unable to re-find *Rubus boraeanus* where it had been reported in 1986. However, Alan subsequently found a potential *Rubus* answering the right description on a return visit. *Sonchus palustris* is making further progress south along the Sixteen Foot and along the Forty Foot; we found several plants on the short section of the Forty Foot running parallel with the B1098. A couple of quick grapnel dips into the Forty Foot Drain east of Horseway yielded *Potamogeton trichoides* and *P.friesii* – but further investigation of this section a few weeks later was unable to add anything of note. At the eastern end of this stretch of the Forty Foot we had hoped to find the *Alisma gramineum* reported last year but no likely looking plants were seen, only *A.lanceolatum*. Sadly, it was not necessary to throw any of the company into the water to gather seeds for a definitive identification. Still, having endured much rain and wind for most of the day, the emergence of strong sun encouraged several to sit down, enjoy the summer while it lasted and gaze into the shining water for a few minutes repose.

Planning this trip long in advance we had no idea that the Washes would be under a metre or so of water, so we had to confine ourselves to the flood embankments and Counter Drain; typical species such as *Petroselinum segetum* and *Torilis nodosa* were new to some members of the group.

In the morning a few of us had spent some time at Pingle Drove, Mepal and we were pleased to re-find *Sium latifolium* in the same spot in a damp ditch where it had been recorded some ten years previously. The same ditch also produced *Galeopsis speciosa* – TL48 seems to be the source of most of our recent records of this species, which is declining nationally, and it is good to know that it is not solely dependent on being a weed of peaty arable fields for its living.

Bourn/Croydon

In the morning a few of us wandered around the footpaths on the northern side of Croydon. The eastern margin of a large wheat field yielded five species of brome (*Anisantha sterilis*, *A.diandra*, *Bromus commutatus*, *B.hordeaceus ssp hordeaceus*, *B.secalinus*), allowing useful comparisons to be made between species. *B. secalinus* is no longer a common species in this country nor in vc29. Once we had our eye in it was quite easy to spot *secalinus* and we then saw it along two other sides of the field; since this field straddled 10km square boundaries we were able to produce records for TL25, TL34 and TL35. August/ September is an ideal time to distinguish *Avena sterilis ssp.ludoviciana* from its commoner cousin *A. fatua* - the spikelets dehisce in different ways - and Alan found specimens of the former quite readily. This subspecies has now been found quite widely on the clay in southern

Cambridgeshire in the last year or so and we suspect that it is much overlooked in these areas rather than rare. As at Wimpole in June we saw quite a bit of *Brachypodium sylvaticum* with stiff and congested inflorescences - making it look somewhat like *pinnatum*. We kept our eyes open for *Cirsium eriophorum* and its hybrid with *C.vulgare*, which had been recorded in this area in the past, but were able to find only the parent species.

At Bourn in the afternoon *Inula helenium* was thriving and looking impressive in its recently discovered location along the footpath beside the Bourn Brook to west of the village. On the northern verge of Caxton Road we saw the rather handsome *Mentha* hybrid previously recorded as *x gracilis* in 1993, which is how it appears in the Flora Catalogue, but which was re-determined as *x smithiana* in 2005. *Chenopodium glaucum* remained elusive; no sign of it could be found in the corner of the arable field where last seen in 1976.

Thorney/Whittlesey

In the morning some of us spent some time in Thorney, very close to the border with vc 32 Northants & Peterborough; we were looking for *Polygonum patulum* which had been reported recently from arable fields here. Unsuccessful in that quest we chanced upon an interesting looking ditch which had recently been reprofiled so that it had a low berm along one side. This not only provided a broad margin for marginal and marsh plants to grow, it also afforded easy access for the botanist. A sizeable population of *Alopecurus aequalis* was found here. However, this improvement for the flora is only incidental to the main aim of the engineering which is to improve habitat for water voles.

In the afternoon we spent much of our time to east of the Ramsey Road, exploring drains in the Underwood's Grounds area, following last year's interesting finds to the west of the road. *Eleogiton fluitans* proved abundant in one long drain and in the same drain we found more *Potamogeton x zizii* and also one of its parents *P.gramineus* – a scarce plant now in Cambridgeshire as in most of southern England (specimens of these last two are with the referee for confirmation). The other parent, *P.lucens*, proved elusive but such hybrids often grow in the absence of one or both.

Excursion programme for 2008

Please note that this year excursions will start in the morning and continue until the end of the afternoon or until participants have had enough. All excursions are on a Saturday.

In April we will visit **Over Wood, West Wickham** to update the species list for this ancient woodland SSSI on the Suffolk border. We will also visit some smaller woods nearby which seem to have attracted little attention since the 1930s.

In May we will spend some time looking for *Potentilla neummanniana* on **Newmarket Heath and Beacon Course**; one aim is to fix the locations rather more precisely so that we can check them more easily in the future. Other targets will be decided on the day but will no doubt involve the Devil's Ditch.

Dernford Fen, Sawston has received rather few visits of late and our excursion in June will be an opportunity to see what remains of the impressive fen flora that this site was once well known for. Scrub clearance last year may have uncovered some species not seen recently.

In July we will join members of the Northants Flora Group in the area northeast of Peterborough, **Newborough/ Eye/ Thorney**, to explore the fen drains and see if we can re-find any of the more interesting aquatics that have been recorded here in the past.

In August we will start at **Fordham Woods** where we should see *Salix myrsinifolia* and hybrids. And then on to **Snailwell Meadows** which have a rich fen flora with the highlight being *Selinum carvifolia*.

Chrishall Grange Plantation, Duxford has a number of older records for interesting calcicole plants; our aim in September is to see what remains. This general area of Duxford parish is less often visited than the river end so we also hope to add to the general flora records for this area; arable weeds will hopefully be of interest.

Date	Locality	Meeting point – 10.00am unless otherwise stated
April 26th	Over Wood and area	TL614480, triangular road junction at Streetly End, West Wickham
May 31st	Newmarket Heath	TL618614, disused road off the Stetchworth Toll roundabout, junction of the A1303/A1304
June 21st	Dernford Fen	Turn off the A1301 Sawston bypass and drive over the level crossing (TL475495), turn right and drive north up the road and stop at the Spicers security office c.TL473498. They will direct you to the lay-by opposite their office to park.
July 26th	Newborough/Eye	11.00am TF204060 - Newborough parish church in School Road
August 16th	Fordham Woods/ Snailwell Meadows	TL632700 Fordham Woods carpark (access track runs southeast from River Lane immediately east of Fox House & cottages)
September 13th	Chrishall Grange Plantation	TL445428, layby opposite Chrishall Grange Cottages

NO DOGS PLEASE

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

ALL ENQUIRIES REGARDING CFG EXCURSIONS TO NPM, PLEASE:

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