

Cambridgeshire Flora Group

NEWSLETTER 2010

Progress with the Flora

The preparation of accounts for the proposed Flora of Cambridgeshire is coming on well and at the time of writing this report those relating to poplars and willows are being drafted. The intention is that by the start of 2011 the project will be a third of the way through: it all depends on whether the temptations to go out in the field rather than stay at a desk can be resisted. It continues to be a challenging but ultimately rewarding task and thanks are due to all those that have patiently answered queries or even gone out searching for particular plants. As far as possible the accounts already written are being updated with any significant new records: recent interest in Cambridgeshire ferns for instance has necessitated some extensive re-writes in a few cases, but since most of this is good news this is really not unwelcome. New records are always welcome, as are reports of plants in places where they have not been seen for a while or just updates of well known plants in well known places (it is easy to assume that someone else has done this!). The Flora will give distributions on a 10km square basis, so if you can add a new square or update the listing in Crompton & Whitehouse, 1983 (*A Checklist of the Flora of Cambridgeshire*) let us know.

Threatened Plant Project

In contrast to the rather meagre success rate in 2008 (17% re-finds) the 2009 season was more encouraging, with 64% of records being re-found. The only species for which we completely failed to come up with any records was *Dianthus deltoides*, at its only site in the county at Hildersham Furze Hills, though the habitat on East Hill still looks broadly suitable. In 2010 the national list of species has a northern and western emphasis so the list for Cambridgeshire is likely to be quite short. Relevant species are limited to *Chrysanthemum segetum*, *Juniperus communis* and *Sium latifolium*, assuming that we are not sent back to re-find *Hordeum marinum* last seen as a native in 1881 or *Herminium monorchis* last seen 1825. Despite being promised that by October we would have the list of target records, at the time of writing these have still to be received from the BSBI Plant Unit.

Floras for neighbouring counties

For those of you who have not yet purchased a copy of the new floras for our neighbouring counties there is still time to buy a copy of the **Flora of Suffolk** at its pre-publication price of £32.50 (incl. p&p) before the offer ends at the end of March; details and order form are available from the SBRC website (<http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~sbrc/Flora.htm>). The **Flora of Hertfordshire** is now published so the attractive pre-publication offer is closed but it is still well worth the full price of £49.50 (or £45 with free p+p if ordered through the HNHS website); details available at (http://www.hnhs.org/view_publication.php?id=69&cat=1).

Report on excursions in 2009

Elsworth Wood - April

The structure of this wood is very unusual in that the canopy is very largely dominated by Field Maple with very little Ash present, this feature being noted in the SSSI citation. Much of the wood turned out to have a surprisingly nettley ground flora which not only obscured smaller species, if they were present, but also made thorough exploration by botanists rather uncomfortable. Nevertheless we did see fair amounts of *Conopodium majus* and lesser amounts of *Ranunculus*

auricomus and *Potentilla sterilis*, not to mention the tiny epiphytic *Polypodium* spotted by the bryologists earlier in the year. As various parts of the wood had been cleared in the past several of the ground flora species were also to be found in the open and around the margins of the adjacent motocross circuit. This area proved to be quite varied, with larger fairly well-vegetated ponds and smaller, less permanent pools with bare clay substrates giving stoneworts a chance to grow. With the new *Callitriche* handbook available there is now less excuse to record these merely to generic level, and none whatsoever if fruiting material is available; the specimens taken were determined as *C.platycarpa* and it was reassuring that the conclusion reached by looking at gross morphological characters was in agreement with that reached by looking at pollen and other features under the microscope.

Stannel Wood and Long Slip etc - May

We started with Stannel Wood and produced a reasonable list for a small nettle-infested recent woodland with cattle sheds occupying a substantial part of it; a little surprising was the presence of *Veronica montana* in one area. We then moved on to the nearby Long Slip which was similarly nettley but with a good complement of ferns and we were soon comparing the various *Dryopteris* species here. We concluded that we had seen *dilatata*, *filix-mas*, *carthusiana* and *affinis*, though satisfactory hybrids eluded us on the day. *Scrophularia vernalis* was still frequent in parts of the wood, as described by earlier visitors.

Even though Heath Plantation was visible a short distance away from Long Slip across an arable field we were forced to use a very roundabout route to avoid trampling crops and ended up approaching the wood via the track from the northern side. The long walk was well worth it; we found another ferny wood with large amounts of very well grown *D.dilatata* and lesser amounts of *affinis* and *carthusiana*. In places the margins held open grassy and scrubby areas and in one of these on the southern side we recorded *Galium saxatile*, *Cerastium arvense* and a single plant of *Carex pilulifera*; this last has not been recorded from the Cambs 'Breck' area before. *Carex muricata* ssp. *lamprocarpa*, which we must now call ssp. *pairae* until someone changes their mind again, was found nearby. The presence of a few very large, low-crowned planted trees coupled with the site name and the acid grassland areas make one wonder if the plantation was established on grass heath originally.

Moving on to the field northeast of Isleham Plantation we found a heavily rabbit grazed and disturbed grassland with much bare sand and scattered flints – a typical Breck habitat. The marginal areas of the field have been planted with broadleaved and conifer trees but in the central open area we found characteristic species such as *Vicia lathyroides* and *Medicago minima* in several places in addition to a variety of commoner species of well-drained soils.

Wilbraham Temple - June

We were warmly welcomed by the owner and given a fair amount of background information such as approximate dates when the various plantations were established. Starting in the gardens and vicinity of the house we soon found the *Asplenium trichomanes* in good heart on a northwest-facing wall in a garden, this was last recorded in 1948 and is the only site we know of for TL55. Other parts of the same wall had *Jasminum beesianum* and plants of a white-flowered *Heuchera* and a *Campanula*, both of which have yet to be identified. The park grasslands proved to have been treated with broadleaved herbicide in the past, leaving a reasonable variety of grass species but with few broadleaves. Some damp or shallowly flooded areas were a little more varied and here were found *Veronica catenata*, *Ranunculus trichophyllus* and *Rorippa palustris*. The areas of broadleaved plantation were also of limited interest and the springs that rise here to flow into the Little Wilbraham River were shaded and very sparsely vegetated. In the open area to northeast of the house and the stream we could find no sign of the formerly recorded *Helianthemum chamaecistus* or *Medicago sativa* ssp. *falcata*. The northeastern part of the park is an arable field in which is a small plantation over a former sand/gravel pit and nearby is an anglo-saxon burial ground. The light soils

yielded typical species such as *Cynoglossum officinale*, *Inula conzyae* and *Verbascum nigrum*; in an uncultivated area near the burial ground we found a small bush of *Rosa rubiginosa*.

Chippenham Fen - July

Orchids were in rather short supply: we were rather late for *Dactylorhiza*, which we had thought we might see a few of, and, as expected, too early for *Epipactis* but we saw several fine *Gymnadenia conopsea* ssp. *densiflora* by way of compensation. During their visit in April the bryologists had tentatively identified a sedge as *Carex lasiocarpa* and we were able to confirm this during our excursion. Remarkably, the site for this species is one that has received much attention over the years, being the former location of *Parnassia palustris* (1980) and *Pinguicula vulgaris* (1984); many botanists have probably stood on the *lasiocarpa* as they looked for the broadleaved species. The last record for the fen would appear to be 1901, though it is quite possible that it has been recorded by Natural England or their contract surveyors in the meantime but that the records have failed to reach the county recorders. Sedges were a particular feature of the excursion and participants had the chance to get to grips with *pulicaris*, *distans*, *hostiana*, *panicea* and *viridula* ssp. *brachyrryncha* amongst others. *Rosa micrantha* has previously been recorded in a number of locations around North Meadow in TL6469, where we saw one bush, but we also recorded a bush on the side of the track along the southeastern side of Forty Acre Wood in the eastern part of the Fen. One of the purposes of our visit was to fix the location of *Salix myrsinifolia* bushes more exactly and we recorded a number of plants of various sizes in the Chippenham and Snailwell parts of the fen; along one path a number of young bushes were found rather evenly spaced leading us to speculate whether they had been planted. Later in the day we had a good thrash around in the accessible parts of Forty Acre Wood looking for ferns, such as *D. dilatata* mentioned in earlier records, but came away more or less empty-handed.

Though we had an entertaining day here we failed to look for some of the species mentioned in our programme for 2009 and significant areas of this large site were unvisited so we have decided to have another excursion to the site in 2010 to make up for our omissions.

Madingley Park - August

Close to the house, in the area known as The Lawns, a reasonably diverse hay meadow grassland survives and here we found typical species such as *Ophioglossum vulgatum*, *Ajuga reptans* and *Leontodon hispidus* and puzzled over a *Hypericum*, which the BSBI referee, Norman Robson, later determined as *H. x desetangsii* (*H. maculatum* x *perforatum*). This St John's-wort hybrid was a variant very close to *H. maculatum* and was an unusual find away from the two main areas in the county where this much rarer of the two parents is found – near Kingston Wood on the western boulder clay and around Lucy Wood/ Ditton Park Wood in the east. In the plantation woodland we admired the substantial stand of *Inula helenium* in an area where it had been known to John Ray in the seventeenth century; whilst this had been spared the trimmer the *Dipsacus strigosus* nearby had not been so fortunate and had been cut down in full flower, but at least participants were able to familiarise themselves with its characteristics. *Ceratophyllum submersum* was abundant at its well-known site Horseshoe Pond, in remarkably clear water free of visible algae, and we found more in a fishpond in Thompson Plantation south of the house. The pasture in the western part of the park where Derek Wells and David Coombe had been able to find *Trifolium ochroleucon*, *Cirsium acaule* and *Silene silaus* as recently as 1990 was found to be heavily improved now and no longer of obvious interest.

Foul Anchor and North Level Main Drain - September

We started off in the grounds of the pumping station and, once we had got our eye in, were soon working our way towards a respectable tally for the number of *Spiranthes spiralis* spikes, though we surely missed many in flower and even more of those that had gone over. We also scrutinised the north bank of the Main Drain. Descriptions and photographs show that much of this area has suffered from engineering works, such as re-profiling, in the past; in some of these operations the

entire turf layer was stripped to leave bare soil. However, as least some elements of the community seem able to re-colonise after these events and this includes the *Spiranthes*. The turf within the pumping station grounds appears not to be so treated and could perhaps act as a seed source for the rest of the site. In total 190 spikes were counted in vc29; within the pumping station grounds plants were found south of the Main Drain and thus in administrative Cambridgeshire. A fine flowering clump of the alien *Gypsophila paniculata* was an unexpected find on the north bank of the Main Drain.

Moving on to Foul Anchor we saw many of the species for which this area is so noted locally including both *Salicornia* species – *ramosissima* in flat areas on the washland and *dolichostachya* as scattered plants at the top of the steep slope down to the river water. A particularly pleasing record was the re-find of *Bupleurum tenuissimum* at its former haunt beneath the power lines; a dense patch 5 x 4m in extent was found midway between the two northernmost powerlines and a second smaller patch a little to north of the southernmost powerline. Both patches were centred around cattle tracks. *Bupleurum* has not been recorded at Foul Anchor since 1992, the last known site being covered in some 4' of soil by the Environment Agency at some point in the year or two following. The last record from the powerline area was 1977. As we walked further south a rather distinctive looking clump of tall grass was spotted on the opposite shore, which is in vc29, and all were agreed that it was a *Spartina* of some kind. Alan had the privilege of visiting that bank a few days later and determining that it was *S.anglica*; in addition, he found a further three clumps under the power lines to the north which we had all walked past unawares. This is the first record for any *Spartina* species in the vice-county.

Excursion programme for 2010

Excursions start in the morning at 10.00 (unless stated otherwise) and continue until the end of the afternoon or until participants have had enough. All excursions are on a Saturday.

We will start the season in April with a visit to **Ten Wood SSSI** in Stetchworth. This is a site with a rich woodland flora, including a number of species rather uncommon in vc29 such as *Oxalis acetosella*, *Geum rivale* and *Melica uniflora*. *Luzula sylvatica* was recorded here in 1964, one of only two sites for this species in vc29. A number of common and less common species have not been reported for some time; *Euphorbia amygdaloides* was recorded in 1960 and *Melampyrum cristatum* on an unspecified path to the wood also in 1960.

Isleham is a large and somewhat under-recorded fen edge parish on the far eastern side of the county, with the village and southern end of the parish on chalk and with fen to the north. In May we will visit the northern area to see if we can find *Cardamine amara* beside the River Lark, site of the last record for this species in vc29 in 1983. *Carex paniculata* was present on the Little Wash in the 1960s at its only site in TL67 and it would be useful to have another attempt at re-finding it. *Potamogeton praelongus* has been recorded recently from the river in a new 10km square and it should be interesting to see what other aquatics can be found here and in the nearby drainage system.

The Whittlesey brickpits have produced a number of interesting records in the last few decades, both aquatic and terrestrial. In June we will start at the **Kings Dyke nature reserve** which contains, amongst other areas, the former Yardy's Pit. Aquatic species such as *Utricularia vulgaris*, *Baldellia ranunculoides* and a selection of stoneworts (including *Chara canescens*) should be in evidence. The clay here is overlain by sandy layers and *Sagina nodosa* is present at its only station in the county. If time allows and we have secured access permission we should be able to visit parts of other pits in the area.

In July we will visit **Chippenham Fen** again to explore areas not visited in 2009.

Despite an abortive attempt to spend some time on the **Ouse Washes** in 2007 this is still an area little explored by the CFG, due in part to the very good coverage achieved by James Cadbury over a long association. In August we will visit the Welney end of the vc29 section of the Washes where James will show us some of the special places and typical species of this huge site. With *Sium latifolium* one of the TPP species for 2010 we may be able to include a recording visit to a site for this project. Other species should include some of the wetland *Persicaria*, *Juncus acutiflorus*, *J.compressus*, various *Potamogeton* and a range of wetland species.

The September excursion is to **Landbeach Pits**, sometimes known as Slap-up Pits. These pits produced a number of interesting records of aliens and introductions by Graham Easy in the 1970s (including *Mentha x villosa*, *Valerianella carinata*) and further records by Edna Norman into the 1990s (such as *Catapodium maritimum*, *Cladium mariscus*, *Petasites hybridus*). Water quality in the large northern pit, Corpus Christi Lake, is good enough to support a trout fishery so it may prove of interest for aquatics.

Date	Locality	Meeting point – 10.00am unless stated otherwise
24th April	Ten Wood	Drive SE down the minor road to Stetchworth Ley (off the Stetchworth to Woodditton road); go past Park Farm Cottages and through Stetchworth Park Farm yard and continue SE along the concrete track; park in the small bay at TL666559 just beyond the junction with the track heading SW to the wood.
29th May	Isleham	Meet on the road to Isleham Marina where it crosses Little Wash, TL649757. There should be space for some cars here.
19th June	Whittlesey Brickpits	Meet in the carpark of the Hansons Brick Sales Office on the north side of the Whittlesey-Peterborough road A605, TL249973.
10th July	Chippenham Fen	From the Snailwell to Chippenham Road turn off at Park Farm (TL656687) and drive slowly , particularly near the houses and parked cars, northwest up the track to the Fen, TL652690. The warden will show you where to park.
21st August	Ouse Washes, Welney	There is adequate parking over the Suspension Bridge, off the A1101 Welney Road on the left (SW) side at TL534928, where a small track leads to some cattle pens. Wellingtons essential.
18th September	Landbeach Pits	Meet in the Waterbeach Angling Club carpark, TL485653. Track to carpark runs north from Waterbeach Road, 230m west of the A10.

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 NM, PLEASE:

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