



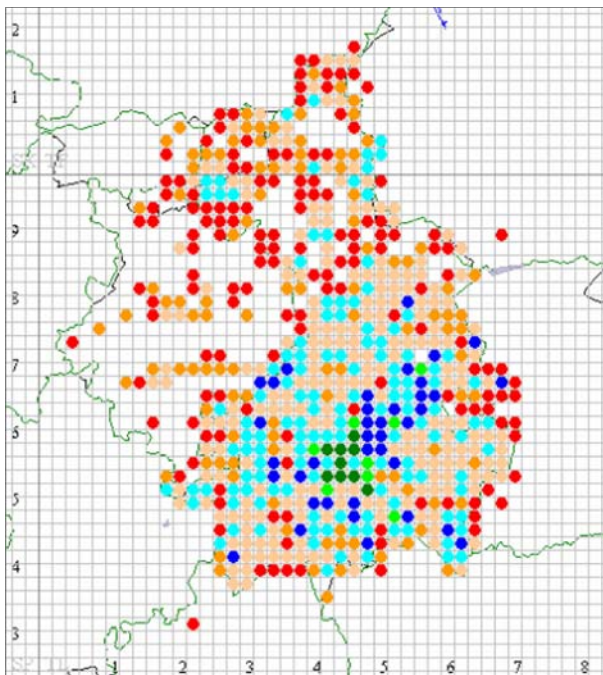
Cambridgeshire Flora Group

Spring Newsletter 2015

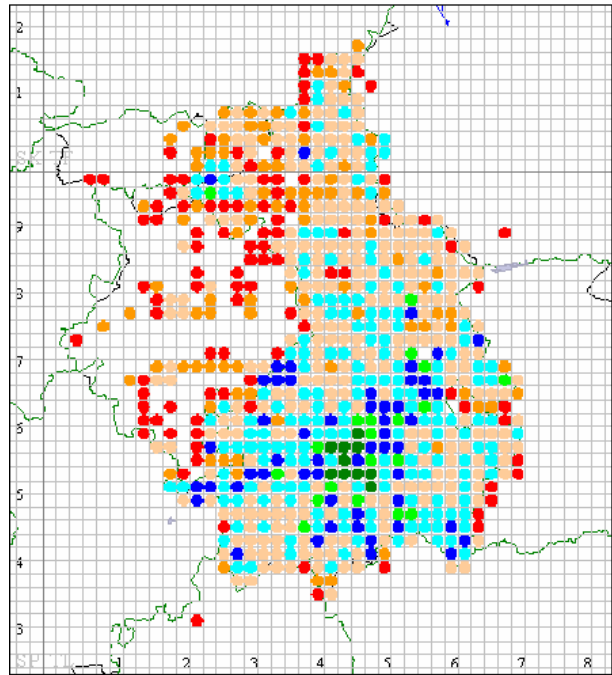
News

Good progress has been made with collating data from various sources into our database and from there into the BSBI Distribution Data-base, though the records have often required a lot of checking and editing, both for format and content. Significant sources of data have included Cambridge and Peterborough Environmental Records Centre, the Fenland Flora project and Steve Hartley. To date 29934 records have been collected for 2014, the largest number for any year to date. Overall in the vc database the most frequent species are *Urtica dioica* (590 tetrads out of the 664 in the vc), followed by *Cirsium arvense* (582) and *Galium aparine* (576). The commonest species from the new England Red List is *Euphorbia exigua*, which is present in 123 tetrads. We have records for 2124 different species. May was the most popular month to record (5110 records) and February the least

2013 11



Cambridgeshire tetrad richness 2014 12



(318). Coverage of the county for Atlas 2020 has continued to improve, with most of the tetrads in the southern half of the county now having had at least one visit. The coverage in the north has increased the most, but there are still many poorly recorded squares, particularly north of Whittlesey and the area between Whittlesey, March and Benwick. Jonathan will be trying to cover some of the later area during the year. Additional records from any of the amber or red tetrads will be very welcome, as will records of new species from any tetrad. Even frequently visited areas will have surprises!

We know that some of the county botanists have been making records since 2010 (or even since 2000), but have so far not managed to send them to us. If you want your observations to be used for the Atlas, please send them sooner rather than later. If you have a large number of records in manuscript it may be possible to get BSBI help to have them digitised. If you can digitise them yourself this is a great help, particularly if you can use a standard data entry system that does some quality control (eg consistent plant names) and formats your records. There are hints and tips on format and recording on the county web page at <http://www.cnhs.org.uk/vc29%20recording.htm> There is a very helpful xls utility to input records which will create nicely formatted records at http://www.cnhs.org.uk/Species_Mapmate_vc29.xls



The death of Oliver Rackham in February was a great shock, particularly as he had joined the lichenologists on a visit to Madingley Wood just a few days earlier. An obituary for him will be published in Nature in Cambridgeshire. Here he is seen in 2011 May on a Cambridge Natural History Society visit to Bradfield Woods in Suffolk.

Vascular Plant Records 2014

Full details of the notable records for the year will be published in Nature in Cambridgeshire, which is due out in mid June. Here we give some highlights, first from Alan then from Jonathan.

The resolution of a long-standing debate about the identity of plants on Chippenham Fen, variously attributed to *Apium repens*, *A. repens* x *A. nodiflorum* and *Berula erecta*. Following DNA work undertaken at Leicester University (Desjardins et al., in

press) this has been shown to be the previously unrecorded combination of *Apium nodiflorum* x *Berula erecta*.

Also of note was the reappearance of *Viola persicifolia* on Wicken Fen after a long gap and the relocation of *Potentilla tabernaemontani* on Newmarket Heath, where it had been feared lost. New localities were also added for *Allium oleraceum*, *Carex echinata*, *Oenanthe silaifolia* and *Carex arenaria* all very local plants in the county. The discovery of *Sagina subulata*, new to the county, on the driveway to Madingley Hall remains to be explained, but may have come with gravel or in vehicle tyres.

New aliens or new records for rare aliens in Cambridgeshire included *Agrostis castellana*, *Arabis blepharophylla*, *Bidens frondosa*, *Calendula arvensis*, *Gladiolus communis* subsp. *byzantinus*, *Juglans nigra*, *Linaria dalmatica*, *Lonicera henryi*, *Miscanthus* x *giganteus*, *Trifolium resupinatum* and *Verbena rigida*.

Some of the most astonishing finds of the year were made during the Cambridge Natural History Society's field studies of tetrad TL45J. This was one of the BSBI local change squares from ten years ago, so whilst re-finding some of the red-listed plants found then was expected, new species were anticipated to be few and far between. The additions started on January 1, with a new vc record (*Lonicera henryi*) and a Section 8 species *Gnaphalium luteoalbum*. An area of sand



Crassula tillaea at the Cambridge Observatories

(imported) and gravel (uncertain origin) at the Cambridge Observatories produced several Breckland species, most remarkably *Crassula tillaea* (second record and the first since 1930) and *Hernaria glabra*. Landscaping works on the Cambridge University West Cambridge Site gave us a host of aliens, with a run-off ditch producing amongst others *Bidens tripartita*, *B. frondosa*, *Persicaria hydropiper* and *P. minor*. A report on the studies will appear in the 2015 Nature in Cambridgeshire, and species lists are on the CNHS web site.

Vascular Plant Red List for England

The new vascular plant red list for England was published in September and has some surprising additions. Many of the plants mentioned can be found in Cambridgeshire, though some are truly rare. Fen Violet *Viola persicifolia* and Crested Cow-wheat *Melampyrum cristatum* are used as examples of assessing threat status. Many once common plants are becoming scarcer and are therefore classed as Near Threatened. These include *Briza media*, *Campanula rotundifolia*, *Cruciata laevipes*, *Fragaria vesca*, *Helianthemum nummularium*, *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, *Knautia arvensis*, *Plantago media*, *Potentilla erecta*, *Sanicula europaea*, *Silene flos-cuculi*, *Succisa pratensis* and *Valeriana officinalis* amongst others. All these, and some others that have been assessed as being in decline but still widespread are now included in our draft rare plant list which is on the web page. Some of them are still common in parts of Cambridgeshire (eg *Euphorbia exigua* or

Knautia arvensis are common in the south, but not in the fens), and a 1km grid reference for these would be fine where they are common. Others have a much more patchy distribution (eg *Briza media*) and a 100 or 10m reference might be more appropriate. The publication is available as a pdf at <http://www.bsbi.org.uk/england.html>

Review of 2014 excursions

The account of the April meeting is slightly revised from the version written for the BSBI Blog. Although our intentions had been to compile accounts immediately after the visits, this failed for the visit to Bourn.



The CFG in the glade at Waresley Wood

April 26: Waresley and Gransden Wood.

Most of Waresley Wood, which is a BCN Wildlife Trust site, is in neighbouring Huntingdonshire. Our targets were to enjoy the woodland flora, to record the small section in vc29, and then do more recording in the area. As an aide Jonathan Shanklin produced a list of rare species for the Wood, taken from the Hunts RPR. *Primula elatior* is fairly common in the Wood, though its hybrid with *Primula vulgaris* is only occasional – both were found quite

easily. Our first real find was *Athyrium felix-femina*, picked up when we were looking at another fern. Previously it had been reported anonymously in 2002, but only in the monad. The other fern, *Dryopteris borrieri* was also on the RPR, but is now occasional across the wood. Next find was leaves of *Platanthera chlorantha*, which we ended up finding in small numbers at scattered sites across the Wood (though not in vc29). We continued through the Wood into the vc29 part, where we made a comprehensive list, which included *Conopodium majus*, *Orchis mascula*, *Betula x aurita* and *Sorbus torminalis* (believed to have been planted), which are all uncommon in the vice-county. A meadow at the edge of the Wood gave pause for thought – a *Calamagrostis* with hairs on the upper surface of the leaf. The keys all say that this must be *C. canescens*, but many of its other features, including those of a second patch in vc31 were more like those of *C. epigeios*. We left the wood to survey the wider countryside wandering along several footpaths. We didn't find much that was rare, though a couple of partly pollarded *Populus nigra*, complete with spiral galls, in a hedgerow was a nice surprise. Heading back towards the Wood we were delayed by a patch of rough ground adjacent to a grass airfield – this had a selection of arable weeds, though none of note. At a fork in the footpath, Jonathan suggested continuing along a green lane, rather than returning directly to the Wood, and we were rewarded by finding a small patch of *Ranunculus auricomus*, along with another plant further down the lane, which Alan Leslie suggested was a different member of the apomict group. Then it was back into the Wood to enjoy the flora. In a wide ride we found some *Luzula*, which after a bit of puzzling decided was *L. multiflora*, another species from the RPR list, with possible both subspecies present

(so are they really subspecies ?). We decided that it was time to strike back towards the car-park, and perhaps find *Neottia nidus-avis* on the way. Along the way Jonathan stumbled across an immediately recognisable plant in an area with very little other ground flora and called the others to have a look at the leaves of six stems of *Paris quadrifolia*. Although this wasn't on the vc31 record card or the RPR list, we assumed that it must just be infrequent as it is well known in some of the nearby vc29 woods. On arriving back home it didn't seem to be in the RPR, until checking the data-deficient section it was listed as not having been seen in the county since 1982. So a very nice find at a new county site. During the day we added significantly to the records for the two vc29 tetrads that we visited, finding over 150 species in one and over 170 in the other.

May 31: Eversden. We parked by the church in Great Eversden and walked through to a delightful flower-filled meadow just to the south-east of Manor Farm. This held a good deal of *Crepis biennis*, together with plants of a variant of Goat's-beard, *Tragopogon pratensis* subsp. *pratensis*, with ligules about as long as the involucre bracts. We were to see this again on the track up to Eversden Wood, and whilst not all plants had the longer ligules, to some eyes at least the flower colour of all the plants seemed different from the usual variant we see, subsp. *minor*. The meadow also had a population of an *Ononis* that caused some pause for thought: in the field a tentative identification of *repens* x *spinosa* was arrived at, but later it seemed possible that this was *spinosa* that has not yet developed its spines. Intermediates are known from this part of the county and this population may warrant further investigation. From the meadow we headed up the track by Manor Farm to Evesden Wood. By a gateway just west of the farm we admired a good colony of *Sambucus ebulus*, a species recorded at Eversden by Relhan in his 1802 Flora. It was tempting to think that this very persistent alien might have survived here since that time, although this precise locality was only pinpointed by R.G.H. Cant in 1986. The sunken way just to the west produced some splendid plants of *Orobanche elatior* and a convincing patch of *Viola hirta* x *odorata*.

We found the wood full of lush growth, the rides very wet and muddy underfoot, but with a great feeling of botanical potential, although the dense canopy meant the whole area was pervaded by a rather gloomy light. This potential was realised to a large extent by the discovery of several patches of *Paris quadrifolia*, some fine stands of *Conopodium majus*, together with flowering plants of *Epipactis helleborine* and *Orchis mascula*, and a single non-flowering plant of *Platanthera chlorantha*: none new to the Wood, but it was good to see they survive there. On one ride margin we identified a very convincing example of *Rosa arvensis* x *canina* (*R.* x *verticillacantha*) and walking along the southern margin, after lunch in the sun at the edge of the wood, we satisfied ourselves that we also had



The group in the meadow at Eversden

Rosa rubiginosa, *R. canina*, *R. arvensis* and *R. tomentosa*. We were also successful in refinding the large bush of *R. micrantha* recorded in 1997 by Chris Preston and Derek Wells. This is a scarce rose in the county, but Eversden Wood was one of many boulder clay wood sites for this species listed by W.H. Mills pre 1939, for which no voucher specimens exist and for which no modern records have been made. Might there be the similar odd bush of this species lurking at other woodland sites?

We then moved down to the Mare Ware and walked to the south-east as far as a track that leads down to the west end of Little Eversden. We mourned the passing of *Cirsium tuberosum*, which was at one time known from this part of the Mare Way and did just wonder if perhaps a bank or two around Sharp Hill Plantation might be worth searching if access could be arranged. However, tracksides along the ridge produced some fine populations of *Vicia tenuissima*, a rather characteristic plant of this part of the county, whilst much to everyone's delight some chalky arable margins at the bottom of the slope had small populations of Shepherd's Needle, *Scandix pecten-veneris*.

June 12: Chippenham and Kennett. A large group visited the Wild Tracks Offroad Activity Park near Kennett on a blazing summer day. The old sandpits have been transformed into carting and other tracks where we hoped to re-find *Herniaria glabra* and *Trifolium glomeratum* and see *Hypochaeris glabra* and *Medicago minima*. We succeeded in the latter, but not the former, and in addition we found an amazing number of casual aliens, perhaps the most notable of which were *Rumex sanguineus* var. *sanguineus* (this the first certain record for this variant) and *Trifolium resupinatum* (the second



Searching under the baking sun for small Breckland species on a grassy bank at Wild Tracks



Medicago minima (at RSPB Lakenheath)

expired we were forced onto the A11 verge and found several halophyte plants,

county record). These aliens may have arrived in fill that was used to create some of the more varied terrain. Wilting rather in the heat, we refuelled in the cafe, then headed for Dale Hill Farm, with the primary aim of recording the *Populus nigra* that grew there, finding three mature trees. Although the fields were well controlled for arable weeds, some remained on the margins, with a good population of *Chenopodium murale*. When the track marked on the map

including *Parapholis strigosa*, *Elytrigia atherica* and *Sagina maritima*. There were also echoes of Breckland in the presence of *Anisantha tectorum* and *Apera interrupta*, both of which have been appearing more widely of late on roadsides and in association with development sites. We also had strong suspicions that at least one mullein by the roundabout might be *Verbascum thapsus* x *nigrum* and recorded some nice tufts of a rather local Cambridgeshire sedge, *Carex muricata* subsp. *pairae*, which is perhaps most frequent here on the sandy borders of the county. On returning to the car, Jonathan reported recorder fatigue, indicating the volume of records that we had made.

July 20: Bourn and Hardwick. Jane Bulleid kindly arranged permission for us to explore the grounds of Bourn Hall, where she had lived as a child. We were able to park in the Hall car-park, but as we had designated the church as the meeting point, we headed there first in case late arrivals had not seen the updated meeting point. The most notable species found here was *Epilobium obscurum*, a plant which seems to like churchyards and is becoming more frequent in the county. We then headed back to Bourn Hall, where we quickly found the *Dipsacus pilosus*, which was doing well at the woodland edge of the main lawn in front of the Hall. We continued round the grounds, discussing various features of the landscape, debating the identity of two sedges and adding a few common species to the tetrad list. We lunched in a secluded garden, and then decided to walk across the fields towards Hardwick Wood and explore some of the footpaths around Toft, in the hope of finding *Bromus arvensis*.

We recorded quite a few common species en route, but nothing really notable until we came to Manor Farm Meadow, a County Wildlife Site, where we found traditional meadow plants including *Silene silaus*. When we reached the footpath at the west of Hardwick Wood, we admired the *Melampyrum cristatum*, and then continued east. Our find of the day was *Allium oleraceum* with around 30 plants on the track margin between Wood Barn and Wood farms. Somewhat further on a rose gave rise to considerable debate, but was eventually formally determined as *Rosa tomentosa* by Roger Maskew. Further down the track to Hardwick Road, on another CWS, we found the expected *Lathyrus aphaca*, but also some *Lysimachia punctata*. It was now time to head back, but as we turned westwards the skies got steadily darker. By the time we got to the Meadow, rain was threatening and a deluge started. The formerly easy path through a cornfield had turned into a sticky clay that quickly stuck to boots and made walking arduous. Although the rain was stopping as we got back into Bourn, we called it a day, during which we had made 248 records.

August 24: (Tetrad TL48B). Our August meeting took us to Horseley Fen south of Chatteris where records were needed for the Fenland Flora and for our own coverage of vc29. In the main we saw a typical range of fenland plants, but there were one or two



Lunch on the drove

highlights. An early find was *Oenanthe aquatica* growing round the margin of an old pond. A field which had been used for growing turf provided several arable weeds as well as *Gnaphalium uliginosum*. A tall Mallow with small, pale pink flowers and hairy nutlets provided some discussion, though the conclusion was that it was a variety of *Malva sylvestris* rather than an erect *M. neglecta*. A drain running alongside Watt's Drove was by far the best that we encountered, with lots of axiophytes, though nothing particularly rare. It also blocked our route westwards, so we had to retrace our steps (as always adding a few additional species in the process). We decided to continue via the drove roads, picking up *Polypogon monspeliensis* on rough ground by a lay-by. We finished by adding over 50 species to a hitherto un-recorded tetrad, which had only a couple of hundred metres of public access.



Sonchus palustris on the Forty Foot

September 14: How Moor and Curf Fen, south of Doddington (Tetrad TL38Z).

Our final meeting of the year was to the south of Doddington. Although the original plan had been to head east, coverage of this area earlier in the year meant that we headed west along Dykemoor Drove on a circular walk covering parts of four tetrads. We found a few better quality ditches, but the nicest species we found were the liverworts *Ricciocarpos natans* and *Riccia fluitans*. We found several sites for the pink-flowered, hairy-shooted *Calystegia sepium* subsp. *roseata*, which with us is found characteristically in the Fens, but as so often there were also plants which had mixed features growing in populations with subsp. *sepium* nearby! As we had some time left, we then moved on to Puddock Bridge to sample a nearby poorly recorded tetrad. The bridge crosses the Forty Foot, and here we had our star finds of the day, first *Hydrocharis morsus-ranae* (VU, though

scattered across the county) and then *Potamogeton compressus* (EN, and a new hectad record). The north bank also produced a fine clump of *Sonchus palustris* which must have been very close to where David Dupree reported a clump near the bridge in 1953. The north fringe of the Forty Foot often has a dense fringe of reeds and driving back at the end of the day along the road that runs beside the water, it was apparent that there was more hidden in the reeds. Further searches made a few days later revealed a total of 58 clumps, extending as far as Leonard Childs Bridge, north of Chatteris. At the close each of the tetrads we visited achieved the target of at least 100 species to them.

Excursions 2015

Please take careful note that our excursions vary both in the day of the week on which they take place and in the time at which we meet on each occasion. Jonathan Shanklin will send out an email before each meeting reminding you of the details and of any changes, and they will also be posted on the web page. Participants are

welcome to join us for all or part of any excursion. A packed lunch will be required for all meetings and we will generally finish towards the end of the afternoon. Meeting places have been chosen as having some parking space, but this can not be guaranteed. Several landowners specifically request no dogs, and it is BSBI policy not to have dogs (except guide dogs) at meetings, so if you have a dog, please leave it at home. Our meetings often produce some surprising and interesting records so do come along if you can. In addition to these excursions, many of the CNHS excursions have a botanical bias and these are listed on the web page.

*Reproduction of a painting by the
Swedish botanist C. A. M. Lindman
(1856–1928)*



*Will we re-find Melampyrum cristatum in
Kingston Wood ?*

Thursday, April 30, 10am, Kingston Wood

We hope to re-find some species in Kingston Wood that have not been seen for some time. The Wood is accessed from the south by a private road about 1 km long (signposted 'Kingston Wood Manor') which leaves the A1198 at TL318533. Parking/meeting will be behind the first large barn on the right (east) as you arrive at the farm buildings (TL327539) on the southern side of the house.

Thursday, May 28, 10am, Whitehall Farm, Isleham

Whitehall Farm lies in a sandy area of Fenland, not that far from the Brecks, and has an interesting range of wildlife features to explore. We have been asked to make a species list for the farm. For access to the farm turn off the A142 Soham bypass along East Fen Drove then left on Common Gate Drove. There is a car park at the south of the farm at TL62147592.

Sunday, June 21, 11am, Ashwell

We have a joint meeting with the Hertfordshire group on the longest day of the year. We begin in vc20, meeting at Ashwell War Memorial (TL27253992) to record the cemetery, then head north along footpaths and bridleways to the under-recorded part of tetrad TL24Q in vc29. We will return via Ruddery Spring and if time permits visit Ruddery Pit and Ashwell church. We may have an additional meeting the following week in the Burwell area; if so details will be sent by email.

Saturday, July 18, 10am, Wisbech

Potentially interesting plants have been spotted on the banks of the River Nene, but access to them has risks that make it desirable to have assistance on hand if they are to be identified. We will attempt to make some identifications, in a circular walk along North Brink to Lords Lane, then back via Barton Road. Meet by the Friends

Meeting House on North Brink at TF45810962. There may be on street car-parking and there is a free public car park off Chapel Road.

Sunday, August 9, 11am, Borley Wood

Conifers have recently been removed from the wood and we are hoping that the combination of disturbed ground and increased light may bring up some interesting species. Meet by Linton cemetery at TL56414695 – early arrivals may wish to record the cemetery, but at 11am we will head north along the Icknield Way and enter the wood at the west end.

Thursday, September 17, 10am, Mare Fen, Littleport, TL58P

This Fenland tetrad has records for 144 species and we will try to add to the total for the Fenland Flora project. Meet at TL551880, on a bend of a minor road from the A1101 at the south end of Little Mare Fen Drove and at a junction with a bridleway. There appear to be broad enough verges here and the Drove continues north as a permissive path. In the afternoon we will look at the under-recorded tetrad TL58I.

Saturday, October 3, 10am, Soham Mere

On our previous visit to the area we walked all round the edge of the former mere, but this time we have been given permission to visit the centre. It includes one of the few tetrads in the vice-county that has no public access and for which we have no records. The owner of Middle Mere Farm is interested in the archaeology and history of the Mere and would like to know more about the botany, so we will be making a species list for the farm. Meet at the junction of Clarks Drove and Mereside at TL58457412.



An impression of Soham Mere as it used to be

In addition to the Flora Group meetings, many of the Cambridge Natural History Society field meetings have a botanical bias. This year the Society is carrying out a detailed survey of the two monads TL4457 and TL4557, focussing on the Local Nature Reserves of Paradise, Coe Fen and Sheeps Green. The year started well with the discovery of *Rubus niveus* on Sheeps Green on January 1st, a new county record. There will also be some more of the “Nature in my neighbourhood” visits to explore Cambridge streets and a couple of visits to Wandlebury Country Park. Dates for all these will be included on the web page.

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