



# Cambridgeshire Flora Group

## Newsletter 2019

3<sup>rd</sup> Edition

### Recording News

Jonathan Shanklin has continued updating the Rare Plant Register (RPR) and the Register of Plants of Conservation Concern (RPCC), with a major update to include species that are in significant decline in the county. The update was generated following a discussion at the BSBI Recorders Conference, with a comment that some plants hadn't yet been re-found in some hectads in a southern county. It was relatively easy to query the BSBI DDb to find out whether there were such "missing" species in Cambridgeshire hectads. There were, and some were very surprising. *Equisetum fluviatile* (Water Horsetail) is now listed as Vulnerable with a decline of >30% in hectad occupancy and *Orchis mascula* (Early-purple Orchid) is Endangered with a decline of >50%. In total there are 40 new appearances in the RPCC and 26 in the RPR. One surprise bonus is that *Asplenium ceterach* (Rustyback) has increased by 600% compared to pre 2000, though it is still rare and only present at six sites. I [JDS] had originally thought that because older recording was often at hectad resolution, finer scale records would not show any significant change. I was wrong! Although only 50% of the pre-2000 records were localised to monad or better, a further 34 species, mostly aquatics, showed a decline of >30% and are

therefore classed as Vulnerable. One caveat is that some recorders have used an even/even monad grid reference to indicate a tetrad, and this may distort some trends. I have written a paper for Nature in Cambridgeshire which describes the declines in more detail and lists the declining species.

A further update to the RPCC is to include a list of scarce or declining hybrids as an appendix. The validity of some of these is perhaps doubtful, but there may be merit in looking for some of them.

There have been several re-finds of species that had not been seen for several decades. The list of those species not seen recently, which is subdivided into decades has been updated. All of these are on the web

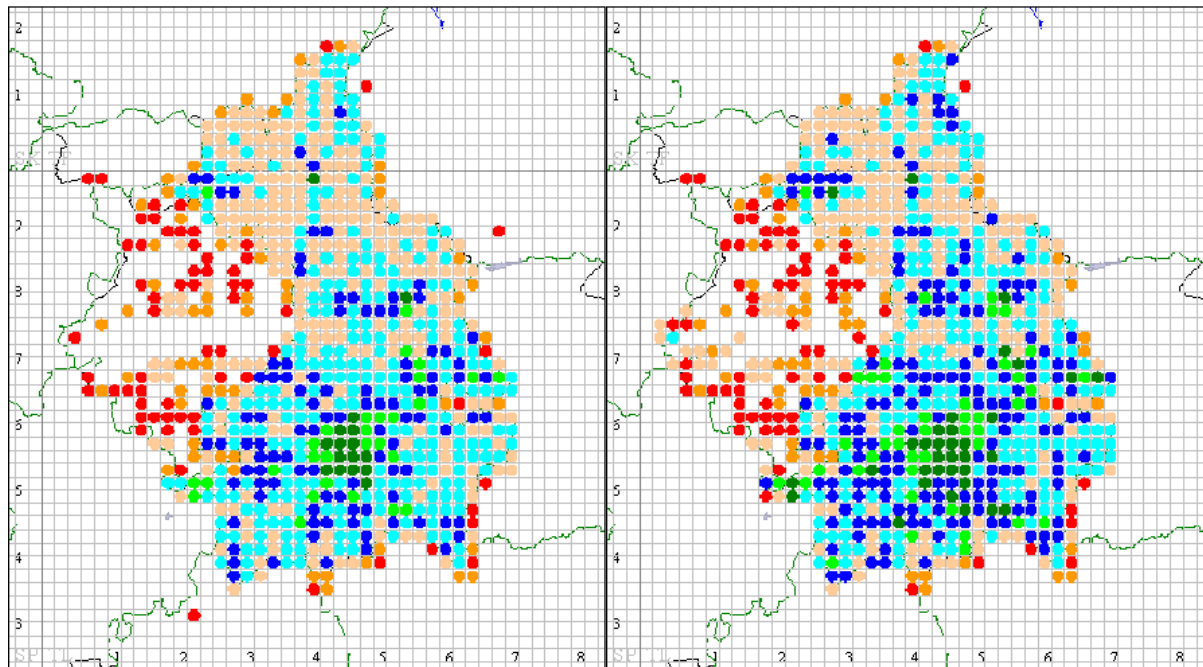


*Carlina vulgaris*, Magog Down

page. The decadal listing might help people to target specific species and perhaps re-discover them. Of the 737 species currently on the RPCC, 299 were seen in 2018, 534 have been seen since 2010 and 591 since 2000. Of the 304 species currently on the RPR (which excludes 145 probably extinct species), 123 were seen in 2018, and 265 have been seen since 2010. Currently 80% of all the RPCC species have been seen since the start of the Atlas 2020 period and there are good chances that some more will still be found in the county.

Cambridgeshire tetrad richness 2017 11

Cambridgeshire tetrad richness 2018 12



Recording progress in 2018 showing the change in coverage over the year for Cambridgeshire (v.cc.29, 31). There was a jump in June/July as a result of incorporating historical records for v.c.29 from the MapMate database. To an extent the main change shown here is in Huntingdonshire (v.c.31), where all the records are from Jonathan making some records during bryological outings and more recently filling in a few gaps. There is an animation showing progress in monthly steps since 2013 November on the web page.

We have now completed the tetrad coverage of the county for Atlas 2020 and Fenland Flora. A few hectads have a less than 75% re-find rate compared to pre-2000, and it may prove impossible to improve their coverage due to the loss of habitat. Further records for 2016 and 2017 have come in and their MapMate (local data entry and database software) totals now stand at 29256, and 25923 records respectively, whilst so far there are 17775 for 2018. Although lower than the peak of 31773 in 2014, these are still magnificent totals, and show the intensity of recording in Cambridgeshire. MapMate records of 1272 species were logged during 2018. May was the most popular month to record (3851 records, boosted by Jonathan starting a survey project) with February being the least (6, with Jonathan in the Antarctic at the start of the year). Overall in the v.c. database the most frequent species are *Urtica dioica* (Nettle) (664) tetrads out of the 665 in the v.c.), followed by *Galium aparine* (Cleavers) (661) and *Dactylis glomerata* (Cock's-foot) (658). We have MapMate records for 2731 (2339 post 2000) different species, subspecies, hybrids or varieties and there are some additional ones in the Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland (BSBI) database (DDb).

The NatHistCam project lead by the Cambridge Natural History Society continues to survey the wildlife of the 64 monads of Cambridge. Jonathan has continued with the botanical surveying and the median number of species per monad in this area currently stands at 291, with a range from 163 to 660. Where possible I have introduced a 5-year cycle for monitoring change at regularly visited sites of special interest such as SSSIs, Local Nature Reserves or City or County Wildlife Sites. This return frequency was recommended at the BSBI Exhibition meeting in 2016 by David Roy. Thanks to the botanical recording for NatHistCam, and this re-recording, TL45 yet again set the record for the most species recorded in a hectad in Britain & Ireland during 2018 with 766 (over 100 more than the next hectad, which was SK56), with TL46 also in the top 40 on 517.

Despite repeated requests for records from individual recorders who we know have records that could be added to the MapMate and BSBI databases, few have been forthcoming. Where necessary independent visits to complete coverage were made. The records that are submitted often still require a lot of checking and editing, both for format and content and it would be a great help if all recorders would follow the recording guidelines! It is not helpful for each recorder to use their own system for submitting data, and



*Paris quadrifolia*, Potton Wood

unless their records are critical the time taken to reformat them is not usually available. 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, but please use a standard data entry system that does some quality control (eg consistent plant names) and formats your records in the standard format. 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](http://www.cnhs.org.uk/Species_Mapmate_vc29.xls) Apps are being developed by the BSBI and others for direct recording, however the means for getting such records into county databases don't seem to have been considered.

If you are not already a member of the BSBI do consider joining. The Society journal *BSBI News* comes out three times a year and has just been relaunched in an updated full-colour format, with Andrew Branson (former editor of *British Wildlife*) as editor.

## New Books

Several publications have come out since the last newsletter, or are due to be published this year. The BSBI Handbook on Euphrasia came out in the spring. Eyebrights are in decline in Cambridgeshire, but we have more members of the family than we thought, so guidance on identification is useful. The final volume (Volume one!) of "Sell & Murrell" came out in March, with a celebratory event at the



Botanic Garden in June. It is an expensive series and perhaps not the first place to look to identify a specimen, but there you will find extensive descriptions. John Poland's Field Key to Winter Twigs arrived at the end of November and I've put it to use a few times. On many occasions you can wait until the summer to identify a tree, but sometimes you only visit a place once and the key is a big help to confirm just about any tree, planted or in the wild. A new edition of the big "Stace" is due out in January, and we will probably have a few new names to contend with. One addition will be "our" new English endemic *x Beruladium procurrens* from Chippenham Fen. Finally Alan's Flora of Cambridgeshire has been sent to the publisher (RHS at Peterborough) and is expected to be published in the first half of the year.

## Vascular Plant Records 2018

Full details of the notable records for the year will be published in *Nature in Cambridgeshire (NiC)*, which is due out in mid April. Here we give some highlights of the records from Alan.



*Viola hirta* leaf hairs, Magog Down  
(Peter Leonard)

As the records to be published later in *Nature in Cambridgeshire* will show there has been the now customary raft of new alien records in the county during 2018. These can sometimes overwhelm the interesting new native plant records that have surfaced during the year and this summary will concentrate on the latter. The publication of volume 1 of Peter Sell and Gina Murrell's *Flora of Great Britain and Ireland* has provided us with a fair number of new taxa, not least in *Ulmus* and *Ranunculus auricomus*. Over 30 Elm species are

now recorded from the county and it is evident that there might well be many more if and when someone gets to grips with those described and looks in detail at more of our material in the field. At present the following seem to be known only from the county: the Woodland Elm (*U. cantabrigiensis*) and the Hatley Elm (*U. sylvatica*), which are both known only from Buff and Hayley Woods, the Madingley Elm (*U. madingleyensis*), which is confined to Madingley Wood, the Hayley Elm (*U. crenata*), which is known from Hayley Wood (where it is the "clone E" distinguished by Oliver Rackham), as well as the Bassingbourn Elm (*U. platyphylla*) which is found only around Bassingbourn, East Hatley and Bottisham. Sell & Murrell suggest that the plant they interpret as *U. minor* is the commonest of these new elm splits in the county.

Similarly the apomictic taxon *Ranunculus auricomus* (Goldilocks Buttercup) has now been divided up, and 15 taxa are recognised from the county, most of which have not been recorded elsewhere. Two are named after famous Cambridgeshire botanists. *R. henslowii* commemorates the influential nineteenth century Professor of Botany, John Stevens Henslow, and is found in a number of localities on the south-eastern

boulder clay, whilst *R. waltersii* is named for Max Walters, formerly Curator of the University Herbarium and Director of the University Botanic Garden, who had a long interest in this group of buttercups: it is found only in woodland on Rivey Hill above Linton. Further taxa are most likely to be recognised from the boulder clay in the south-east of the county. In both these groups the form and variation in the leaves are of critical importance and these are illustrated for all taxa included in the Sell & Murrell accounts. Those looking to develop an interest in these groups should study carefully the introductions to the two accounts.

Our field excursions have been as productive as ever. In Chippenham Park we were able to confirm the presence of *Carex arenaria* (Sand Sedge) in grassed over former sand workings on the southern edge of the Park and indeed to extend its distribution from where it was last recorded in 1980. Earlier in Buff Wood several of us considered that the *Helleborus viridis* (Green Hellebore) had extended its range in the wood and there were certainly many young plants, but we were unable to relocate the *Tilia cordata*



*Trifolium micranthum*, Soham Common  
(Peter Leonard)

(Small-leaved Lime) near the road end of the panhandle (although a later visit confirmed the presence of two trees there). This later visit also enabled the presence of *Rubus britannicus*, suspected on our spring excursion, to be confirmed as one of the brambles in a recently coppiced areas of the wood. Until now this bramble has been almost exclusively a plant of some of our south-eastern boulder clay woods. Later in the year we were given access to the grounds of Sawston Hall where, although there was no sign of *Selinum carvifolia* (Cambridge Milk-parsley), we did manage to restore *Potamogeton coloratus* (Fen Pondweed) to the list for the Fen fields; it had not been reported here since the 1960s. Our visit to Chippenham Fen in June enabled Ian Denholm to come and give us the benefit of his advice and experience in dealing with the identity of marsh orchids. There were no great surprises here, other than the fact that the recently described *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* subsp. *schoenophila* seemed of rather dubious value: this is the narrow-leaved plant that we used to record here as *D. traunsteineri*, but seems to grade imperceptibly into subsp. *praetermissa* on the Fen. However, we had time to move on the same day to Fulbourn Fen which provided some surprises and where Ian's expertise proved particularly invaluable. The population of marsh orchids at Fulbourn has often been a puzzle and the reason is now clear. Not only are there the same three species known at Chippenham (*D. praetermissa*, *D. incarnata* subsp. *incarnata* and *D. fuchsii*), but also all three possible binary hybrids between them, with *incarnata* x *praetermissa* being especially common. These finds all go to show that not only are CFG excursions rewarding occasions, but that well-worn sites can go on yielding surprises.

Other surprises have been recorded during the year. Early in the season the Cambridgeshire bryologists reported *Calluna vulgaris* (Heather) to have reappeared in the Cinques at Gamlingay, where the last plant was reported to have died some years ago. This reappearance is a direct consequence of deliberate clearing and disturbance of the site where the plant was last seen. Later in the season a number of the new seedling plants were seen in flower in what is perhaps now the only site in the county with native plants of this species. Another plant that seems to be making a local comeback is *Bidens cernua* (Nodding Bur-marigold), for long a very rare plant in the county and usually only occurring in small quantity. A solitary plant was seen in a ditch near the Ouse south of Earith in 2015 and in 2018 not only were four plants located just to the south, along bank of the river west of Over, but considerable stands of it were



*Calluna vulgaris* in flower at  
Gamlingay Cinques

reported on the margins of restored pits on the RSPB's Over Fen reserve. *Carex demissa* (Common Yellow-sedge) is another relatively common British plant that has always been rare in Cambridgeshire and the appearance of a solitary plant in a new run-off pit by a new development on the edge of Stretham may indeed be our only extant record. *Taraxacum palustre* (Marsh Dandelion) was recently found for this first time in the Triangular Meadow at Soham, and this year its occurrence in the Soham area was boosted by the discovery of another new population around the gravelly margins of a pond on East Fen Common (the same pond where the previous year we had found *Carex oederi* (Small-fruited Yellow-sedge), which seems already to have faded away at this site).

Another intriguing apparent rediscovery was *Rosa micrantha* (Small-flowered Sweet-briar) in a hedge on the Roman Road by Borley Wood. This was one of the sites noted on the boulder clay by W.H. Mills, probably in the 1930s, many of which have never been relocated and for which no herbarium vouchers were made. These records have been dismissed as probable errors, but this new find follows its rediscovery at Eversden Wood in 1997 and the report of another plant in a hedge on the Roman Road just to the north west of this latest record in 2012. Perhaps other solitary bushes still lurk at some of Mills's other sites? A further example of how plants can sometimes stage a resurgence in areas where there are few modern records comes from Wisbech, where *Rumex hydrolapathum* (Water Dock) was recorded as 'Common by dykesides' by Skrimshire in the early nineteenth century. There have been few records in this area since, the most recent being of a single plant in a ditch west of Halfpenny Lane in 2010; then in 2018 c.90 plants were reported in a ditch along the Lane itself following ditch management. Such variations rely on local botanists being on hand to record the changes.

Some plants do occur in apparently entirely new sites, although of course it may be that if their local occurrence is sporadic no botanist has ever been there at the right moment. Nevertheless, it is remarkable to have a new and locally rare native plant



record from the much-studied Madingley Wood, in this case *Stellaria alsine* (Bog Stitchwort), which has been reported in a damp area along the central north/south ride. This has always been rare in the county and our recent records have otherwise all been from the Gamlingay area. In the Commissioners' Pit at Upware, however, it is a result of the invasion of the pit in the past by *Salix x fragilis* (Crack Willow) which, as they have decayed, have now provided a suitable habitat for epiphytic localities of polypody ferns. These are uncommon enough in Fenland, but most remarkably here it includes plants of both *Polypodium vulgare* s.s. (Polypody) and *P. interjectum* (Intermediate Polypody), the only site as far as we know where both occur together in the county.



*Eriophorum angustifolium* (Common Cottongrass)  
Great Kneighton, Cambridge (Mark Hill)

There have been new records for a few unusual hybrids during the year. Perhaps of most interest is *Hypochaeris glabra* x *H. radicata*. This hybrid is said to occur wherever the parents meet in Breckland, but had never been reported from Cambridgeshire until this year, when a large population of *H. glabra* (Smooth Cat's-ear) was reported for the first time from an unploughed, sandy arable field margin at

Fordham. In one area of this population was small group of *H. radicata* (Cat's-ear) and surrounding them scattered plants of the hybrid. Another hybrid which posed more of a problem in its identification was a willowherb collected from an urban roadside in Cambridge. This had consistently 4-lobed stigmas and rather narrow, stalked leaves and seemed a good candidate for *Epilobium lanceolatum* x *montanum*, both of which are present in this part of the city. However, when submitted to the BSBI referee, Geoffrey Kitchener, its indumentum and other characters proved it to be *E. montanum* x *E. roseum*. Admittedly it was an atypical variant, unusual for a hybrid between a species with an entire stigma (*E. roseum*) (Pale Willowherb) and one with a four-lobed stigma (*E. montanum*) (Broad-leaved Willowherb), in that the stigma was not irregular in its form: a lesson in looking beyond the most obvious character and studying the whole plant!

Our new alien records have been boosted by an unexpected rash of new finds from caravan and camp sites (a phenomenon recently reported in *BSBI News* from elsewhere in the country), as well as some unexpected plants found as weeds in nurseries and garden centres. Some of these, such as *Euphorbia maculata* (Spotted Spurge), *E. prostrata* (Prostrate Sandmat) and *Amaranthus blitum* (Guernsey Pigweed), are now being picked up as street weeds in the county and these will all be covered in more detail in *Nature in Cambridgeshire*. Three other plants, all of which are aliens in the county, are perhaps worth a mention here. The most unexpected was found on a CFG excursion to Whittlesey in August. Here, on the infill bank of an old clay pit (Gildenburgh Water), we found an alien figwort, *Scrophularia grandiflora*, well naturalised under access steps to the water, and on a later visit also around the nearby buildings. The plant appeared to be known to some members of the diving club, which now uses the pit as a training centre, but the origin of this figwort here is a mystery: it has unusually large flowers, yellowish green at first, but

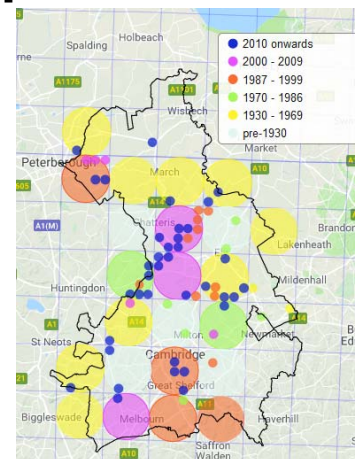
aging to an orange-red colour. By contrast there has been a recent report that the alien willowherb, *Epilobium tetragonum* subsp. *tournefortii* (resembling subsp. *tetragonum* (Square-stalked Willowherb) in general form, but with flowers almost the size of *E. hirsutum* (Great Willowherb)) has now appeared on the A428 west of Cambridge; up till now it was known almost only from the Royston bypass. Finally visitors and residents in Cambridge may be familiar with some of the scattered sites now to be found in and near the city for the Ivy Broomrape, *Orobanche hederaceae*, which has now turned up in an entirely new area, as a weed in Linton in the south-east of the county. This too seems likely to spread further and may well turn up anywhere as a garden weed.

## Cambridgeshire Rare Plants

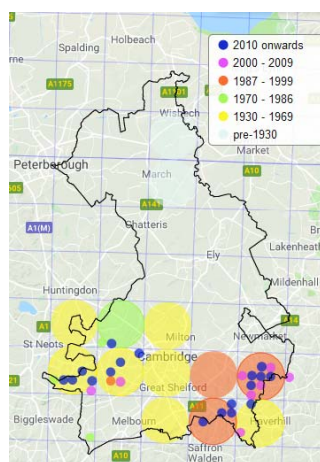
For this issue I have chosen three plants that are significantly threatened in the county as shown by their decline in hectad occupancy. All three are common in parts of the county, so their threat status was a surprise. The figures show their current distributions in the county from the DDb and the introductions come from the BSBI Atlas accounts.

### ***Equisetum fluviatile* (Water Horsetail) [County Vulnerable]**

This deciduous herb grows in a wide variety of aquatic and semi-aquatic habitats, from ditches and small ponds to large lakes and sheltered rivers. It tolerates a remarkable range of water and substrate pH, nutrient levels, substrate type and water depth, and is often a pioneer species in freshwater successions. (BSBI Atlas) This plant is one of our many aquatic species that are in trouble. Although still common along the Hundred Foot Washes, it seems to be in slow decline elsewhere as habitat is lost. On rare occasions it does colonise new sites in the county, for example it was found in 2014 at the edge of a newly created lagoon at Paradise LNR in Cambridge.



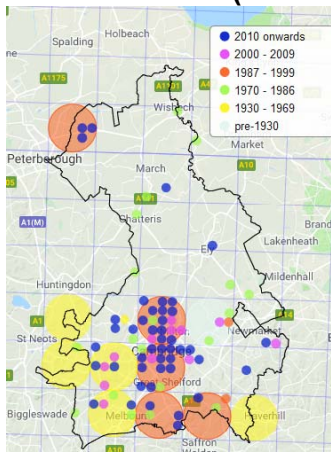
### ***Orchis mascula* (Early-purple Orchid) [County Endangered]**



This tuberous perennial herb grows on a variety of neutral and calcareous soils, and is most frequent in woodland, coppices and calcareous grassland. However, it also occurs in hedgerows, scrub, on roadsides and railway banks and on limestone pavement and moist cliff ledges. (BSBI Atlas) In Cambridgeshire it was mostly a woodland plant, though it was occasionally found in more open grassland. The woods in the north of the county are long gone. The plant is now restricted to the Boulder Clay woods of the west and south-east of the county and even in these woods it appears to be in decline. As an example Ray (1660) noted that it was abundant in Madingley Wood but in 2018 Jonathan Shanklin found only one plant on the western ride.



## ***Viscum album* (Mistletoe) [County Vulnerable]**

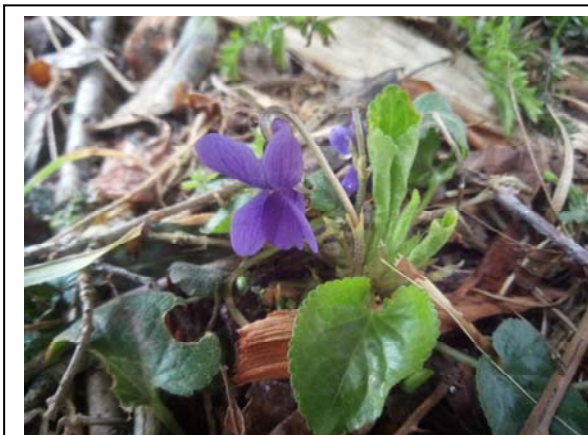


A hemiparasite on a wide range of trees in orchards, hedgerows, parklands and gardens, but rarely in dense or primary woodlands. Its most frequent hosts are *Malus* spp., followed by *Tilia x europaea* (Common Lime), *Crataegus* spp. (Hawthorn, its commonest native hosts), *Populus* spp., *Acer* spp., *Salix* spp. and *Robinia pseudoacacia* (False-acacia). (BSBI Atlas) Those living in Cambridge will think that the plant is doing really well, particularly when passing along Madingley Road, where some trees give the appearance of sinking under the weight of the infestation. It does however appear to have been lost from many hectads, perhaps as a result of grubbing out old orchards. As a winter challenge readers might like to see if they can spot it in any of its lost hectads of TL24, 25, 26, 37, 38, 57, 64, 67, TF40 and 50.

## **Review of 2018 excursions**

### **March 24: Magog Down**

March was cold, with snow only the weekend before. On our visit to Magog Down it was an overcast, cool, though calm day. Whilst the Met Office had forecast heavy rain at the start, this didn't appear. We began with two tetrad additions – An *Erophila* at the path edge had the typical shiny green, hairless leaves of *E. glabrescens* (Glabrous Whitlowgrass) and the area was covered with young plants of *Torilis nodosa* (Knotted Hedge-parsley). How this had been missed on previous visits I don't know! We explored the car park, though



*Viola odorata*, Magog Down

were slightly distracted by some interesting lichens and a patch of Winter Stalkball *Tulostoma brumale*. We then continued clockwise round the Magog Trust grounds. In general few flowers were out, but we did see some patches of *Viola odorata* var. *odorata* (Sweet Violet). We took lunch about as far from the main road as we could get, and then continued on our circumnavigation, which took us into the Stapleford Parish Pit. This has recently been cleared of scrub and it will be interesting to see what appears over the summer. From Colin's Bank we spotted the sandy ground of the Lowestoft Formation which caps Little Trees Hill. Apparently *Calluna vulgaris* (Heather) used to grow here and Alan offered a bottle of champagne if anyone could re-find it. Having detoured across the Down, as we returned towards Little Trees Hill we spotted a patch of *Carlina vulgaris* (Carlina Thistle), another tetrad record. Alan also spotted a *Cotoneaster* (*C. lacteus*), which up to then had been notably absent across the site. We continued on to Colin's Wood, where a strongly growing patch of *Viola odorata* made us wonder if it had a little of *V. hirta* in its make-up. We completed our circuit by coming up the entrance road, where some clumps of

*Muscari* made us get out Poland, which led to the conclusion that it was *M. armeniacum* (Garden Grape-hyacinth). By now the skies were darkening and the first spits of rain fell as the two cyclists approached the City centre.

#### April 15: Buff Wood



*Helleborus viridis*, Buff Wood

The cold, wet spring had continued, and the Met Office forecast a 50% chance of more rain through much of the day. We had some sun, and the patchy rain held off until the end of the day. *Anemone nemorosa* (Wood Anemone) was in flower on the banks near the wood entrance, along with plentiful *Ficaria verna* (Lesser Celendine). Although *Helleborus viridis* (Green Hellebore) was our target, a different species, *Helleborus x hybrida* was spreading not far from the entrance, along with a selection of Narcissus and Galanthus. Continuing inwards the main rides were in good condition, though quite wet. Here we saw *Paris quadrifolia* (Herb Paris) and *Luzula pilosa* (Hairy Wood-rush). Lunch, however was to be in St Denis's churchyard, so we had to leave before seeing the *Helleborus viridis*. We had a quick look round the churchyard after lunch, with *Luzula*

*campestris* (Field Wood-rush) added to the list, but overall it didn't seem very inspiring. We then decided to head to the three smaller wood that belong to the Astor Estate. The first seemed to be of more recent origin, with little ground flora, though a couple of glades provided more interest, with *Centaureum erythraea* (Common Centaury) and *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* (Common Spotted-orchid) on a stream bank. The next wood had some large Elms that had survived Dutch Elm Disease, but we were too early to decide the exact species. This wood had more ground flora, with *Mercurialis perennis* (Dog's Mercury) present. On our way to the final wood we re-found the *Genista tinctoria* (Dyer's Greenweed) that we had seen five years previously at what may be its only native site in the county. Baulk Wood was different again, with one plant of *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* (Bluebell) and some *Viola odorata* var *dumetorum* (Sweet Violet). We decided we had time to see the *Helleborus viridis* before returning home, so headed back to Buff Wood. The plant's population seems to have increased over the years and now occurs in a patch some 30 metres across. There are other locations for it at Kingston Wood and in nearby Hatley Park.

#### May 10: Chippenham Hall

By kind permission of Becca Nicolle we visited Chippenham Hall and its Park to see if we could re-find some pre 1900 species. In this we were unsuccessful, but we did succeed in finding a good number of pre 2000 wants and a few surprises. The weather for our visit was excellent and select group of seven walked round the grounds. At the start we were a group of five, so dallied near the entrance drive, finding *Cerastium semidecandrum* (Little Mouse-ear) and *Saxifraga tridactylites* (Rue-leaved Saxifrage). The other two had followed the letter of the instruction and parked outside the grounds, but eventually found us. We perambulated round the



estate, beginning with the cricket ground. Our first excitement came at a more sandy area at the far end of the estate where we first spotted a *Carex*, which was at first neglected for the more exciting *Carex arenaria* (Sand Sedge). A nearby sedge was agreed to be *Carex muricata* (Prickly Sedge), which left the first sedge as being *Carex divulsa* (Grey Sedge). After lunch we continued a little way round, but to avoid crossing into another tetrad headed back along an avenue of limes that had plentiful *Descurainia sophia* (Flixweed) underneath them in cattle trampled areas. The cattle had clearly been fed Parsnip at some point as there was some *Pastinaca sativa* subsp. *sativa* growing in disturbed ground. Heading for the Lake we were amazed at the amount of *Berberis vulgaris* (Barberry) in flower in the boundary planting. The Winter Walk fishponds gave us a good range of aquatics, including *Potamogeton coloratus* (Fen Pondweed) and *Chara hispida*. The garden walls of Hare Hall gave us *Pseudofumaria alba* (Pale Corydalis) and a *Chaenomeles* sp. but were generally fairly clean. We continued along Adrian's Walk back to the cars, but didn't add much further. By the end of the day we had recorded 270 species in total, found over 20 species on the post 2000 tetrad missing list and added a further 93 species to the list thus making it a very successful day.



*Berberis vulgaris*  
Chippenham Hall

### May 13: Soham meadows

We paid another visit to Soham a year after our first, with the aim of visiting the remaining larger commons. We began at the churchyard, which was rather disappointing, but we did add a couple of species to the tetrad list. Taking a lane southwards we crossed the river and followed the footpath, eventually entering a meadow. This wasn't actually one of our targets, but Moat Closes was in some ways the best of the day, with *Avenula pubescens* (Downy Oat-grass) and *Filipendula vulgaris* (Dropwort). Crossing the railway line we entered South Horse Fen. This was covered in Buttercups, but didn't look that promising for much else. Oli did however find a patch of *Ophioglossum vulgatum* (Adder's-tongue), and our lunch



The CFG admiring *Anacamptis morio*

spot had *Trifolium micranthum* (Slender Trefoil) at its second most northerly location in the county. Heading north we came to Angle Common, which is split into two by the railway. The eastern part was rather neglected, with a swamp in the north, and the western half was much improved. Returning to the cars we decided that there was time to visit North Horse Fen and at first glance this seemed better; we soon found a few patches of *Ophioglossum vulgatum*. Continuing round there were a few indicator species, but it



wasn't until we were nearly back at the starting point that we found a flowering *Anacamptis morio* (Green-winged Orchid), and then a further couple not far away. We hadn't spotted them until we were nearly on top of them so there may have been others in the meadow; those interested might like to return.

### June 14, Sawston Hall

The weather was kind and it was dry all day, with sun in the afternoon. We began with a walk round the churchyard, where one side was in fair condition, but the other side had recently been trashed by strimming and leaving all the cuttings. It was fortunate that we looked round in the morning as when we left in the late afternoon a gang were busy mowing the remaining part. We did manage to spot a good number of species, with perhaps the highlight being *Asplenium adiantum-nigrum* (Black Spleenwort) on the churchyard wall and on the church. There were several



*Potamogeton coloratus* in the ditch (Chris Preston)

*Epilobium* species, with *Epilobium obscurum* (Short-fruited Willowherb) living up to its name by appearing at first glance to be *E. tetragonum* (Square-stalked Willowherb). It used to be a rare plant in the county, mostly seen at Gamlingay, but is now widely spread.

The owner of Sawston Hall, John Crompton, kindly gave us permission to record the flora of Sawston Hall Fen and the grounds. Once inside (the gates were timed for cars, not walkers) we were welcomed by the groundsmen and shown the layout.

We decided to begin with the meadows in the hope of finding the *Selinum carvifolia* (Cambridge Milk-parsley), as some of the party had to leave early, but in this we failed. We did however find a host of interesting species such as *Carex pulicaris* (Flea Sedge) and *Potentilla x mixta*. A chance find (in a secluded spot after lunch....) was *Potamogeton coloratus* (Fen Pondweed) in a section of ditch, last seen on the site in 1965. Having completed the meadows we started a walk around the grounds. The wooded area gave us planted aliens such as *Metasequoia glyptostroboides* (Dawn Redwood), but also Near Threatened natives such as *Sanicula europaea* (Sanicle). The vegetable patch had *Chenopodium hybridum* (Maple-leaved Goosefoot) and a bank at the back of the tennis courts had *Carex caryophyllea* (Spring Sedge) and *Centaureum erythraea* (Common Centaury). Altogether a very satisfying day, with 275 species recorded. We plan to return a little later in the year in 2019.

### June 21, Chippenham Fen

The dry weather in June continued and we had a fine day for our outing. Ian Denholm, the BSBI *Dactylorhiza* referee, had come along to help elucidate the species on the Fen. Chris Hainsworth, the Natural England Site manager welcomed us, and warned us to avoid ditches and things that bite. We made a circular walk around the Fen, stopping here and there to inspect the orchids. The majority were *D.*

*praetermissa* (Southern Marsh-orchid), a few were *D. incarnata* (Early Marsh-orchid), mostly the salmon pink subspecies, but some albino. Ian also pointed out some of the hybrids, showing us that it needed several features of both parents to be sure that it was a hybrid. There were some specimens of *D. praetermissa* that had a few spots on their leaves, but weren't a hybrid. On the circuit we also saw the *Epipactis palustris* (Marsh Helleborine), which was just into flower and *Gymnadenia densiflora* (Marsh Fragrant-orchid) which was mostly still in bud. We also saw *Selinum carvifolia* (Cambridge Milk-parsley), which seemed to be shooting up, but was still only in leaf, along with quite a few sedges.



Ian Denholm studying an orchid

We completed our circuit about 2:30, so Alan suggested that it might be worth going on to Fulbourn Fen to look at the orchids there. It was! Here all the *D. incarnata* was the albino form, and there were plants that appeared to be the hybrids of *D. incarnata* x *D. praetermissa*, *D. incarnata* x *D. fuchsii* and *D. praetermissa* x *D. fuchsii*. There were also some plants that Ian couldn't place, so he took lots of photos of them. In addition there was *Ophrys apifera* (Bee Orchid), *Neottia ovata* (Twayblade) and *Anacamptis pyramidalis* (Pyramidal Orchid), bringing our count of species up to eight.

### July 5, Wicken Fen

There had been no rain since the beginning of June, and July started hot and sunny. Our main target for the day was to find some additional species in tetrad TL57K, but we also made general records for Wicken Fen, and showed off some of the less common species. Having checked in at the visitor centre, we set off along the



A hot day at Wicken Fen

boardwalk by Wicken Lode. A somewhat rugose Bramble caught the eye and Alan suggested that it was something like *Rubus prinosus*. The next oddity was a Hawthorn, and this seemed to include *Crataegus monogyna* and *C. rhipidophylla* in its parentage. A boardwalk corner provided the first of the Fen rarities *Thelypteris palustris* (Marsh Fern), which only grows here and at Chippenham Fen. By now we were into the target tetrad and along the Lode we kept looking for pondweeds, but failed to find any. At the edge of the path we found a patch of *Eleocharis quinqueflora* (Few-flowered Spike-rush), only known from Wicken and a patch of *Trifolium fragiferum* (Strawberry Clover), last seen here by Max Walters in 1980. Scattered along the rides was occasional *Lathyrus palustris* (Marsh Pea), some of it in flower. Jonathan fished out a *Chara* from a ditch, later identifying it



as *C. virgata*, noting that it had a different smell to *C. vulgaris*. We completed our circuit in mid afternoon, and most unusually were allowed a tea-break before proceeding along Spinney Drove for the second part of the day. This actually proved rather disappointing, with no access to adjoining fields, and only *Potamogeton natans* (Broad-leaved Pondweed) in an adjoining ditch being of much note, though a *Lemna* in the drain next to the Fen did generate some discussion. It seemed to have a darker patch around the roots, but a later inspection under the microscope suggested this was just an algal concentration. The microscope did however show that there were two *Lemna* present, both *Lemna minor* (Common Duckweed) and the flat form of *L. gibba* (Fat Duckweed). Steve suggested continuing over the road, where there was a track between wheat fields. This did prove to be more interesting and we eventually found one of the missing species – *Lapsana communis* (Nipplewort). At the end of the track we spotted the excavation into the Jurassic limestone, however this was deemed too far away to investigate, so we headed back to the National Trust car park. Although there was some discrepancy between the DDb and MapMate listings, by the end of the day we had achieved the target of reducing the number of “unfound” species in TL57K to less than 90, to be precise to 82 so there are still many more to find.

#### **August 18, Lattersey, TL29Y.**

Our August outing took us to the east of Whittlesey, an area that Owen Mountford had extensively covered before 2000. The target was our only remaining tetrad in which we had re-found fewer than 70% of species seen prior to 2000. Following some rain in the first half of August, the brown of the baking June and July was beginning to turn green and we had fine weather all day. The CFG targeted Lattersey LNR and Gildenburgh Water, whilst Owen took on a roving commission to cover other areas. We found *Mentha spicata* (Spear Mint) near the car park, and Jonathan pointed out that there was another mint mixed in with it that was much hairier – *M. x villosanervata* (Sharp-toothed Mint). The voluntary wardens kindly lead us round, and we perhaps went slower than they expected. Willows provided some discussion and one with long pointed leaves and a downy underside suggested *Salix caprea* (Goat Willow) and *S. viminalis* (Osier) amongst the parents. Striping the Willow showed no evidence of *S. cinerea* (Grey Willow), so it was one of our wanted species: *S. x smithiana*. A newly emerged Musk Beetle distracted us from the botany for a short while. The long pond didn't have many aquatics, but did have the floating liverwort *Ricciocarpos natans*. Some areas of wet meadow had *Sonchus palustris* (Marsh Sow-thistle), a relatively new arrival on the site. A *Dactylorhiza* sp, defied firm identification and will need a revisit next year if the tetrad hasn't achieved 75%. We took lunch in a glade, then headed across New Road to the northern part of the reserve, though we passed through fairly quickly on our way



The CFG admiring  
*X Conyzigeron huelsenii*



to neighbouring Gildenburgh Water. Having checked in, we first explored a small pit near the owners' house. A *Veronica* was closely inspected, with the final decision being that it wasn't *V. scutellata* (Marsh Speedwell) but *V. catenata* (Pink Water-speedwell), still it was a species on the wanted list. Mark also noted *Riccia fluitans*, another liverwort. The former brickworks site had plenty of *Erigeron acris* (Blue Fleabane) and some small *Conyza canadensis* (Canadian Fleabane) and Alan was asked if there might be the hybrid. A few seconds later he showed it to us! We continued round the site, but it wasn't until we had nearly finished that Chris noted a *Scrophularia* below steps going down to a diving cage. After a bit of thought someone spotted the large red flower, and Alan suggested possibly *S. grandiflora*, which was a first record in the BSBI database, but not new to the British Isles. We crossed back to the north part of Lattersey LNR, but this was rather disappointing with few additions. Back at the car park we met up with Owen who reported a list of over 200 including some 15 re-finds. Altogether we had around 25 refinds and a number of new tetrad records, which just took the tetrad over the 75% refind requirement.

### September 15: Walpole Marsh.

Our trip to the Cambridgeshire sea-side took place on a fine autumn day. We had a short walk in to vc29, where a gate conveniently marked the county boundary. We soon spotted some interesting plants on the bank of the River Nene – a *Salicornia*, later determined as *S. ramosissima* (Purple Glasswort), and *Suaeda maritima* (Annual Sea-blite). Dredging of the bank had removed the *Spartina anglica* (Common Cord-grass), seen on the last Flora Group outing to the area, but maritime plants were growing on the dredgings. Just before we reached the county boundary to the south we spotted *Plantago maritima* (Sea Plantain) and *Artemisia maritima* (Sea Wormwood). Lunch was in the shelter of some dredgings in Kindersley's Cut (there was a bit of a breeze) and we then headed inland along a saline channel, where a crab dived for shelter. The pumping station stilling well provided a couple



*Hyoscyamus niger*  
in the weedy bulb field

more species, then a silty bulb field beckoned. This had *Anchusa arvensis* (Bugloss), and five plants of *Hyoscyamus niger* (Henbane), that Tim had spotted from the other side of the hedge. A *Rorippa* attracted much debate, but the eventual consensus was that it was *R. sylvestris* (Creeping Yellow-cress) as it was a perennial, and it wasn't fruiting well because it was self-incompatible. An adjoining silty field had one plant of *Glebionis segetum* (Corn Marigold), possibly native here as there was no other evidence of wild-flower sowing. The trek back to the cars was rather disappointing, particularly with a navigation error increasing the length of the walk. For a finale we went on to Foul Anchor to view the *Spiranthes spiralis* (Autumn Lady's-tresses), which was doing well on the banks of the pumping station.

## October 6: Chatteris



A fen drove in the rain

After a season largely without rain it was inevitable that we should draw the short straw for our final outing. After a dry start to October, the weather changed and it was cold, wet and windy all day. Nothing daunted the team of five set off along the old railway track that had been turned into a local walking route. A series of planted trees delayed our progress, and because of the rain specimens were taken for later identification (these included *Euonymus sieboldianus* (apparently a first UK record) and *Elaeagnos commutata*

(Silverberry)). After this the track was pretty dull with no relict grassland and we turned off onto Little Acre Drove. A Maize field gave a few arable weeds, notably *Erysimum cheiranthoides* (Treacle-mustard) and *Solanum physalifolium* (Green Nightshade). Further along, a side track led into a field, which had partly burnt during the drought. Somewhat to our surprise a plume of smoke showed that it was still burning in an underground peat fire. At the field margin we found *Juncus conglomeratus* (Compact Rush), which was on the hectad wanted list. We returned back to the old railway and on to the county boundary, but it was only slightly better quality on the higher ground. We needed some shelter for lunch, so thought the "Works" might provide some. It was securely fenced off, but we did find a sheltered bank. We decided that Chatteris itself might offer better pickings and be less exposed, so headed towards the urban fringe, with Lewis spotting *Panicum miliaceum* (Common Millet). Continuing round the fringe, a backstreet track and adjacent field gave some excitement, with first *Datura stramonium* (Thorn-apple) followed by *Panicum capillare* (Witch-grass) at the edge of the rape field, followed by *Chenopodium giganteum* (Tree Spinach) at the edge of a ditch. From there we meandered back through the tetrad towards the cars, not finding much else of note, though *Solanum lycopersicon* (Tomato) was a hectad record. In all we added 17 species to the MapMate hectad list, with the *Euonymus* having to go directly into the DDb, however this wasn't enough to get the hectad to 75% and more visits will be required.

## Excursions 2019

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, but please arrive promptly at the start. We often have to give a site briefing at which you must be present. A packed lunch will be required for all meetings and we will generally finish towards the end of the afternoon. On occasion we will be walking over some distance over ground which may be rough. Please do read the BSBI advice to participants on field meetings, which is at <http://bsbi.org/download/6323/> 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. This year our outings focus on sites or species, particularly with a view to re-finding species not seen for some time.

**Tuesday, April 16, 10am, Weston Colville and Lower Wood (General)**

We begin the year with our usual visit to a woodland site. Lower Wood is being badly affected by Ash Dieback, but what effect will this have on the ground flora? Meet at Weston Colville church TL616531. Park in the village as the church is on a bend.

**Sunday, April 28, 11am, Chatteris (Atlas 2020)**

Only a few hectads in the county are under-recorded when compared to pre-2000 records at the <75% level and the worst is still TL38, despite our visit there in 2018. Meet by the barrier on the old road south of the roundabout at TL386856. This time we will head north.

**Sunday, May 12, 11am, Wilbraham Common (General)**

Over half the species known from Wilbraham Common have not been recorded in the last decade, so we will attempt to refind as many as we can. Our route to the Common will begin at Quay Water Bridge (TL509594) and along the Little Wilbraham River. After recording the Common we will return via Long Drove Way to D'Engayne's Fen.

**Tuesday, June 4, 10am, Bottisham Hall (Site/Species)**

This site, the home of the Jenyns family, has long standing connections with natural history. We will record the grounds, and in particular we hope to re-find *Orchis insectifera* (Fly Orchid). Full details of the arrangements will be sent by email.

**Saturday, June 8, 10:30am, RSPB Nene Washes (Site)**

Depending on which fields birds are breeding in, we hope to visit parts of the Nene Washes that have rare species such as *Cirsium dissectum* (Meadow Thistle) and *Dactylorhiza incarnata* (Early Marsh-orchid). Park at the edge of the track off the B1040 north of Whittlesey at TL279991.

**Saturday, July 13, 10am, Gamlingay (Sites/Species)**

Several of the Gamlingay tetrads still have more than 100 species missing compared to pre 2000, so we will aim to remedy the deficiency. We will also look for some of the varied species of *Rubus* (Bramble) that grow in this area. We will be visiting one site where several interesting species such as *Deschampsia flexuosa* (Wavy Hair-grass) used to grow. The number of participants for this visit is strictly limited to 10 at the request of the landowner, so please contact Jonathan if you plan to come. If it is over-subscribed you will be put on a waiting list.



*Luzula multiflora* (Heath Wood-rush)  
Gamlingay Cinques



### **Thursday, July 25, 10am, Cambridge Guided Busway (General)**

We will walk west along the Guided Busway, detouring off in a few places and returning on the bus. Meet at the Science Park stop TL467612.

### **Sunday, August 11, 11am, Kingfishers Bridge (Site/Species) TBC**

The group has never visited Kingfishers Bridge, despite it being a well-known site that is trialling the introduction of several rare species. Jonathan Shanklin is carrying out a detailed inventory of the plant species in the site and will lead the group round to see some of them, hopefully including *Selinum carvifolia* (Cambridge Milk-parsley), *Teucrium scordium* (Water Germander) and *Viola persicifolia* (Fen Violet). Meet at the car park TL548729.



*Carex pseudocyperus* (Cyperus Sedge)  
Great Kneighton, Cambridge (Mark Hill)

### **Sunday, September 1, 11am, Royston (General)**

We will begin this visit at Goffers Knoll, where we may see some chalk grassland and caravan transported aliens. We'll then move to the wide verges of the Royston bypass, which whilst not to everyone's taste, have a range of interesting species, including several *Hieracia* (Hawkweeds). We will see what else we can find on them. Meet at Summer House Farm TL390429. Turn north off the A505 towards Melbourn, then take the farm track west, roughly midway between the A505 and Melbourn. There is parking by the farm. Provisionally the second part of the day will explore the western end of the bypass, but plans may change on the day.

### **Saturday, September 21, Cherry Hinton (Specialist)**

This meeting is a joint one with the BSBI, so you will need to book to attend and will then receive details of the meeting point and time. Alan Leslie will guide us through the identification of Cotoneaster species, of which there are many in East Pit. We should also see the *Seseli libanotis* (Moon Carrot), though this may require a stiff climb to the top of West Pit. There is no parking immediately on site and you are advised to park in Cherry Hinton.

There is the possibility of one or two last minute additions to the programme if permissions come through or surveys are organised. 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 parts of Cherry Hinton, including the chalk pits and Cherry Hinton Hall, primarily covering the monads TL4756, TL4855 and TL4856. There may also be further "Nature in my neighbourhood" visits to explore Cambridge streets, and visits to the Barnwell Junction Pastures, Wandlebury Country Park and Magog Down. Dates for all these will be included on the web page.

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