



# Cambridgeshire Flora Group

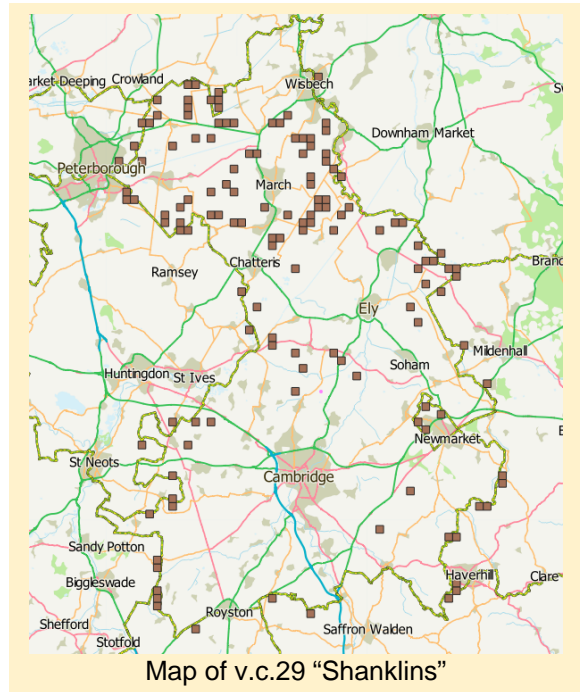
## Newsletter 2022

1<sup>st</sup> Edition

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### News

Coronavirus guidance continued to influence what was allowable, though fortunately by the time the recording season properly started it was possible to meet in groups outdoors. This year none of the CFG excursions were severely impacted, although the first was delayed by a few days to allow it to take place. Recording has continued apace, although not quite at the high level of the previous year. I have been systematically recording a few areas, notably Trumpington Meadows, the Gog Magog golf course SSSI and the Madingley Estate. I've continued with local recording, visited some more protected road verges and ticked off a few "Shanklins". Alex Lockton (Shropshire) coined this term for a monad with no previous records as I was managing to visit quite a few such monads in his county. Despite the very intensive recording across Cambridgeshire there are still some to record, particularly in fenland. Altogether there are around 130 entire or partial "Shanklins", though a majority have no public access. Whilst most are unlikely to hold anything of significance, you never know!



On the BSBI front I remain as the Hon. Field Meetings Secretary and Chair of the Committee for England (CfE), along with acting as a proof reader for *British & Irish Botany (B&IB)* – and of course vice-county recorder. The various roles keep me pretty busy! There has been further discussion on a possible project for England and a study of declining plants from the *Register of Plants of Conservation Concern (RPCC)* that are no longer present in a hectad, but are still present in a neighbouring hectad may help inform conservation priorities. The three BSBI meetings in the county that were due to take place in 2020 did happen 2021. Two of these were more specialised (Elms and Cotoneasters) and the other was for beginners. There were the usual Flora Group meetings and these covered a variety of sites across the county. They are reported in more detail later in the newsletter. I've continued work on compiling a register of county botanical sites, though this is still a work in progress. One constraint is the lack of

knowledge of the actual boundaries of many designated sites. Although the boundaries of SSSI sites are public knowledge, the locations and boundaries of CWS and CiWS are largely on a “need to know” basis. There are however some public documents, notably Site Registers for [Cambridge City](#) (2005) and [East Cambridgeshire](#) (2010). There is a [map showing sites in Fenland](#), however South Cambridgeshire does not seem to have anything comparable.

I’m sorry to have to report another death of a noted local botanist – that of Philip Oswald. A comprehensive obituary appeared in BSBI News No 148 (September 2021), along with one for Trevor James. There was also an obituary for Philip in *Nature in Cambridgeshire* (NiC). Gordon Hanson, from Hertfordshire, who was noted for his work on and growing of alien plants, died on December 13 aged 83. He was also interested in *Hieracium* and contributed some v.c.29 records of the taxa.

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## Recording News

As I write, the local logging software, “MapMate” has not been updated to use Stace 4 names. Therefore when submitting species lists, please continue to use the Stace 3 names. I have received at least one list that used a mix of Stace 2, 3 and 4 names, which then required some editing! The BSBI is working on producing a new recording app, but this is unlikely to be in a useable form before the summer. The BSBI is slowly updating names in the main database to Stace 4, and this should soon be completed.

The evidence is clear that whilst standard hand held GPS recorders will give you a position to 10 figures (eg TL1234567890) and may claim that this is accurate to better than two metres, the reality is that the position will not be accurate to ten metres. This was demonstrated when plotting the position of trees in a Cambridge nature reserve and the GPS positions put many of them in a lake. Therefore, please only give 8 figure positions (eg TL12346789) unless you are using a high accuracy differential GPS unit.

These are very expensive!



*Eryngium campestre* (Field Eryngo)  
on the A603 central reservation  
[Jonathan Shanklin]

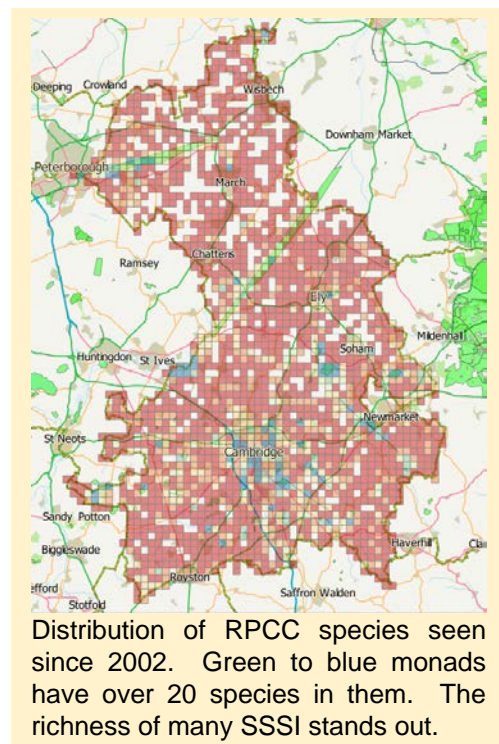
The *Rare Plant Register* (RPR) and the *RPCC* were updated to cover the period 2001-2020 at the start of 2021, with a further update in March to take account of the new *GB Red List*. Species for which the UK may have international responsibility were added to the *RPCC*. A further update to the period 2002 – 2021 was made at the beginning of 2022. As usual the updating process revealed that a few species showed a continued decline at monad level, despite increased recording at this resolution. A few species were deleted from the *RPR* because additional sites had been found, a few were added either because of finds new to the county or because a significant decline has occurred and a couple were moved to the extinct list. Some species are on the margins of being of concern and so move in and out of the *RPCC*. There is

probably merit in leaving such species in the *RPCC* in future until they show sustained recovery. One way of codifying this process would be to continue to regard species that have declined by more than 30% as potentially vulnerable, but once on the *RPCC* the decline needs to reduce to 25% for the species to be removed from it. This constraint may be introduced from 2023. The list of those species not seen recently, which is subdivided into decades has also been updated. All of these are on the web page. The decadal listing might help people to target specific species and perhaps re-discover them.

There have been several re-finds of species that had not been seen for some years or in some locations for over a century and a few of these are described by Alan in his notes later in the Newsletter and will otherwise be reported in *NiC*. The details of the insertions and deletions are given in the Registers. There is still a chance that some species thought to be extinct will be re-found in the county, either as casuals, or as returning natives. There are 13 species not seen since the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and these are perhaps the most likely to be re-found. Given the re-find of *Triglochin maritima* at Foul Anchor, it is equally possible that *Beta vulgaris* subsp. *maritima* (**Sea Beet**) or *Atriplex glabriuscula* (**Babington's Orache**) might re-appear.

Of the 731 [728 – numbers in square brackets are last year's figures] species on the *RPCC* at the beginning of 2022, 322 (44%) [316 (43%)] were seen in 2021, 539 (74%) [542 (74%)] have been seen since 2012 [2011] and 583 (80%) [580 (80%)] since 2002 [2001]. Of the 287 [292] species (which excludes 136 [135] probably extinct species) on the *RPR* at the beginning of 2022, 118 (41%) [118 (40%)] were seen in 2021, 249 (87%) [258 (88%)] have been seen since 2012 [2011] and 276 (96%) [283 (97%)] since 2002 [2001].

The total number of records for 2021 in the DDb is currently 41799, the second highest total ever. The revised total for 2020 will however be very hard to beat as there were an astonishing 47880 records made during the year. In reality there are probably even more than this as the DDb counts as duplicate records that are made at different sites in the same monad. We have DDb records for 2836 different species, with 2372 seen from 2000 onwards. 1229 species were recorded during 2021, down on 2020 and below the record of 1295 set in 2018. May was the most popular month to record (7542 records) with November being the least (588). Overall in the v.c. MapMate database the most frequent species remain as *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).



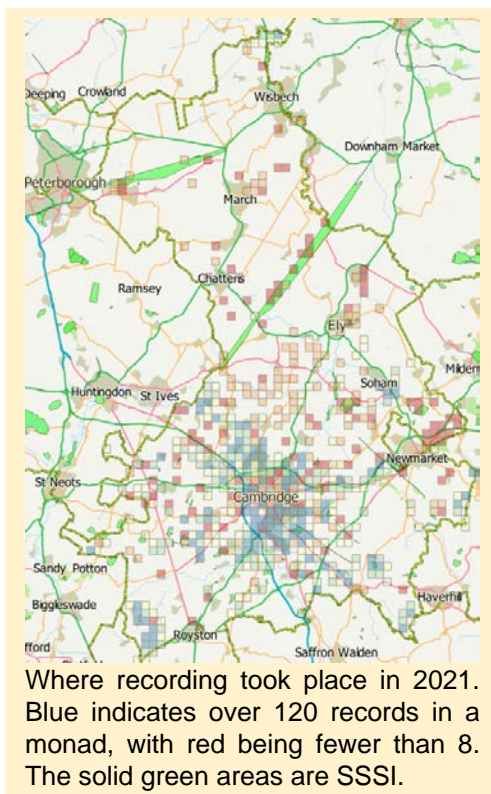
Two species have been added to the list of *RPCC* plants not reported for over a decade: *Rubus boraeanus* (Wimblington Gravel Pits) and *Rubus echinatus* (Comberton). I had three others listed, but Alan Leslie notes that he recorded *Daphne*



*mezereum* (**Mezereon**) on the Devil's Ditch in 2016 (though it may since have been destroyed) and *Hypochaeris maculata* (**Spotted Cat's-ear**) was there in 2020. He also recorded *Rosa sherardii* (**Sherard's Downy-rose**) at Four Went Ways Little during his Rose hunting last year.

With lockdowns again restricting us to local travel I continued to do a lot of local recording, concentrating on specific sites, though also increasing the post 2000 monad coverage. Somewhat surprisingly several City Wildlife Sites, which are documented in the [Cambridge City Wildlife Sites Register 2005](#), have not been specifically recorded since 2005. Most have been recorded in passing through the monads, but there is scope for additional recording of brooks and rivers such as Cherry Hinton Brook, Coldham's Brook, Hobson's Conduit and the River Cam. The last might be interesting to do by canoe in order to sample more widely. There are signs that water quality in the Cam is improving, with *Ranunculus penicillatus* (**Stream Water-crowfoot**) seen by Trumpington Meadows above Byron's Pool and *Potamogeton friesii* (**Flat-stalked Pondweed**) by Ditton Meadows. The latter had not been reported this far up the river since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Because of all the local recording, TL45 has retained its top spot for the most species recorded in a hectad in Britain & Ireland during 2020 with 903, and TL46 was second with 748. SO60 (Lydney area on the River Severn) was third with 730 and NS56 (Glasgow) had 677. Taking all records into consideration TL45 has records of 2038 species in the DDb.



If you have lists of records, please submit them promptly, in properly formatted spreadsheets if possible. This makes it much easier for me to verify them and import them into the local and thence national database. Casual records of interesting species can be submitted in any format and images are also welcome, particularly where they can help illustrate the newsletter. There are [hints and tips on format and recording](#) on the county web page. There is also a very [helpful xls utility](#) to input records which will create nicely formatted records. Phone apps are being developed by the BSBI and others for direct recording, and iRecord is operational, though does introduce erroneous records. Records from iRecord will only be accepted if they clearly meet the standard for what is a good record, in particular that the recorder gives a name rather than a pseudonym and that grid reference and site name match. The recorder should extract such records from iRecord and send them to me in a spreadsheet so that I can carry out the

necessary full verification.

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 is full of interesting material as is their

open access scientific journal *B&IB*. Some abstracts from the latter follow. By joining BSBI you can get discounted rates on many publications, including their Handbook series.

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## Recent Papers

The following papers from *B&IB* are either about or note plants from Cambridgeshire. The links should take you to the papers.

[Mistletoe, \*Viscum album\* \(Santalaceae\), in Britain and Ireland: a discussion and review of current status and trends.](#) Jonathan Briggs. 3(4)

The status of *Viscum album* L. (Mistletoe) in Britain and Ireland is discussed and current trends reviewed. An overview of its life-cycle is given, including discussion of dispersal, germination and host connection, all aspects important in understanding status and trends. A summary of hosts and habitats is followed by a review of distribution; the long-established pattern in the south-west midlands plus recent and ongoing changes. The biodiversity value of mistletoe for other species is discussed. The seasonal mistletoe trade, its history and implications, is outlined. Some current conservation, control and planting projects are described. A brief summary of toxicity and medicinal uses is given. Concluding remarks outline various research opportunities; particularly those that would help understand and set a baseline to measure current and future trends.



*Viscum album* (**Mistletoe**) near an industrial site at Barnwell in Cambridge [Jonathan Shanklin]



British hybrids involving *Epilobium tetragonum* subsp. *tournefortii* (Onagraceae), **Tournefort's Willowherb**. Geoffrey Kitchener, Alan Leslie, Peter Leonard. 3(4)

A study of populations of Tournefort's Willowherb, *Epilobium tetragonum* L. subsp. *tournefortii* (Michalet) Lév., a non-native taxon naturalised in Cambridgeshire, revealed the presence of plants which on the basis of their morphology were attributed to hybrids with native willowherbs *Epilobium parviflorum* Schreb. (Hoary Willowherb), *Epilobium tetragonum* L. subsp. *tetragonum* (Square-stalked Willowherb) and *Epilobium hirsutum* L. (Great Willowherb). Details of distinguishing characters are given. The hybrid taxa have not previously been recorded as such in the British Isles.



Figure 3 B&IB. *Epilobium tetragonum* subsp. *tournefortii* (left); intermediate (centre); subsp. *tetragonum* (right) – scale bars 7mm apart [P. Leonard].

The 2021 edition of *NiC* (No 63) had several botanical papers, including Cambridgeshire's Protected Road Verges (Jonathan Shanklin), *Rosa micrantha* and other sweetbriar roses in Cambridgeshire (Alan Leslie), The Flora of Bottisham Park Revisited (Alan Leslie), Lower Wood Part 1: Trees (Duncan Mackay), The Coton Countryside Reserve: A report on the CNHS Field Studies of 2020 (Jonathan Shanklin), Vascular Plant Records 2020 (Alan Leslie) as well as an obituary for Philip Oswald. The Editorial Board welcomes submissions on any aspect of natural history relevant to Cambridgeshire. Subscription details are on the [NiC web page](#). All [back issues](#) over two years old are freely available and often offer fascinating views of how some of our sites appeared in the past.

The CNHS hopes that a book entitled *The Nature of Cambridge* will be published in the spring. This includes chapters on the plants of the area.

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## Vascular Plant Records 2021 – Alan Leslie

Despite the difficulties we all experienced in 2021 the county's botanists have once again reported a diverse range of new records. The number of alien taxa has continued to rise. Some of these, such as the suspected coir (coconut fibre) aliens reported from Monksilver Nursery at Cottenham are tropical or subtropical weeds that are unlikely to become permanent members of our flora. They were quite a challenge to name and included plants such as *Mollugo nudicaulis* (Molluginaceae), *Cleome viscosa* (Capparaceae) and *Phyllanthus maderaspatensis* (Phyllanthaceae). Others aliens are likely to be more permanent fixtures and reflect their increasing records in the rest of the country, as is the case with *Dittrichia graveolens* (**Stinking Fleabane**), reported in the county for the first time from arable margins and the verges of the A14 near Stow cum Quy. Some aliens have been consolidating their distribution in the county with the Mediterranean willowherb *Epilobium tetragonum* subsp. *tournefortii* (**Tournefort's Willowherb**) reported from additional sites at Littleport, Meldreth and near Great Eversden. Vegetatively this plant closely resembles subsp. *tetragonum* (**Square-stalked Willowherb**), but has flowers the size of *E. hirsutum* (**Great**

**Willowherb**). Hybrids of subsp. *tournefortii* with three native willowherbs were also reported in the county in 2021, all new to Britain, and have been written up in *B&B* (see abstract above).



Alan Leslie found *Oxybasis glauca* (**Oak-leaved Goosefoot**) on Coldham's Common  
[Jonathan Shanklin]

Perhaps the best native plant record of the year was the discovery of a fine flowering plant of *Triglochin maritima* (**Sea Arrowgrass**) on the muddy west bank of the Nene just south of Foul Anchor. This was found on a CFG outing and is the first definite record of this maritime species in the county since 1930. It rather caught us all out at the time as the significance of the find was not realised until we had all returned home and looked up the records! This is unlikely to have been present continuously at this site since the last record and emphasises the value in revisiting well-known sites from time to time, especially here where the tide will continually be bringing in potential propagules. On the same outing *Bupleurum tenuissimum* (**Slender Hare's-ear**) was confirmed as still persisting nearby, but is struggling here as the surrounding Sea Couch is not being grazed and there are few gaps for the Hare's-ear to get going. On the other hand *Spartina anglica* (**Common Cord-grass**), first recorded on the Nene banks in 2009, was found to have established several new colonies.

Other rare natives that were reported from new sites included *Himantoglossum hircinum* (**Lizard Orchid**), which was seen on a road verge in Swaffham Prior, on another new site on the Devil's Ditch and by a chalk pit at Litlington. This species is a further case where our records of its increase reflect a wider set of new records in southern Britain. As is the case with the continuing spread of *Galium parisiense* (**Wall**



**Bedstraw**), which was reported in some abundance at an entirely new site at by the A11 near Bottisham. The orchid is probably spreading from wind-blown seed, but it is



*Cephalanthera damasonium* (**White Helleborine**)  
at the new site in Trumpington [Anne Kell].

hard to assess how the Bedstraw is extending its range. Another orchid, *Cephalanthera damasonium* (**White Helleborine**), has also been reported from two new sites along the chalk (the Old Cambridge Road at West Wrating and Trumpington) and has expanded its range on the Gogs. It is in some danger of no longer being seen as a local rarity! Other good records from the chalk included *Astragalus danicus* (**Purple Milk-vetch**), which reappeared on Magog Trust land following clearance of scrub, and

*Pulsatilla vulgaris* (**Pasqueflower**) which was reported to have arrived naturally in the Picnic Field on the Wandlebury estate on the Gog Magogs, although sadly it was dug up almost immediately. Away from the chalk another new record for *Bidens cernua* (**Nodding Bur-marigold**), on the draw down zone of a pool on Burwell Fen, begins to suggest that this species is having a quiet resurgence in the county, although it still remains a rare plant.

Gaining permission to visit sites where access is normally restricted can often produce satisfactory results, especially where these areas have some existing botanical reputation. For example, further investigation in Great Heath Plantation at Gamlingay has confirmed the continued presence of *Hypericum pulchrum* (**Slender St John's-wort**), which had not been noted from there since 1949 and is a welcome addition to the refinds at this site which were reported after a CFG excursion here in 2019. They show that with more sympathetic management the wood is recovering from its period as a site for free range pigs. Another restricted site for botanists has been the Gog Magog golf course and here too there is clearly an increasing desire to enhance the wildlife of the area. *Seseli libanotis* (**Moon Carrot**) was known still to be extant there, but there had been no records of *Prunella laciniata* (**Cut-leaved Selfheal**) since 2002, which we now know does indeed still persist, although now accompanied by many plants of its hybrid with *P. vulgaris* (**Selfheal**). There are no other extant sites for *P. laciniata* or this hybrid in the county.



*Prunella laciniata* (**Cut-leaved Selfheal**) at Gog  
Magog golf course [Jonathan Shanklin]

Access to the racing gallops around Newmarket is of course permitted by the Jockey Club after 1:00 pm, although the gallops to the east of the town are perhaps visited less frequently by botanists as they lack many of the rarities found on the Heath by the Devil's Ditch. However, they can produce surprises and in 2021 the presence of a



previously unrecorded population of *Rosa micrantha* (**Small-flowered Sweet-briar**) was revealed, scattered around the margins of copses, plantations and linear woodland in this area, accompanied in some places by *R. rubiginosa* (**Sweet-briar**) and their hybrid.

Amongst many other records of note in 2021 are our first report for a self-sown *Ginkgo biloba* (**Maidenhair-tree**), in Mill Road, Cambridge; *Carex distans* (**Distant Sedge**) in Bentley Road Paddocks in Cambridge; *Dipsacus pilosus* (**Small Teasel**) in a site believed to be Newbould's 'Kington Stones' locality quoted by Babington (1860); *Inula racemosa* (**Indian Elecampane**) invading a damp field beside Cottenham Lode; and *Solanum triflorum* (**Small Nightshade**) well naturalised in arable fields on the Chippenham Hall estate. The records noted here are just some of the highlights of the recording year and these and more will be included, with further details, in the next *NiC*. They will include no less than three grass hybrids new to the county, each involving at least one species of *Polypogon*!

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## Cambridgeshire Native Plants

The DDb suggests that there were 91 new hectad records of native species in 2021, but many of the records are of no great significance, often because they are introductions. Looking through the list there are a few groups that are of more interest.

The halophytes continue their spread along major roads. *Catapodium marinum* (**Sea Fern-grass**) was new to TL55 (A14) and TL67 (A142), *Parapholis incurva* (**Curved Hard-grass**) in TL35 (A428) and *Sagina maritima* (**Sea Pearlwort**) in TL23 (A505). Also spreading along roads is *Carduus tenuiflorus* (**Slender Thistle**) and as described in the *B&IB* paper so is *Epilobium tetragonum* subsp. *tournefortii* (**Tournefort's Willowherb**). Major roads may not be the most pleasant of environments, but they can be a lot safer than narrow country roads and often have a diverse flora.



*Catapodium marinum* (**Sea Fern-grass**),  
Laksteeltje, [Ed Stikvoor]

There are several woodland species in the list, but they weren't all found in woods. *Ajuga reptans* (**Bugle**) was new to TL37, but it was the bronze cultivar in Over cemetery, where there was also *Daphne laureola* (**Spurge-laurel**). *Athyrium filix-femina* (**Lady-fern**) was spotted in Overhall Grove (TL44) by Peter Leonard. *Betonica officinalis* (**Betony**) was introduced on the Soham bypass (TL67). Oli Glenister found *Calamagrostis epigejos* (**Wood Small-reed**) in Station Quarry, Steeple Morden (TL33). Also in the far south-west was *Elymus caninus* (**Bearded Couch**) at Odsey (TL23). During a stray into Kirtling Great Wood (TL76) I found a patch of *Melica uniflora* (**Wood Melick**).

As mentioned by Alan, several orchids have been found at new sites, though not necessarily in new hectads. *Himantoglossum hircinum* (**Lizard Orchid**) does come into this category, as does *Ophrys apifera* (**Bee Orchid**) and *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* (**Common Spotted-orchid**), which both reached the northern edge of Cambridgeshire at Tydd Gote (TF41). Maggie Hook reported an unusual variant of Bee Orchid, *Ophrys apifera* var. *chlorantha*, from Cambourne (TL35), which had only previously been reported from near Snailwell, though there are additional records in Alan's Flora.

The hectad with the most additions was TL33, due to visits to Station Quarry by Oli Glenister and to Odsey and Morden Grange Plantation by myself. This hectad only has two tetrads in v.c.29 and between them they average 27% in the vice-county. Over all years the hectad has had 357 species recorded from it, with 283 seen since 2000, so there are still 64 to recover. There are four other fragmentary hectads with low species counts: TL15, TL19, TL28 and TL69. The lowest count goes to TL28 with only 78 species, but although it is in Fenland it should be possible to boost this as the fragment includes several houses. Somewhat surprisingly the DDb listed two of its missing species as *Nymphoides peltata* (Fringed Water-lily) and *Tolypella prolifera* (Great Tassel Stonewort), but it is clear that both of these were in v.c.31. We might pay a visit to TL19 when we visit Stanground Wash if there is time.



*Ophrys apifera* var. *chlorantha*  
[Maggie Hook]

## Cambridgeshire Threatened Plants

This year I've chosen the six most commonly recorded species during 2021 of plants that are on the *RPCC*. In part of course they will be commonly recorded simply because they are on the *RPCC*. The version of the *RPCC* on DDb is not the current version (it would be if I could add it) so one of the plants shown by the query I used is no longer regarded as threatened, but there is a link to previous items. The ecological descriptions come from the [Online Atlas of the British & Irish Flora](#).

*Arenaria leptoclados* (**Slender Sandwort**) was listed as declining over a longer period than was used for the England Red List assessment, so was included in the *RPCC*. It was not often recorded in Cambridgeshire prior to 2002, being reported from only 27 monads, but is now found in 250. This may in part because it was regarded as a subspecies of *Arenaria serpyllifolia* (**Thyme-leaved Sandwort**) and may have been subsumed into the aggregate. It does not seem to be threatened in the county.

It is a winter- or rarely summer-annual of dry, open sites in similar habitats to those of *A. serpyllifolia* and sometimes growing with it. However, there may be a stronger preference for cultivated and waste ground, old walls and quarries (Grose, 1957). It is also found in bare places in calcareous grassland, on roadsides and railway tracks.



*Filago germanica* (**Common Cudweed**) is on the *RPCC* because it is Near Threatened in England, largely on account of loss of habitat leading to a 26% decline in area of occupancy. Historically its centres of distribution in the county were on the acid soils around Gamlingay and around Newmarket. Today it is still present around Gamlingay, but it is most frequent around and to the south-east of Cambridge. Its distribution across the county has also increased, from 23 monads prior to 2002, to 201 today. In general however the BSBI distribution map suggests that it is spreading north-west across England.

An autumn- or spring-germinating annual of dry, open, acidic to neutral and occasionally calcareous habitats including open grassland, quarries and rocky ledges, sand-pits and dunes, sandy heaths and tracks, and arable and other cultivated ground. Lowland.

*Knautia arvensis* (**Field Scabious**) is another species on the *RPCC* because it is Near Threatened in England, this time with a 23% decline in area of occupancy. It is the most widespread of the six species, found in 508 monads, roughly double that of before 2002. It has a similar distribution in the county to the next species, though extends a little more in Fenland. It is frequently introduced as a component of meadow mixes and this will be obscuring some of the natural distribution

A perennial herb of calcareous and neutral grassland on well-drained, especially basic soils. It is found in chalk and limestone grassland, in rough pasture, open hedgerows and wood borders, and as a colonist on roadside verges, railway embankments and grassy waste ground. It is also a locally common weed of cultivation, especially in field-borders on the chalk.

*Plantago media* (**Hoary Plantain**) is the third of these species on the *RPCC* because it is Near Threatened in England, this time with a 22% decline in area of occupancy. In Cambridgeshire it is widespread in the south-east and has been recorded from 430 monads since 2002, but not refound from 64 monads. It too is frequently introduced as a component of meadow mixes. It has however been known for a long time in the far north of the county at Tydd Gote and Foul Anchor, though generally avoids much of Fenland.



Basal rosettes of *Plantago media* in Little Gransden churchyard [Jonny Hughes]

A perennial herb, characteristic of chalk and limestone soils but also occurring on heavy clay soils. The main habitats are downland grassland and tracks, calcareous pasture and mown grassland (such as churchyards); it is less frequent in hay meadows and on fixed dunes, and is sometimes found in water-meadows which receive calcareous water (Grose, 1957). Seed appears to be short-lived.

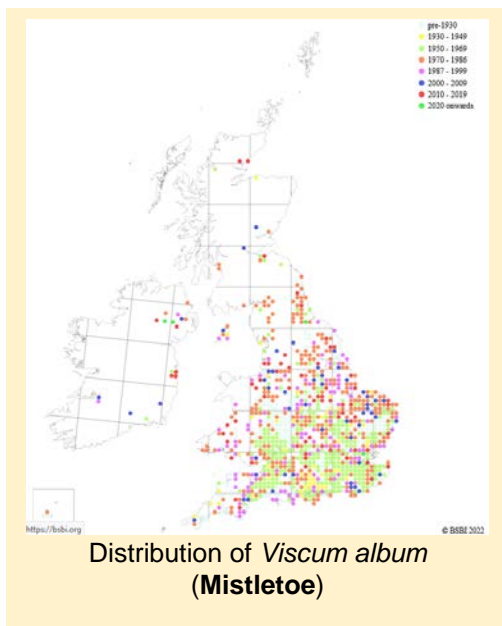
*Torilis nodosa* (**Knotted Hedge-parsley**) was also listed as declining over a longer period than was used for the England Red List assessment. In Cambridgeshire it has become almost ubiquitous in mown grassland and verges and is now present in 375 monads. It has almost certainly spread thanks to mowing of short amenity grassland verges, which provide it with ideal habitat. In general it has a southern and coastal distribution in England, with a rather curious concentration of records in Cambridgeshire. Are we just better at spotting it?



*Torilis nodosa*, Bowcombe Wood  
[G. Toone, IWNHAS]

An annual found in a wide range of dry, sparsely vegetated habitats, including open grassland, sunny banks, sea walls, cliff-tops, arable fields, tracks and waste ground; occasionally in disused sand- and gravel-pits, and on rubbish tips. Lowland.

*Viscum album* (**Mistletoe**) is no longer on the *RPCC* as a thorough search during the 2018/19 winter found it in several hectads where it had not been seen since the 1990



survey. The greatest concentration in the county is around Cambridge, where it is clearly becoming more frequent. There is a section in the forthcoming book *Nature of Cambridge* describing change in the 64-monad NatHistCam area. For Britain and Ireland as a whole I take the opportunity to give the BSBI distribution map showing a probable expansion of range, which complements the distribution map given in the [B&IB paper](#).

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*, *Crataegus* spp. (its commonest native hosts), *Populus* spp., *Acer* spp., *Salix* spp. and *Robinia pseudoacacia*. Lowland.

Of the plants that have a significant threat status in the *England Red List*, *Euphorbia exigua* (**Dwarf Spurge**), which is Vulnerable, was the most frequently recorded, with reports from 33 monads. Cambridgeshire is near the centre of its distribution and it has been recorded from 253 monads since 2002. It does not seem to be threatened in the county when going by simple distribution, but this often conceals a decline in abundance. As an arable weed it is threatened by modern agriculture, particularly the monoculture wheat fields and is often found as only a few plants on the arable margin.

An annual of arable land, less frequently occurring in other areas of disturbed ground such as gardens, waste ground and bare patches in dry grassland. It favours dry, light and base-rich soils in sunny situations. Lowland.





Spot the *Jacobaea paludosa* (**Fen Ragwort**)! This is its only native location.

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## Review of the 2021 excursions

### Tuesday, March 30, South-west Cambridgeshire churchyards

The meeting was originally scheduled for March 27, but covid lockdown did not end until March 29, so it was delayed a few days to allow a group of six to meet. This proved fortuitous as the five participants were able to enjoy the hottest March day for 60 years. We began at Caxton churchyard, which had no botanical or bryological records, so Chris and Jonny concentrated on bryophytes, whilst Jonathan, Lucy and Peter recorded the plants. Chris pointed out an overlooked problem – the churchyard was actually in two hectads, so records had to be quickly separated, though fortunately there were not many affected. There was nothing highly notable in the churchyard, though it was pleasant and would repay another visit later in the year.

Next stop was Little Grandsen, where Peter Sell had reported *Oxalis acetosella* (**Wood-sorrel**) as a native species in 1988 [Alan Leslie had first seen it in 1978 and he found it still there in 2021]. We didn't spot it, but there was some *Oxalis exilis* (**Least Yellow-sorrel**). We found the *Ranunculus auricomus* (**Goldilocks Buttercup**) without any trouble, although it took us a little longer in our clockwise circuit to find *Plantago media* (**Hoary Plantain**). We decided it was fractionally too early for lunch, so drove on to Gamlingay church, where we lunched in a corner of the churchyard by a carpet of flowering *Luzula campestris* (**Field Wood-rush**) growing through *Pilosella officinarum* (**Mouse-ear-hawkweed**). Chris found a rust on a narrow leaved plant



growing under a Beech and wanted to know what it was. Jonathan suggested *Ornithogallum* on account of the hyaline band up the midrib and the vegetative key suggested investigating what the bulbils looked like. The bulb and its bulbils proved deeper buried than expected, but when unearthed were rounded, identifying it as *O. umbellatum* (**Star-of-Bethlehem**). Just as we were leaving Jonathan spotted a sedge growing where we had lunched and the green colour and ligule suggested *Carex caryophylla* (**Spring-sedge**), which was new for the churchyard. We walked on to the cemetery where there is abundant *C. caryophylla* and it too was not in flower and otherwise similar.

We had hoped to see some of the spring flowering clover in the cemetery, but they proved elusive. We debated whether a plant of *Calluna vulgaris* (**Heather**) growing on an old grave was planted or native without coming to a certain conclusion. At one end of the cemetery we found finely cut leaves of an umbellifer that Chris suggested might be *Conopodium majus* (**Pignut**), but it took some homework to confirm the identification. This was a new find for the cemetery although the plant is known from around the village. Probably of greater interest were several scarcer bryophytes of acidic ground including one that hadn't been seen in the county for 70 years.



Peter Leonard studying a small white flowered crucifer in Gamlingay cemetery  
[Jonathan Shanklin]

We next visited the two Hatley churches, first St George where a helpful churchwarden showed us where the *Ranunculus auricomus* was growing. There was also a planted green snowdrop which was recorded as *Galanthus woronowii* (**Green Snowdrop**), though perhaps a variant of it. Sheets of *Veronica filiformis* (**Slender Speedwell**) gave a blue haze. We were expected at St Denis as the local group wanted to discuss management with Lucy (wearing her Wildlife Trust hat). We didn't manage to find any of the RPCC species here and it was mostly spring flowering additions to the list that Jonathan had made the previous summer. One obvious plant that had been missed was *Ilex aquifolium* (**Holly**) growing in a hedge. There was just time for one reserve churchyard and Toft was chosen as its previous visit had been longer ago. Here the *Ranunculus auricomus* was just coming into flower, but again we failed to find *Plantago media*, last seen here in 1999.

### Sunday, April 18, Eddington

As a change from the usual all day excursion, this was an afternoon visit to the Cambridge University North-west Cambridge site including the sown meadows and lake of Brook Leys. Parts of the area were still a building site and this meant that we couldn't visit some of the gated areas, however as a compensation we visited the grounds of World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC). There had been a cold and largely dry spell prior to the excursion and the afternoon was mostly sunny. With Covid-19 restrictions still in force the party was limited to six participants.





Vista across Brook Leys lake and the Eddington development [Jonathan Shanklin]

We met at the Madingley Road entrance, with most participants arriving well before the scheduled start time. Once the hour struck we began by getting engrossed in a very weedy bed at the roadside, which had a good showing of spring annuals. Moving on a little we found many sown in species including some rather garish *Polyantha* cultivars. Here there were leaves of *Ranunculus acris* (**Meadow Buttercup**) often looking very similar to *Geranium dissectum* (**Cut-leaved Crane's-bill**). Jonathan explained that

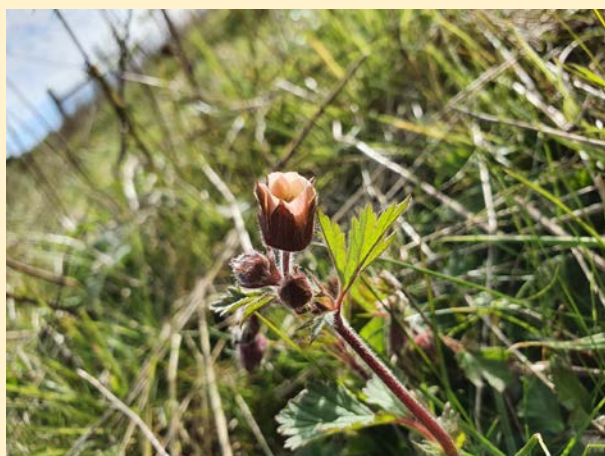
one way to tell the difference between the two families was to look at the leaf stem – *Ranunculus* has a furrow running down the stem.

Crossing the road Chris spotted a *Lysimachia arvensis* (**Scarlet Pimpernel**) in flower. In sown grassland running along the road verge we saw several rather precociously early flowering species, with some very showy *Medicago lupulina* (**Black Medick**) and a *Knautia arvensis* (**Field Scabious**) that was starting to go to seed. Chris speculated that as such species were from harvested seed there might be an evolutionary bias towards early flowering and showier species.



*Lysimachia arvensis* (**Scarlet Pimpernel**)  
[Jonny Hughes]

The grasslands around the Brook Leys lake were clearly a popular spot and there was barbecue smoke hanging in the air. The lake had several waterfowl include a nesting Swan, with Canada Geese, Coot and Mallard. The male of the Swans was kept busy chasing off the Canada Geese from the nest site. There had been a lot of planting around the margin, with lots of clumps of *Caltha palustris* (**Marsh-marigold**) and Emma spotted *Silene flos-cuculi* (**Ragged-Robin**) in flower. After a little searching Jonathan refound the leaves of *Veronica spicata* (**Spiked Speedwell**) that had presumably come in as a seed contaminant. Leaving Brook Leys, a verge had some planted *Muscari*, one rather unusual



Introduced *Geum rivale* (**Water Aven**) by the Brook Leys lake [Jonny Hughes]

which after some later research was identified as *Muscari armeniacum* 'Fantasy Creation' (A double flowered Garden Grape-hyacinth).

With time passing we decided to move on to see the WCMC, with Jonny leading us over a couple of gates. This site has a small pond, where we saw *Juncus subnodulosus* (**Blunt-flowered Rush**) and *Menyanthes trifoliata* (**Bogbean**). Adjacent is the Travellers Rest Pit SSSI, an old gravel pit notified as a geological site for its Cam terrace gravels. Given the recent dry weather it was rather surprisingly still partly flooded after the winter rains. The WCMC car park had both male and female fruiting *Marchantia polymorpha* subsp. *ruderalis* (**Common Liverwort**).

Returning to Eddington we climbed through a fence to try and find *Aristolochia clematitis* (**Birthwort**) by Gravel Hill Farm, but there was no sign of it [I did find it later in the year]. We did however find an extensive sward of *Filago germanica* (**Common Cudweed**) and one plant of *Fragaria vesca* (**Wild Strawberry**) on the site of the [archaeological dig](#) or a reconstruction, where there were remaining structures of somewhat indeterminate age (to the botanists). We returned via the old farm lane and then back to our starting point, pausing to look at *Lemna* in a ditch; this clearly had large central cells so was the flat form of *Lemna gibba* (**Fat Duckweed**). Although "only" a half day outing it was gone 6 p.m. by the time the remaining members of the party set off home.

## Tuesday, May 4, Kings Dyke Nature Reserve

The long drought of April broke the day before our excursion, but the cold continued and strong winds made the occasional slight shower rattle through. Covid-19 restrictions still applied, so it was a group of six that met up at this site, which is in a former brick pit near Whittlesey. We began with a look around the gravel entrance area, where there were many plants hugging close to the ground, including *Filago germanica* (**Common Cudweed**), which lives up to its name in Cambridgeshire, but is Near Threatened in England. Here there



King's Dyke nature reserve [Jonathan Shanklin]

were also several small Dandelions, one of which was given a provisional field identification of *Taraxacum hamulatum*. Moving down the track to the lake there was a solitary *Primula veris* (**Cowslip**) in flower and a patch of *Viola hirta* (**Hairy Violet**), both plants that I had missed last year. There was also *Anthoxanthum odoratum* (**Sweet Vernal-grass**), a new addition to the site list. Jonathan Graham ventured into the lake finding *Elodea nuttallii* (**Nuttall's Waterweed**), *Lemna trisulca* (**Ivy-leaved Duckweed**) and *Potamogeton coloratus* (**Fen Pondweed**).

The next challenge was to refind *Ranunculus parviflorus* (**Small-flowered Buttercup**) on the steeply sloping bank near the fossil hunting area. Alan Leslie soon found a patch of plants, with another patch further on with well over 100 plants in total. A few





*Ranunculus parviflorus*  
(**Small-flowered Buttercup**) [Peter Leonard]

were just coming into flower, showing that the season was much less advanced this year compared to last. Continuing round the track we found *Cerastium semidecandrum* (**Little Mouse-ear**) on the track, standing out as clearly different in appearance to *Cerastium glomeratum* (**Sticky Mouse-ear**) which we also saw. It was getting on for lunch time, so we found a little shelter from the wind on a bank over-looking a reed-bed lake.

We then continued on the circular walk, eventually finding our way into a small slightly scrubby meadow where

Jonathan Shanklin had previously found *Veronica officinalis* (**Heath Speedwell**). This was duly re-found, with Chris Preston finding his only fungus of the day (*Asterina veronicae*) growing on it. There were also some site additions, with Alan Leslie finding *Neottia ovata* (**Common Twayblade**) which is decidedly uncommon in northern Cambridgeshire and *Viola riviniana* (**Common Dog-violet**), which is also uncommon. Back on the track we saw a pair of Marsh Harriers and also a Swift flying over, then stopped to check a Cotoneaster, which Alan determined as *C. hjelmqvistii* (**Hjelmqvist's Cotoneaster**).

The ponds in compartment 2AA had good amounts of *Potamogeton coloratus* and Jonathan Graham demonstrated the power of the Olympus TG cameras that four of the party have by operating it underwater to take photos of it. On the bank of the long ditch here Jonathan Shanklin found a patch of *Myosotis discolor* (**Changing Forget-me-not**), which was growing with *M. arvensis* (**Field Forget-me-not**) and *M. ramosissima* (**Early Forget-me-not**) allowing comparison between them. Returning back to the track around the site we discovered that we had to ford a section by the old pill-box as water was being pumped out of the lower lake and had substantially raised the level of the upper lake. Just a little further on Alan found some rosettes of *Sagina nodosa* (**Knotted Pearlwort**) at the side of the track, a plant that he had not previously seen in the county.

A bit further on again Chris and the two Jonathans had found a mystery plant with



*Myosotis discolor* (**Changing Forget-me-not**)  
[Peter Leonard]

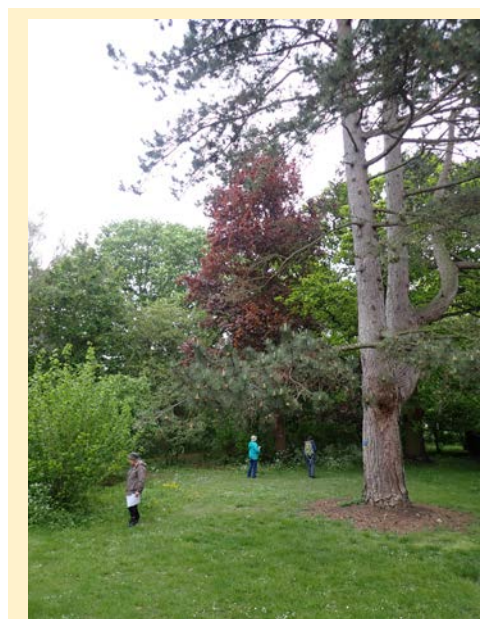
narrow toothed leaves, with a suggestion that it might be *Achillea ptarmica* (**Sneezewort**). Alan didn't disagree at the time, though took a root sample home to grow it on and subsequently found that it was actually *Leucanthemum vulgare* (**Oxeye Daisy**).

With storm clouds black above the brickworks we decided that a rapid retreat to the cars was probably wise, and whilst we did get the heaviest rain of the day it was short lived. To finish the day we had a quick look for the *Pratia pedunculata* (**Matted Pratia**) in the lawn, eventually finding leaves, but no flowers. Having visited twice last year, the species list recorded on the day was relatively short, however it was clear that the site would repay another visit later in the season, so one may be included in the 2022 itinerary.

### Sunday, May 23, Accordia

The April showers had continued throughout May, and a cold wind often came with them. The weather for the excursion continued this theme and Jonathan predicted rain within 20 minutes as participants arrived. The rain came spot on time, but fortunately it was only a brief shower and the rest of the afternoon stayed dry but cold. To allow those in Cambridge without access to transport a chance of an excursion, this was organised as an afternoon visit to what is a new Cambridge housing development, which includes a tree trail, several ponds and is bounded by Hobson's Brook. The tree trail made a surprisingly interesting focus for the afternoon and we followed it from 1 to 36. Our first interesting find was *Poa nemoralis* (**Wood Meadow-grass**), with its stiff leaves held in salute. On odd looking plant in a pavement crack was confirmed as *Cerinth major* (**Greater Honeywort**), with its parents in a nearby bed. Other cracks in paving held quantities of *Saxifraga tridactylites* (**Rue-leaved Saxifrage**) across the site.

The tree trail said that number 12 was **Lombardy Poplar**, but the tree looked a bit too broad in the crown. Fortunately the wind had torn off some leafy twigs, and consulting



The big *Pinus nigra*  
(**Corsican Pine**) [Jonathan Shanklin]

Poland showed this was *Populus x canadensis* 'Robusta', the **False Lombardy Poplar**. A little further on was a patch of presumably introduced *Anemone nemorosa* (**Wood Anemone**), but was it *Luzula sylvatica* (**Great Wood-rush**) next to it? A quick look suggested the leaves were hairless, but a later check showed hairs and the patch had presumably come from a planted bed near Brooklands Avenue. Under the trees of Aberdeen Square we found a good display of *Anthriscus caucalis* (**Bur Chervil**) and then headed for the next on the trail. We were distracted by an odd looking Oak, with reddish-pink galls on the flowers, but couldn't initially decide on the species. Fortunately a few trees along the trail was *Quercus x crenata* (**Lucombe Oak** (*Q. cerris* x *suber*)), which was clearly the same species. A later bit of remembering showed that *Andricus grossulariae* had been described by Philip Oswald in *Nature in Cambridgeshire* in 2019 from



these same trees and that these galls were the sexual generation. At the end of the trail was a large *Pinus nigra* (**Corsican Pine**) and this area gave the find of the day – one plant of *Cirsium palustre* (**Marsh Thistle**) between the damp lawn and a shrub belt. Last seen in the City in 2003, on this occasion it might have come from the nearby fenland bed of the Botanic Garden. With the trail finished we headed back to the starting point along a path by the *Luzula sylvatica* bed, and near the end found a plant of *Valeriana officinalis* (**Common Valerian**), another that had perhaps come from the Botanic Garden.

## Tuesday, June 15, Guided Busway

Our second visit to the busway once again took place under blue skies and burning sun, though fortunately not quite as hot as on the day before. We started where we finished last year, at the Oakington stop, though it took a while to move on, perhaps fortunately as it gave the last member of the group time to walk there from his home. Here we saw two plants that

seem to be spreading along the busway. *Artemisia absinthium* (**Wormwood**) is spreading along the busway track from a former nursery in Longstanton in both directions. There is also *Lepidium latifolium* (**Dittander**), which may have spread from the long established site at the Long Road triangle in Cambridge.



A view along the cycle/foot path by the busway  
[Peter Leonard]

Along the busway we often encountered *Lathyrus nissolia* (**Grass Vetchling**), some plants still showing their striking solitary flowers. This might be a contaminant in the seed mix sown along the banks and is certainly becoming more widespread in the county. A fine flowering *Silybum marianum* (**Milk Thistle**) suggested that it was time for lunch, and we found a quiet spot in one of the Busway Wildlife Areas that was conveniently nearby.

Roses were a feature of the afternoon although most were consigned to *Rosa canina* agg. (**Dog-rose**).

A few stood out as being different. One appeared to have a slightly hairy upper surface, though later microscopic study suggested that the “hairs” were perhaps pollen grains, although why only one rose should show this was not clear. A planted and suckering rose in the boundary hedge was subject to detailed scrutiny and keyed out as *Rosa virginiana* (**Virginian Rose**), not previously recorded in the county. Somewhat further on, we found *Rosa multiflora* (**Many-flowered Rose**), though the key took those using it down a few blind alleys before arriving at a



Some of the party with *Rosa virginiana* (**Virginian Rose**), behind them. [Jonathan Shanklin]

consensus. Previously we had crossed a damper section which often floods during

the winter and there we found a couple of plants of *Silaum silaus* (**Pepper-saxifrage**) on the embankment and sweet-smelling white flowered *Galium palustre* subsp. *palustre* (**Common Marsh-bedstraw**) clothing the adjacent ditch.

The final section of the walk was through the Over Railway Cutting CWS, though some of the party had their sights on a return home and proceeded quite quickly through it. The main cutting is clearly deteriorating, and Nick Millar commented that the railway used to run about two metres deeper, but for some reason the busway had to be raised. This section still had a few good plants, with *Briza media* (**Quaking-grass**) and *Vicia parviflora* (**Slender Tare**) being recorded. Having previously commented on the difficulty in distinguishing between the common *Epilobium tetragonum* (**Square-stalked Willowherb**) and the much scarcer *Epilobium obscurum* (**Short-fruited Willowherb**), Jonathan was surprised when checking the calyx of a flowering plant (the first we'd come across) to see that there were the glandular hairs of the latter species. Lucy had gone ahead (wearing her Wildlife Trust hat) to inspect the Busway Wildlife Area D, which is part of the CWS, as a water main had burst over the winter, damaging some of the site. At the entrance to the Area we saw a large-leaved **Agrimony**, which on inspection later under the microscope showed clear glandular hairs on the petiole and sessile glands on the lower leaflets, which vegetatively keys to *Agrimonia procera* (**Fragrant Agrimony**). However it wasn't clear whether the vegetative key recognises *A. eupatoria* var *major* (**Agrimony**), and a later visit, when in fruit, confirmed it as *A. eupatoria* var *major*.

Although most attention was given to the flora, Chris Preston noted plant fungi, Jonathan Shanklin recorded a few ladybirds (finding the increasingly scarce 2-spot Ladybird) and Nick Millar hunted for invertebrates with a sweep net. We also noted a pair of Avocet and the purring of a Turtle Dove. During the course of the day we made 674 records of 242 "species" of which 140 were in flower. We failed to get beyond the Over bridge, so next year we will return to complete the final leg to Fen Drayton.

## **Tuesday, June 29, Seven Springs & Newmarket Heath, Suffolk**

This visit was arranged by Phil Ricketts to see part of the Jockey Club estate that is rarely visited and is near where he grew up in Exning. The weather forecast for the day was mixed, but in the end we only had a few spots of rain and mostly overcast skies. We met at the Rowley Mile car park, which then required a 2 km walk to get to what was described as "wet woodland" created by the seven springs which arise from the chalk. It wasn't very wet (though my choice of wellies proved a good one), and the ground flora was mostly nettles and cleavers. There was water (and an assortment of wriggling creatures) in some of the springs, but apart from some *Veronica anagallis-aquatica* (**Blue Water-speedwell**) there was not much of floristic interest. We eventually came to a rough



The going was always difficult through Seven Springs and this was one of the more open areas  
[Jonathan Shanklin]

Eventually came to a rough



track running across the site and decided that this was probably as good as we were going to get for a lunch spot.



Debating a nettle [Peter Leonard]

After lunch we continued north through the nettles, eventually coming to more open ground. Not all the nettles were of the stinging variety with Alan finding *Urtica dioica* subsp. *galeopsifolia* (**Stingless Nettle**). There was now a steep bank to the west and this proved more interesting, with *Verbascum nigrum* (**Dark Mullein**) in flower. Having climbed up we continued along a much nicer track at the top, which eventually took us back to what was now a chalk stream, though it was mostly well shaded. Our final push north took us

to the A14 which the stream flowed underneath with an open meadow on the far side of the stream. The wellies allowed me to wade across, but even the open meadow had nothing of note.

We now returned along an exercise track that linked Exning with Newmarket Heath and the banks of this were much more interesting. There was *Picris hieracioides* (**Hawkweed Oxtongue**) and some amethyst coloured *Orobancha minor* (**Common Broomrape**). Phil had previously noted an unmown field and so we next explored this, though it was not very species rich. The two leaders headed across the field, which eventually gave access to the Heath, but the rest of the party



Back on easier going [Peter Leonard]

steadfastly refused to follow and were abandoned. Near the edge of the field was a colony of *Ophrys apifera* (**Bee Orchid**) and an *Anacamptis pyramidalis* (**Pyramidal Orchid**). A pile of sandy ground near an old barn provided one of the scarcer plants of the day: *Papaver hybridum* (**Rough Poppy**). Exiting on to the Heath there was still no sign of the others, so we continued across, aiming for the SSSI part near where we had started. This area of Heath had occasional more species rich patches, but we didn't come across anything really notable. When we got there it turned out that the SSSI section was little different, but at least here we did finally meet up with the rest of the party. Over the course of the day we made 532 records of 212 species.

### Sunday, July 4, Litlington Parish Pit

The weather forecast was not good, with heavy showers forecast, so I again opted for wellies and used waterproof recording cards. This clearly kept the rain away for the rest of the day! We met by Ashwell Street (the Roman road) and then walked a short

way to the lane leading to the pit. The lane was generally fairly rank grassland, although it did have *Trifolium fragiferum* (**Strawberry Clover**), but this quickly changed as we entered the pit itself. We soon found some of the nicer plants such as *Asperula cynanchica* (**Squinancywort**), *Thymus polytrichus* (**Wild Thyme**) and some eyebrights of various corolla sizes in the hybrid *Euphrasia* (**Eyebright**) swarm. We also added a few plants not seen previously such as *Ranunculus bulbosus* (**Bulbous Buttercup**), which was now in seed, but the bulb at the stem base provided the confirmation. There were many **Marbled White** butterflies in the grassland and Andy used a pheromone lure to demonstrate that nationally scarce **Orange-tailed Clearwing** moths were present.

We began to move towards the top of the pit, finding a solitary *Anacamptis pyramidalis* (**Pyramidal Orchid**) on one of the shortly vegetated banks. A few intrepid members



The *Himantoglossum hircinum* (**Lizard Orchid**). [Jonathan Shanklin]

braved the brambles along a narrow path that took them to the pit lip, which had a good chalk grassland flora including *Avenula pratensis* (**Meadow Oat-grass**). A call from the other side drew attention and emerging on a slightly less bramble infested path we discovered that Ray had made the find of the day, a solitary *Himantoglossum hircinum* (**Lizard Orchid**). This was duly admired, with strict instructions that it was to be viewed by one person at a time and without trampling a path. This is a significant south-westward extension of the range of the species in the county, with recent records all relatively close to the Devil's Ditch. Continuing down to the other side of the pit Andy found *Filago vulgaris* (**Common Cudweed**) on a disturbed bank, with Alan spotting a patch of *Cirsium acaule* (**Dwarf Thistle**). It was now lunch time, so we returned to the lip of the pit and ate lunch in strong sunshine.

There was plenty of time for an extended walk, so we used several permissive paths for a circular walk. We first inspected a stewardship margin around the pit where there were clearly sown plants such as *Centaurea cyanus* (**Cornflower**), but also a few relict arable weeds including *Chaenorhinum minus* (**Small Toadflax**) and *Papaver hybridum* (**Rough Poppy**). Returning to the path we found solitary plants of *Astragalus glycyphyllos* (**Wild Liquorice**) in a couple of places and eventually came to Morden Grange Farm where a field had been left to grass and had a splendid display of *Anacamptis pyramidalis*. Continuing onward we came back to Ashwell Street and soon encountered quantities of *Astragalus glycyphyllos*. A little further on the Roman Road had been concreted, presumably for a wartime airfield, though even this did not deter the *Astragalus*.

Older maps show some allotment gardens adjacent to the track, but these are now the Woodland Trust Whitethorn Wood. Perhaps the most showy plant here was some well-established *Lathyrus latifolius* (**Broad-leaved Everlasting-pea**) along with a solitary *Anacamptis pyramidalis*. Returning to Ashwell Street we headed back towards



the cars and the quality of the vegetation steadily declined the closer we got to Litlington. A sub-station yard and verge provided more interest, with the former having more *Papaver hybridum* and the latter having *Eschscholzia californica* (**Californian Poppy**) and *Centaurea cyanus*, both appearing to be sown in. A little further on was an unmown section with *Salvia verbenaca* (**Wild Clary**), but was this native or introduced? We timed our return to perfection, with the weather radar later showing that we would have got wet if we had stayed another half hour.

We reduced the “wanted” list for the pit by only three to 57, though many of these are just alternative names, and didn’t find either of the plants mentioned in the last newsletter. We did however add 16 species to the site list including several additional axiophytes. In total during the day we made 468 records of 223 species.

### **Saturday, August 14, Sawston Hall**

We returned to Sawston Hall at the invitation of John Crompton, the owner, for another attempt at finding *Selinum carvifolia* (Cambridge Milk-parsley). The generally cool summer weather continued, making for a pleasant day in the countryside. We were met by John and Steve, his groundsman, who explained that the electric fences were all switched off and that we had the run of the place. We began with the meadows of Sawston Moor, which is a SSSI, starting with the one that had just been cut for hay. Chris pointed out a patch of *Trifolium fragiferum* (**Strawberry Clover**) and showed the



Sawston Hall and participants on the front lawn looking at *Plantago media* (**Hoary Plantain**)  
[Jonathan Shanklin]

curving veins on the leaf that are a distinguishing feature. This was an addition to the site flora, the first of 27 additions made on the day and which we also found on the main lawn.

We continued round, next visiting an ungrazed, generally rushy meadow. Here we first encountered some of the rarer plants of the site, such as *Potentilla erecta* (**Tormentil**), *Silaum silaus* (**Pepper-saxifrage**) and a patch of another clover *Trifolium medium* (**Zigzag Clover**). We crossed over to a rather more grazed meadow but unintentionally so, as the young cattle had broken through a fence to get at it. This seemed a good spot for lunch, making good use of some wood piles in the shade of a tree severely affected by Ash dieback. This meadow is where the *Selinum* used to grow, but once again there was no sign of it. We did however find many of the former associates such as *Anagallis tenella* (**Bog Pimpernel**), *Serratula tinctoria* (**Saw-wort**) and *Succisa pratensis* (**Devil's-bit Scabious**). We hadn't seen a couple of plants that also grew in the meadow, but quickly found both by accident. There was a patch of *Hydrocotyle vulgaris* (**Marsh Pennywort**) by a Kite feeding station and then a sedge (pulled up to check the ligule) had a rather round stem and very rough leaf edges indicating *Cladium mariscus* (**Great Fen-sedge**).

With time passing we left the meadows to see what there was in the woodland area. By and large, there wasn't much, although a couple of Willows caused some discussion and one produced a non-botanical find of a grasshopper affixed to a leaf. This seemed to have been infected by a fungus, which had paralysed it, and it may be the first recorded find of the causative entomopathogenic fungus in the UK. We then tried the moat and this proved more interesting, with much *Chara hispida* (**Bristly Stonewort**) and *Lysimachia vulgaris* (**Yellow Loosestrife**) on the bank. The former had clearly got there without help, but was the Loosestrife planted? Overall, there seemed that most species in the moat area were natural arrivals, so perhaps this was also true of the Loosestrife.

We then inspected the vegetable patch and admired some of the weeds. We had seen *Chenopodium hybridum* (**Maple-leaved Goosefoot**) there on the previous visit, but there were two Speedwells new to the tetrad: *Veronica agrestis* (**Green Field-speedwell**) with pale flowers, and *Veronica polita* (**Grey Field-speedwell**) with darker blue ones. Both differ from *Veronica persica* (**Common Field-speedwell**) in the angle formed by the two halves of the fruit. We moved on to the more formal lawn and tennis court in front of the Hall. Not seen on previous visits was a patch of *Origanum vulgare* (**Wild Marjoram**) on the bank behind the tennis court, which also supports *Carex caryophyllaea* (**Spring-sedge**). The lawns are mown "high", which means that they stay



Discussing an identification at Sawston Hall  
[Richard Price]

green even in a drought, and this also allows plants to flower, so we were able to see some shining flower spikes of *Plantago media* (**Hoary Plantain**). The final stop was the car park, the cars providing our means of exit through the automatic gates. There we saw some fruiting *Marchantia polymorpha* subsp. *ruderalis* (**Common Liverwort**), then a Willowherb that had appressed hairs on the stem, but some glandular hairs on the sepals and hypanthium, indicating *Epilobium obscurum* (**Short-fruited Willowherb**), though the fruits were not particularly short.

In the main, only additive records were made during the day, as I had visited the site last year. Overall we still made 182 records of 137 species, with quite a few from the RPCC being seen. There were even seven tetrad records, adding approximately one percent to the tetrad total, along with the hectad record of *Athyrium filix-femina* (**Lady-fern**), found by Nick on the wood margin. An interesting day, despite not refinding the *Selinum*. There are still quite a few species not seen for some years several of which are worth further searches.

### **Saturday, September 11, Tydd Gote and Foul Anchor**

The forecast for the day was for showers, but in the event we had a pleasant day, with some sunshine. There was a slight change of plan to accommodate the need for a count of the spikes of *Spiranthes spiralis* (**Autumn Lady's-tresses**) at Tydd Gote pumping station, as part of Wildlife Trust monitoring of the County Wildlife Site. The



team of ten began with a count of the orchids – on first arrival the number didn't look promising, but the detailed count gave a total of 127 spikes on the admin Cambridgeshire side of the pumping station banks. Earlier in the week the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust (the admin Lincolnshire/Cambridgeshire border goes through the middle of the bank, although it is all in v.c.29) had counted around 100 spikes in their part. This count is much higher than those reported 20 years ago and higher than the most recent count of 167+ in 2016.

Those with grapnels then tried their hand at fishing, finding some strands of *Myriophyllum* (**Water-milfoil**) without turions and some with, showing that both *Myriophyllum spicatum* (**Spiked Water-milfoil**) and *M. verticillatum* (**Whorled Water-milfoil**) were present. As we needed to check whether there was any further *Spiranthes spiralis* on the admin Cambridgeshire side of the North Level Main Drain we decided to walk west along the south bank (which is partly in v.c.53) and back along the north bank. We did find a few more plants in three locations, but they were all in v.c.53. With lunch beckoning, we continued on until we were back in v.c.29 and decided to eat lunch on the bank below a fine plant of *Gypsophila paniculata* (**Baby's-breath**). This had self-sown from a farm on the other side of the Drain, where it had been grown.



Admiring the *Apium graveolens* (**Wild Celery**)  
[Jonathan Shanklin]



*Erigeron x huelsenii* (left) and *E. acris* (**Blue Fleabane**) (right) [Peter Leonard]

After lunch we headed on to the pumping station, where Jonathan spotted an odd looking *Erigeron*, which Alan agreed was *Erigeron x huelsenii*, the hybrid between *E. acris* (**Blue Fleabane**) and *E. canadensis* (**Canadian Fleabane**). As there was more of v.c.29 to the east of the pumping station we decided to look for one of the plants not seen for a few years. We didn't have far to go before spotting a stand of *Apium graveolens* (**Wild Celery**) covering over 10 m. Although we continued for another 100 m, the bank didn't look very promising, so we returned to the cars and made the short journey to Foul Anchor.

The saltings on the wash provided a good hunting ground for the halophytes and we quickly spotted *Puccinellia maritima* (**Common Saltmarsh-grass**) and *Glaux maritima* (**Sea-milkwort**). Rather less obvious, though present amongst the *Puccinellia*, was *Parapholis strigosa* (**Hard-grass**), looking very much like all the other dead stems until you looked closely and saw the remains of the florets. Lucy called us back to see a few stems of *Suaeda maritima* (**Annual Sea-blite**), whilst on the Nene bank were occasional patches of *Spartina anglica* (**Common Cord-grass**). Having navigated to the approximate grid reference for the *Bupleurum tenuissimum* (**Slender Hare's-ear**), the presence of the associates indicated that we were close and Oli called "is this it?". It was, but on this occasion we only found two plants, amongst the sward of *Elytrigia atherica* (**Sea Couch**).

Returning to the river bank Alan noticed a large plant and suggested *Plantago maritima* (**Sea Plantain**), but Jonathan looking through binoculars said no, the fruits are on stems, so it is *Triglochin maritima* (**Sea Arrowgrass**) and we passed on. We should have paid it even more attention as the only previous record for the plant was made in 1930! Further on Oli spotted a single plant of *Apium graveolens* whilst Phil spotted *Bidens tripartita* (**Trifid Bur-marigold**) on the landward side. We should have made more of this too, as it is the most northerly record in the county. Oli also spotted a **Glasswort**, but failed to take a grid reference and couldn't refind it for the rest of the party, so it will have to go down as *Salicornia europaea* agg. Having reached the v.c. boundary we crossed to the old railway track where most of the party gave up on recording and headed rapidly back towards the cars. Phil pointed out some *Trifolium fragiferum* (**Strawberry Clover**), which was duly recorded, rather surprisingly for the first time at monad accuracy in TF41. Once back at the cars, the majority of the party had no desire to walk further, though Jonathan and Sarah chose to continue and survey the remaining 100 m of river bank. There wasn't much of note, but several common species were added to the list. In total we made 160 records of 107 species, including 19 from the RPCC.

### Saturday, October 9, Soham Cemetery CWS and Wet Horse Fen SSSI



A rather misty morning at the cemetery  
[Jonathan Shanklin]

We had a fine autumnal day for our final outing though there had been a heavy overnight dew, with patchy fog on the journey from Cambridge to Soham. The question was whether there would be any plants in flower, as around Cambridge there was now a preponderance of dead plants. First impressions when we arrived at the cemetery were not promising as the grass had recently been cut short. However we soon found rosettes of *Plantago media* (**Hoary Plantain**) and later found one in flower on a grave. The chapel walls had been cleaned so there were no ferns, though there was

a single plant of *Senecio vulgaris* (**Groundsel**) growing half way up a wall. Nearby was a grave with a headstone commemorating "The Chief Bellringer of the Parish"



much to the amusement of several of the participants who themselves are bellringers. Some parts of the cemetery had not been cut so recently, and here there were frequent flowers of *Leontodon hispidus* (**Rough Hawkbit**). Some of the gravel track edges had a plentiful weed flora, including *Veronica polita* (**Grey Field-speedwell**). At the far end, adjacent allotments contributed a few additions that had crossed the fence, including *Asparagus officinalis* (**Garden Asparagus**) and *Foeniculum vulgare* (**Fennel**). The site is in two different hectads, so lists were made for each separately, but altogether we recorded 147 species, tripling the list for the site, and with 45 in flower.

By now it was getting close to lunch time, but rather than eat in the cemetery we decided to walk to the afternoon destination of the Wet Horse Fen SSSI. Spying the nice sunlit bank of Soham Lode we chose that as our lunch spot, but the field was also occupied by a herd of cattle who decided that we were the most interesting thing that they had seen for a long while. We continued with our lunch and eventually the cattle raced back to the gate to greet a late arriving pair of botanists. Lunch completed we walked along the bank of Soham Lode to the “Fen Reeves” unit of the SSSI. This proved to have an interesting mix of chalk grassland flora and marsh species, with *Cirsium acaule* (**Dwarf Thistle**) contrasting with *Cirsium palustre* (**Marsh Thistle**) and *Briza media* (**Quaking-grass**) mixing with *Deschampsia cespitosa* (**Tufted Hair-grass**). Somewhat to our surprise there were also flowering *Primula veris* (**Cowslip**) and *Ranunculus bulbosus* (**Bulbous Buttercup**), showing that plants no longer know what season it is. However a fairly thorough search failed to reveal any *Gentianella amarella* (**Autumn Gentian**) which had been reported in 1970 with a six-figure grid reference. The suspicion is that this may have been a centroid for the SSSI rather than a position for the plant.



The open expanse of the Wet Horse Fen  
[Jonathan Shanklin]

We retraced our steps and crossed Soham Lode at the road bridge to access the northern units of the SSSI. The first of these was the Trust unit, owned by the BCN Wildlife Trust. The meadows on this side of the Lode were quite different in character to those on the other side, being far more lush and with many damper areas supporting plants such as *Equisetum palustre* (**Marsh Horsetail**) and *Galium palustre* subsp. *elongatum* (**Great Marsh-bedstraw**). Although clearly not likely to be suitable for the *Gentianella amarella* the Trust Meadow was certainly in good condition, with flowering *Polygala vulgaris* (**Common Milkwort**) scattered across it. An unexpected find was *Lonicera japonica* (**Japanese Honeysuckle**) in the eastern boundary hedge, where there was also a *Symphytum*, which was provisionally recorded as *Symphytum officinale* (**Common Comfrey**), though neither it nor *Symphytum x uplandicum* (**Russian Comfrey**) have been recorded from the meadow before.

We just about had time to record another unit, but walking up the Lode, the furthest one didn't look in particularly good condition, so the majority of the party settled on the aptly named "Middle" unit. This was similar to the Trust Meadow, although a ditch and largely dried pond produced several additional species including *Lysimachia vulgaris* (**Yellow Loosestrife**). With more dew beginning to form we decided to call it a day, leaving behind Charles and Monica to continue with the "North" unit. Altogether during the day we had recorded 215 species of which 76 were seen in flower, a surprisingly good total for this late in the season.

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## Excursions for 2022

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. Some Coronavirus restrictions are likely to be still in force and these must be respected. I 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 open excursion, but please arrive promptly at the start. We often have to give a site briefing at which you must be present. A packed



*Astragalus danicus* (**Purple Milk-vetch**) at Magog Down, presumed to have come out of the seed-bank following creation of a new scrape.  
[Claire Beale]

lunch will be required for most meetings and we will generally finish towards the end of the afternoon. On occasion, we will be walking for some distance over ground which may be rough. **This means that sections of some meetings are not suitable for all potential participants.** Please do read the [BSBI advice to participants on field meetings](#) and consider whether your attendance will adversely affect the excursion for other participants. Some meetings have been deliberately arranged to allow wide participation. To help you decide, I have used the BSBI colour codes, so that **Green** implies fairly easy going, whilst **Amber** implies that the going is often likely to be rough. I don't anticipate any of the meetings being **Red**, but we did have one that came close last year. Meeting places have been chosen as having some parking space, but this can not be guaranteed. Several landowners specifically request no dogs, and the BSBI guidance is not to have dogs (except guide dogs) at meetings, so if you do have a dog, please leave it at home. Our meetings often produce some surprising and interesting records so do come along if you can.

### **Saturday, March 19, 10:00, Fenland churchyards, **Green****

Continuing with our early season format of starting with churchyards we will explore some in the north of the county. We will begin at Cottenham, then on to Sutton and Chatteris. Other churchyards may include Doddington, Wimblington and March, or we may head back south to Mepal and Witchford.



**Sunday, April 24, 11:00,**

The details of this meeting remain to be confirmed, though we plan to visit a woodland site in the south east of the county. If this proves impossible we may head for a wood in the west instead!

**Tuesday, May 10, 14:00, Histon set-aside, Green**

Histon villagers have recently bought a parcel of land, which has been abandoned for many years. It has an interesting flora, with several plants of more acidic ground such as *Filago minima* (**Small Cudweed**) and *Myosotis discolor* (**Changing Forget-me-not**). David Dives and Daphne Fisher, the site manager, who know the site well, will lead us round. If time permits, we will also visit the neighbouring ridge and furrow fields of Manor Farm and the churchyard. Parking is best in Cottenham Road. We'll enter the site via a gap in the hedge a short distance up the Gun's Lane bridle path so meet at the start of Gun's Lane on Cottenham Road. Gun's lane is just 25 m NE of Barrowcrofts, and is opposite a stop for the No 8 bus.

**Saturday, June 18, 10:00 Stanground Wash NR, Amber**

The Flora Group hasn't visited this BCN Wildlife Trust reserve previously, which consists of washlands and the track of an old railway. There are several unlikely records which may have come from the latter which need following up and this will be an opportunity to do so. Meet at the car park TL208975 (which is in v.c.31).



A blue haze of flowering *Linum perenne* (**Perennial Flax**) covering the rough on the Gog Magog Golf Course. [Jonathan Shanklin]

**Tuesday, July 5, ,** The Golf Course is one of the Cambridgeshire jewels of chalk grassland. It should be at its best at this time of year with *Linum perenne* (**Perennial Flax**) creating a haze of blue and the rare *Prunella laciniata* (**Cut-leaved Selfheal**) in flower. This meeting is strictly limited to seven participants and you must book in advance. Those attending will need to wear high-viz jackets.

**Sunday, July 24, 11:00, Ely cemetery, Common and meadows, Amber**

We will start at the cemetery, which is a County Wildlife Site and then move to Ely Common and the flood meadows of the Great Ouse for lunch and exploration in the afternoon. If permission is given we may also be able to explore part of Roswell Pits.

Meet at the cemetery entrance on Beech Lane TL546807.



*Gentianella amarella* (**Autumn Gentian**) [Jonathan Shanklin]

**Wednesday, August 3, 10:00, Guided Busway, Green**

We will aim to complete our walk along the Busway to Fen Drayton, including recording the Over Railway Cutting CWS and possibly detouring off to Mare Fen CWS if time permits. Meet at the Longstanton stop TL402679.

**Sunday, September 4, 11:00, Ickleton area, Green**

There are several interesting sites in the Ickleton area. We will begin at Coploe Hill Pit (TL492426), where we should see **Eyebright** and *Gentianella amarella* (**Autumn Gentian**). There is limited parking here. We'll move on to record Ickleton churchyard and finally cross the railway to the Hinxton wetlands nature reserve.

**Saturday, October 1, 10:00, Reach & Tubney Fen, Amber**

Our final visit of the year is to part of the National Trust Wicken Fen Vision area, which has been restored from arable to wetland. Meet at Little Fen Drove (TL553661) [NB limited parking]. If time permits we'll do a circular walk via Reach, perhaps visiting the old chalk pit.

There may be additional meetings organised after publication of this newsletter. 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 Backs, covering all of TL4458, including several colleges. Numbers may be limited for these visits, but they are all "Green" rated. There may also be further "Nature in my neighbourhood" visits to explore Cambridge streets, and visits to Wandlebury Country Park or Magog Down. Dates for all these will be included on the [county web page](#).

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