



Cambridgeshire Flora Group

Newsletter 2026

1st Edition

News

The [Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough](#) has been published. Although the process of producing it failed to fully engage with specialists I was pleasantly surprised that some of the comments on draft versions have been acted on in the final version. There are still concerns, for example a strong focus on iconic rare species, rather than on the most rapidly declining species where overall biodiversity loss is greatest. There is also an emphasis on planting to improve biodiversity, rather than on providing habitat to encourage natural colonisation as far as possible. Never-the-less the recommendations should lead to substantial improvements, provided the necessary finances are provided to enable them. That of course is part of the conundrum. Government wants exponential economic growth in order to pay for environmental improvements, but the growth destroys the environment that already exists. The real issue is unsustainable population growth. Given the environmental resources that we have, our population needs to reduce substantially if we are to retain a green and pleasant land.

We had a successful series of field meetings in 2025, beginning with the New Year Plant Hunt, starting the main season with the now traditional churchyard visits and continuing through to September. We sneaked in an indoor meeting in November and plan another in 2026 February. There are accounts of these meetings later in the newsletter. As usual they provide a mix of learning about plant



The Flora Group at Dungate Farm
[Lucy Wilson]

identification, discovering new or lost plants and recording specific sites and areas. Do come along to one as they provide an excellent introduction to the county flora.

Both Lucy and Jonathan continue to sit on the Local Sites Panel (which includes both County and City Wildlife Sites and Local Geological Sites), Lucy in her professional capacity at the Wildlife Trust and Jonathan as an independent natural historian. Due to available funding most of the County Wildlife Site (CWS) work undertaken by the Wildlife Trust is based around Peterborough and so outside of vc 29. However, the Flora Group directly contributed to the formal selection of Westfield



Telescopes of the 4C array at Lord's Bridge
[Lucy Wilson]

Farm in Comberton as a County Wildlife Site for its arable flora in February, based on records made by the group the previous autumn, and records made during their visit to Lord's Bridge in May 2025 indicate that this CWS could also be selected for its arable flora. Lucy also provided some guidance to East Cambridgeshire District Council for the Lakeside Bereavement Centre which is currently being built on the site of the old Mepal Outdoor Centre so that the early successional flora present (added to its selection criteria in 2024 based on some of Jonathan's records) will hopefully

be taken into account in future management. Part of the First Public Drain in Cambridge (the section running adjacent to Cowley Road) was selected as a City Wildlife Site in November, somewhat based on its diverse flora for such a small site.

Sadly we have said farewell to several botanists. Julia Napier died in April. She was a staunch supporter of the Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke, though she only submitted a few botanical records. Phil Horton died in August, having only arrived in Cambridgeshire relatively recently.

On the BSBI front Jonathan continues as the Hon. Field Meetings Secretary and Chair of the Committee for England (CfE) and does various other odds and ends, including proof-reading articles for British & Irish Botany. The various roles keep him pretty busy, particularly when you add in helping to organise the BSBI Annual Summer Meeting (ASM). The 2026 England Annual Meeting in September is a residential one for all members and will focus on beginners and improvers. It will be held FSC Preston Montford near Shrewsbury. You don't have to be a member of the BSBI to participate in BSBI meetings, although being one does make those with registration charges cheaper.

Lucy is continuing to focus on improving her botany (becoming a VCR certainly accelerates the process), including botanising as much as she can outside the county which also is helping her to integrate into the BSBI community by liaising with other VCRs. 2025 included a lot of botanising by coasts – Jersey, Dorset and North Wales. She is also beginning to compile a detailed list of the flora of the Ffestiniog Railway (vc 48, Meirionydd) which is turning up all sorts of local and some national rarities. In 2026 Lucy will be an Identiplant tutor, assisting some local

botanists on a BSBI-led course which uses a systematic family-based approach to learning plants for people to advance into more serious botany.

Recording apps

There are three main recording apps for plant species: The [BSBI Recording app](#), [iRecord](#) and [iNaturalist](#). They all have pros and cons, but as the BSBI app has been designed for plant recording we recommend using it. If you are also recording genera other than plants then iRecord is probably the best option. Both apps are being enhanced on an ongoing basis.



The desktop version of the BSBI app.

iNaturalist needs to be used carefully to make sure that records made using it are adequate. By default it makes up a location on the basis of the grid reference, however this means that the grid reference is not verifiable. If all grid references related to where the plant was, this wouldn't be a problem, however we encounter too many records where the plant seems to be at home, in the pub, on the train etc. This destroys the value of the record to the extent that records with automatically generated locations will not be used and may not be verified. In most cases these are all locations that give a post code as part of the location name so that it looks like an address. You can put in a named location manually and we recommend that you do this if you want your record to be verified. See our [vc 29 guidance](#) on the [vc 29 web page](#) for more details. iNaturalist have realised that there are problems and have provided their [own guidance](#), which applies to all taxa.

Notable finds

Alan Leslie has decided that it is time to hand over the production of the detailed lists that have appeared here and in Nature in Cambridgeshire to the present VCR team. His work on these has been much appreciated and will be a hard act to follow, but we'll do the best we can. As a starting point we'll make use of the list of "star finds" that Jonathan Shanklin posts on the current web page, combined with analysis of records submitted to the BSBI to show unusual records. "Star finds" are a set from those species new to the county, those re-found after a long absence, or rare plants found in a new location. Some are the results of deliberate searches whilst others are accidental finds by groups or individuals.

In this section we give informal reports on some of the discoveries and there will be a more formal write up in Nature in Cambridgeshire. The 2025 issue with Alan's last report should be published in February, whilst the editorial board hope to get the 2026 issue out towards the middle of the year.

On May 28, Iain Webb, Community Conservation Officer with the BCN Wildlife Trust was cycling in the rain to a meeting and passed along a potential protected



One of the plants of *Orchis anthropophora*
[Iain Webb]

road verge site on the way. Out of the corner of his eye he glimpsed a distinctive orchid and briefly stopped to check, finding three plants of *Orchis anthropophora* (Man Orchid). For him this is a very well known plant as he supervises work and orchid counts at its main known site in the county. This is the second new site for the plant in the county in the last few years, so it is perhaps expanding its range as has also happened with *Himantoglossum hircinum* (Lizard Orchid).

Jonathan Shanklin and Lucy Wilson visited a county wildlife site near Madingley on June 19 to compile an updated species list for it. A large field margin had been unintentionally left adjacent to the site, which produced an interesting set of arable plant species. Quite a few were known from the general area such as *Vicia parviflora* (Slender Tare) and *Euphorbia platyphyllos* (Broad-leaved Spurge) and some were present in good quantity such as *Euphorbia exigua*

(Dwarf Spurge). Jonathan Shanklin spotted a colour form of *Lysimachia arvensis* (Scarlet Pimpernel), then Lucy Wilson went one better and spotted a blue flowered variety. Microscopic examination later showed that this was *Lysimachia foemina*. Overall the uncultivated area scored 34 on the Plantlife scale, which makes it of national significance.

A couple of new sites for *Valerianella dentata* (Narrow-fruited Cornsalad) have been found in Cambridgeshire over the summer. First off was during the Cambridgeshire Flora Group visit to Dungate Farm on June 28 when the group found scattered flowering and fruiting plants over about 50 m on the west margin of an arable field adjacent to a plantation. Jonathan Shanklin confirmed the continued presence of another population at a known site on July 9, where the farmer appeared to have deliberately left the field corner uncultivated. Finally Lucy Wilson found a small population at the margin of another county wildlife site on



Lysimachia foemina
[Lucy Wilson]

July 20. Despite the new finds it remains Endangered in the county as it has not been seen at some former sites.

Many excursions produce surprises and one by the Cambridge Natural History Society to a site that will become a new publicly accessible chalk downland was no exception. A small arable margin had been left after sowing an Emorsgate chalk wildflower mix and the group hoped to find some interesting arable species. There were some, with scattered heads of *Papaver hybridum* (Rough Poppy) being seen, but nothing very special. Then Jonathan Shanklin spotted an odd looking plant on the field verge, which turned out to be *Isatis tinctoria* (Woad). It had clearly been there before the field had been sown with the mix, so how did it get there? It could have come from a seed bank, or perhaps birds brought seed from sites where it was known to be introduced between two and eight km away.



Eleocharis acicularis at the A14 borrow pit location [Oli Glenister]

Eleocharis acicularis (Needle Spike-rush) turned up in a couple of similar locations. Oli Glenister found it at the edge of a borrow pit near the A14 between Bar Hill and Girton on September 10, then Jonathan Shanklin found it at the edge of a balancing pond south of Longstanton on October 28. In both cases it formed extensive carpets on the draw-down zone and was or had flowered. The question is whether it had been brought in by birds, which make extensive use of the new habitat created in the area, or whether it was a deliberate or accidental part of the planting. The additions have removed

the plant from the scarce list in the county, but it remains on the RPCC due to historic decline at all levels.

In preparation for the BSBI *Taraxacum* weekend held on the Isle of Wight in April, Alan Leslie and Paul Stanley visited several sites to gather specimens for determination by John Richards, the *Taraxacum* referee. Most of us just record Dandelions as *Taraxacum* agg, but there are nearly 250 microspecies in Britain & Ireland. It is therefore not surprising that many properly determined specimens will be rare or scarce in the county and some will be new. Their collections produced seven species that were rare or scarce and four new to the county.

Oxybasis glauca (Oak-leaved Goosefoot) has turned up at several locations over the past few years, mostly associated with disturbed ground created during building works. On July 7 Oli Glenister found two plants on ground in a greenhouse at South Angle Farm Park, Soham.



Oxybasis glauca in Soham [Oli Glenister]

One plant was also found during the CFG visit to Waterbeach New Town on August

12, as recounted in the section on excursions. Despite these two additions it remains a rare plant in the county.

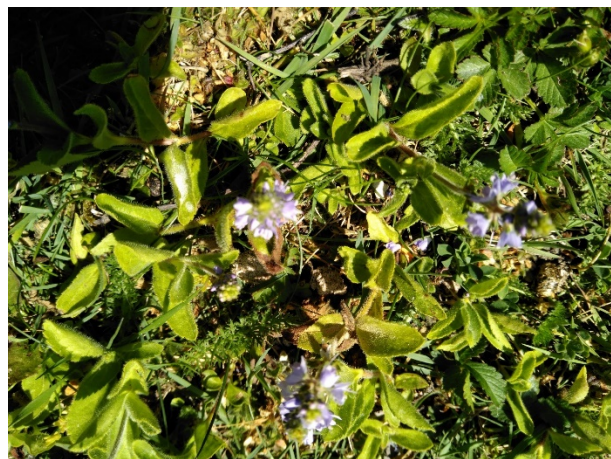


Carex lepidocarpa subsp. *jemtlandica*
[Mike Padfield]

Carex lepidocarpa (Long-stalked Yellow-sedge) is a scarce and endangered plant in the county, but is well known from sites such as Wicken Fen and Chippenham Fen. It was therefore a little surprising to find a record from Chippenham Fen being flagged as a notable record by the DDb query that I ran to find new hectad records of rare and scarce species. What I had forgotten was that on the joint visit with the Norfolk Flora Group to Chippenham Fen on August 16 a plant had been recorded as the subspecies *jemtlandica*, which is new for the British Isles! This had been spotted by Alex Prendergast in the same area as *Carex lasiocarpa* (Slender Sedge) and then confirmed by the sedge referees. Maybe we have it at our other sites in the county.

It has been something of a year for finding *Veronica officinalis* (Heath Speedwell), which is a scarce and endangered plant in the county having

been lost from several hectads. First up was the CFG visit to Lord's Bridge Observatory on May 20, when we found it in several places in one area of the site, in a new hectad. It had perhaps come in with material when it was a military site in World War 2. Next was a find in TL55 on June 1, at the opposite end of the hectad to where I had found it last year. Here it was probably on the glacial gravels that are scattered in the area, so it might be elsewhere. Finally we found it on the CFG visit to Middle Moor CWS on July 8, where we had seen it in 2013.



Veronica officinalis at Lord's Bridge Observatory [Jonathan Shanklin]

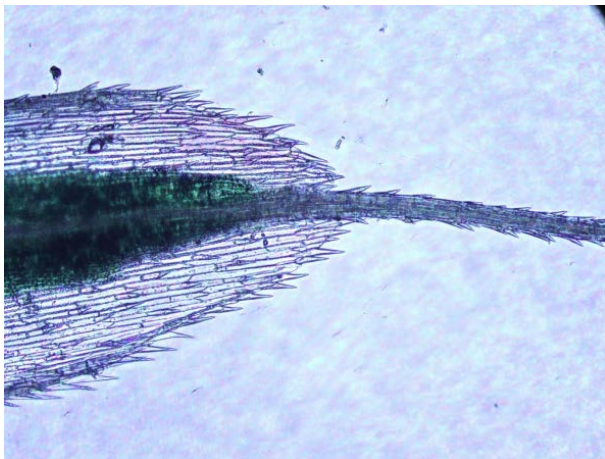
It was quite a surprise to see *Anemone ranunculoides* (Yellow Anemone) in the Trinity Meadow CiWS on April 13. It was a plant that I'd seen in Geneva Botanic Garden, but it isn't often recorded in England. There is a curious concentration of recent records in the Scottish Borders. The Trinity garden staff could not recall it being planted and it was clearly established in the Meadow.

Alan Leslie visited Bullocks Haste Common in Cottenham several times, finding some unusual plants. The Common is not actually a common but is a winter wet area that locals would like as a nature reserve. On August 21 and September 18 he found scattered plants of *Bidens radiata* (Greater Bur-marigold), which has the next nearest plants 180 km away. These were found near Leeds by David Broughton in early September. Where they all brought in by waterfowl? The site has also yielded *Bolboschoenus maritimus* (Sea Club-rush), *Juncus compressus* (Round-fruited Rush) and the two dock hybrids *Rumex x knafii* (*R. conglomeratus* x *maritimus*) and *Rumex x fallacinus* (*R. crispus* x *maritimus*). A stop press addition is *Oxybasis chenopodioides* (Saltmarsh Goosefoot) that Alan found in September, but only confirmed in January by comparison with herbarium specimens.



Anemone ranunculoides [Karen Wells]

One of our rare willowherbs is *Epilobium lanceolatum* (Spear-leaved Willowherb), which seems to prefer the south-west and south-east England. It was therefore still a surprise to find it both along Hobson's Conduit (May 24) and in the Botanic Garden (August 21), even though most of our recent records are from Cambridge.



Micrograph showing the awn on the glume of *Polypogon fugax* [Chris Preston]

Chris Preston reported *Polypogon fugax* (Asian Minor Bluegrass) at RSPB Ouse Fen on July 23. This looks a bit like the more widespread *Polypogon viridis* (Water Bent), but has a short awn. Members of the CFG also got a chance to see it when we visited the reserve on August 30 – see the later report. A subsequent visit by Chris with Alan Leslie and Peter Leonard found the hybrid X *Agropogon lutosus* (*Agrostis stolonifera* x *Polypogon monspeliensis*), for which we have three previous records.

An abandoned horse paddock near Eddington, in what is one of our tetrads with the highest number of species, provided some unexpected finds. I received an email from Fiona Head saying that she thought she had found Nottingham Catchfly in it on May 30. In the photo this looked possible, so I went to have a look a few days later, and sure enough it was *Silene nutans* (Nottingham

Catchfly), along with several other species of interest. *Briza media* (Quaking-grass) and *Cichorium intybus* (Chicory) were familiar, but there were also plants of *Tragopogon pratensis* subsp. *orientalis* (Goat's-beard) and *Tanacetum corymbosum* (Scentless Feverfew). It seems likely that all were introduced at some point, but were clearly well established. The *Tragopogon* is a new British host for the smut *Microbotryum tragopogonis-pratensis* and also grows in the Bishop's garden in Ely. It is only the second British record for the *Tanacetum*. The paddock has since been mown, so is no longer quite so abandoned. It will be worth keeping an eye on to see if anything else appears in the spring.

There are many additional more technically interesting records, which will be reported in Nature in Cambridgeshire.



Silene nutans [Fiona Head]

Recording News

Cambridgeshire recorders continue to make a huge number of records and the total for 2025 is over 57,000. It is these records that really help to know which species are doing well, which are becoming problems and which are in decline. Looking at the records it is obvious that most effort so far since Atlas 2020 has taken place south of Ely. More records are needed in the Fens in the northern half of the county. In 2025 there were very few records in the north-west corner of the county.

The BSBI is planning a new science strategy and this may result in some new projects to study some of the changes. It could, for example, include an expansion of the New Year Plant Hunt (NYPH) to monthly hunts, along a fixed transect. The BSBI will issue guidance in due course. Another project is likely to be a repeat of the local change project that last ran in 2004. This requires intensive recording in selected tetrads and is probably best carried out by the VCRs or nominated recorders.

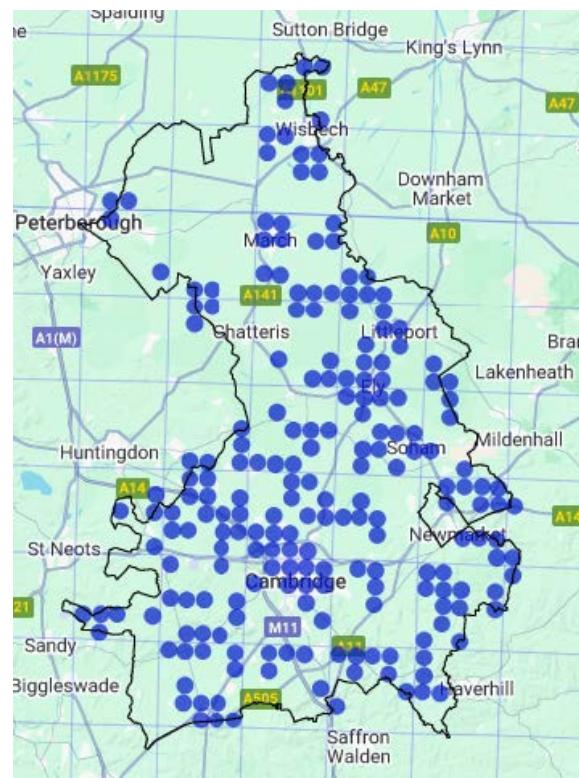
The NYPH was, as usual, very popular but showed that the guidance given by the BSBI had some flaws. During the 2026 hunt, recorders in Cambridgeshire made 574 records, with a concentration around Cambridge and Ely. At least 145 taxa were recorded as being in flower, with *Bellis perennis* (Daisy) being the most frequent and *Lamium album* (White Dead-nettle) coming second. Seventeen recorders or groups took part, with two making over 100 entries over the four days. Many of the records had associated images, which made it possible to check some of the unlikely identifications and suggest alternatives. Some of the records without images are also unlikely! A significant problem is whether the plant is actually where the record says it is. In some cases the grid reference is the same for all the plants and this is probably a flaw in the BSBI instruction. Certainly all those using the NYPH app should have

been able to use the built in GPS to log the positions. In some cases the site name and the grid reference don't match, which makes the record invalid for scientific use. These issues probably don't matter for the NYPH, but will prevent the records being used for other purposes.

In addition to the usual Cambridge Natural History Society / CFG walk on New Years Day I made a couple of walks to my usual sites: The Kite and West Cambridge. I've been doing the former each year since 2020, with the highest total being 56 on 2021 January 3 and the lowest 21 on 2022 December 31. This year saw 52 species in flower on January 3. It is rather easier said than done to query the DDb for a complete list over the seven years, but there have been at least 86 species in flower, with the most common being *Bellis perennis* (Daisy), *Capsella bursa-pastoris* (Shepherd's-purse), *Erigeron sumatrensis* (Guernsey Fleabane), *Euphorbia peplus* (Petty Spurge), *Lamium purpureum* (Red Dead-nettle), *Mercurialis annua* (Annual Mercury), *Poa annua* (Annual Meadow-grass), *Senecio vulgaris* (Groundsel) and *Stellaria media* (Common Chickweed). This mirrors the most common species in our area.

According to the BSBI Distribution Database (the DDb) there were 285 new hectad records in 2025, though the answer does depend on how the query is phrased. Some of the answers are nonsense, such as *Lysimachia arvensis* (Scarlet Pimpernel) being new to nine hectads. This is because it was previously recorded as *Anagallis arvensis*, which potentially includes what are now *Lysimachia foemina* (Blue Pimpernel) and *Lysimachia loeflingii* (Azure Pimpernel). As we are getting better at recognising some sub-species several have been added to hectads, for example *Solanum nigrum* subsp. *nigrum* (Black Nightshade) and *Symphytum officinale* subsp. *bohemicum* (Common Comfrey). *Euphorbia oblongata* (Balkan Spurge) continues its spread, being added to three hectads.

The BSBI's local logging software, "MapMate" was from an external provider and is no longer being supported. All our records have been transferred to the DDb. MapMate had some advantages over the DDb and BSBI recording app both for record entry (it can take historical records) and for display and analysis of records. As a part replacement for the software, the BSBI has its own recording app, which is available as a mobile app and for desk-top record entry. There are still a few minor bugs in the mobile version, though these won't be noticed by most users and new features are being added, such as AI image recognition. If you only record plants we recommend using this, as it provides you with supporting information on your potential record – whether the plant has been seen recently in the monad/tetrad/hectad and whether it is on the RPCC. You can also include a picture with the record, which makes it much more likely to be accepted if it is an "unusual" record. If you record more than plants it may be more



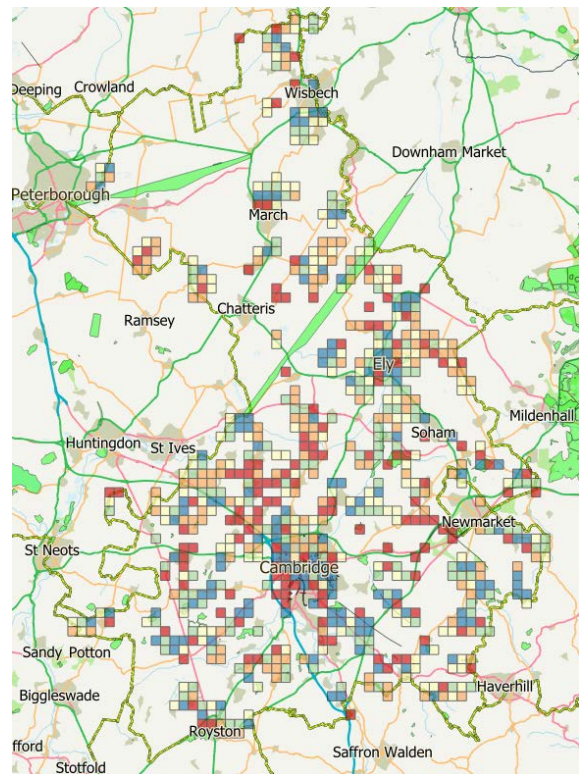
Location of new hectad records in 2025

convenient to use iRecord, which also allows you to include images. Transfer of botanical records from iRecord to the BSBI is now happening more regularly. If you are submitting species lists in a spreadsheet, please continue to use the Stace 3 names as it is still possible to use MapMate in a limited fashion.

We have made a start on verifying records from iRecord and iNaturalist at the iRecord end of the system. Records from these sources will only be accepted if they clearly meet the standard for what is a good record, in particular that the site name provides cross-confirmation of the grid reference. Ideally you should give your real name rather than a pseudonym, but there can be good reasons for using a pseudonym. Mostly Jonathan concentrates on those records with associated images, and Lucy has been verifying some by particular recorders, though only accepting those where they are common or already known from a site unless there is photographic evidence. While these records of common or site-known plants do not contribute much to our understanding of the distribution of flora, verification provides the recorders with good feedback and builds a relationship between them and the VCRs. For those with photos there have been some good records of scarce species among them.

The records do, however, show some problems with various aspects of recording. Some records have the wrong grid reference – mostly the recorder's home location. This is why it is important to include a clear site location as well as the grid reference. Note that a site location is not a long description of the site and the description should go in as a comment. Unless you are careful to put in a location, iNaturalist automatically generates a location name from the grid reference. This provides no cross check, so the record is not verifiable. There are revised [hints and tips on format and recording](#) on the county web page.

There are also issues with AI identification of taxa. Some plants have probably been identified by an AI app trained on alien species that are unlikely in Cambridgeshire. Some plants are probably identified too precisely, possibly because the first plant on a list is selected – this isn't always the most likely species or subspecies. Some plants are identified incorrectly because the AI gives an aggregate and the user takes that to mean the species, for example, *Hieracium maculatum* agg. Sometime the image is very nice, but no help in identifying the plant – for example many yellow composites look quite similar when imaged face on. If necessary I re-determine wrongly identified records as far as possible from the image, rather than simply rejecting them. This is going to be more problematic with records that have no image, and those that seem dubious will have to be rejected. Sometimes the image is good enough to allow identification of the sub-species. A potential issue is wrongly identified common species such as

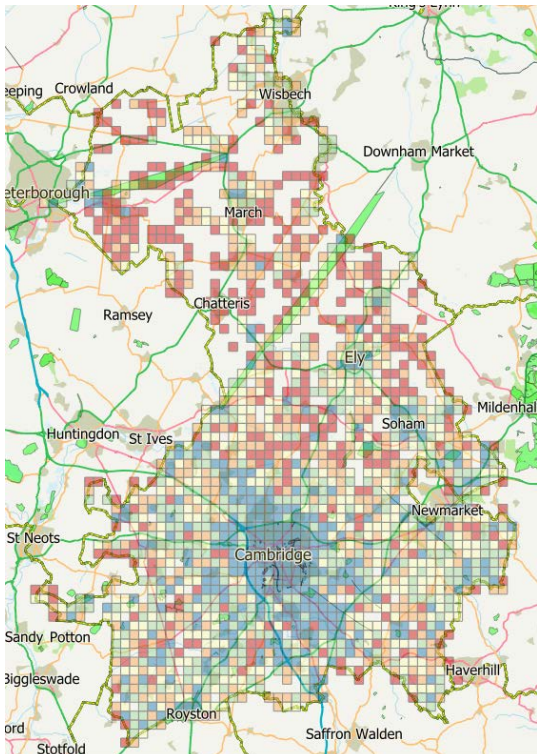


Monads with records in 2025. There are large parts of fenland that would benefit from more even coverage.

Brassica napus (Rape) being confused for *Sinapis arvensis* (Charlock). It is of course always possible that I will make a mistake in identification, and I have certainly been caught a couple of times by the slow response of the iRecord system and changed something that I didn't mean to change.

The Register of Plants of Conservation Concern (RPCC) has been updated to include all plants that have been found to have a threat status in the new GB Red List. All of these were either already on the RPCC or are of Least Concern in Cambridgeshire. The usual annual update also added a few species and deleted some others, bringing the total to 791 species. An RPCC is more comprehensive in terms of species than a standard Rare Plant Register (RPR) as it includes plants that are not necessarily rare in the county, but are threatened. The Cambridgeshire one also has an appendix giving a list of plants that are showing significant increases and hence may be a concern for invasive reasons.

The list of those species not seen recently, which is subdivided into decades has also been updated and this time I have remembered to update the web page. The decadal listing might help people to target specific species and perhaps re-



discover them. There are 57 species in this listing not seen this century and these are perhaps the most likely to be re-found. Many of the additions to those not seen for over a decade are introductions, or “difficult” *Taraxacum* species and none have a long history in the county. 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 have been several re-finds of species that had not been seen for some years and a few of these are described later in the Newsletter. Of the 791 species now on the RPCC, 364 (46%) were seen in 2025, 526 (69%) have been seen since 2019, 583 (75%) since 2015 and 612 (81%) since 2005. 153 (19%) are regionally extinct.

We have DDb records for 2756 different species and hybrids (this is apparently down on last year, which probably reflects changes to taxa in the DDb), with 2277 seen from 2005 onwards. 1219 species and hybrids were recorded during 2025. May

Post Atlas 2020 species counts. We clearly need to get out of Cambridge more!

was the most popular month to record (9359 records) with February as usual being the least (2338). Overall in the DDb the most frequent species remain as *Urtica dioica* (Nettle) (now recorded in all 665 tetrads in the vc), followed by *Galium aparine* (Cleavers) (664, missing in TL25C) and *Dactylis glomerata* (Cock's-foot) (661, missing in TF41J, TL25Y, TL28U, TL64K).

Lucy and I have targeted “Shanklins” (monads with no records) and monads with fewer than 50 records during the year and have visited 88 of them. The total number of entire “Shanklins” remaining is now 51 or 100 when partial monads on the county boundary are included. There are still 214 entire monads with fewer than 50 species and 355 when boundary squares are included.

TL45 was second for the most species recorded in a hectad in Britain & Ireland during 2025 with 882, with NT27 (Edinburgh) top with 916. Our next best hectad was TL46 in 6th place with 660. Taking all records into consideration TL45 now has records of 2383 “taxa” in the BSBI DDb and is 6th on the all time list, though there is no documentation on the exact definition of the various options that can be used in searches.

If you have lists of records, please submit them promptly, in properly formatted spreadsheets if possible or use the BSBI app. This makes it much easier for us 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.

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 *British & Irish Botany (B&IB)*. Some abstracts from the latter follow. By joining BSBI you can get discounted rates on many publications, including their *Handbook* series. The latest of these is on Roses and should help us to be a bit more precise than *Rosa canina* agg (Dog Rose).



The cover of the latest BSBI Handbook, on Roses

Abstracts of Recent Papers

The following papers from British & Irish Botany (B&IB) are either about or mention Cambridgeshire. The links should take you to the paper.

[*British & Irish Botany* 7\(2\):73-89](#)

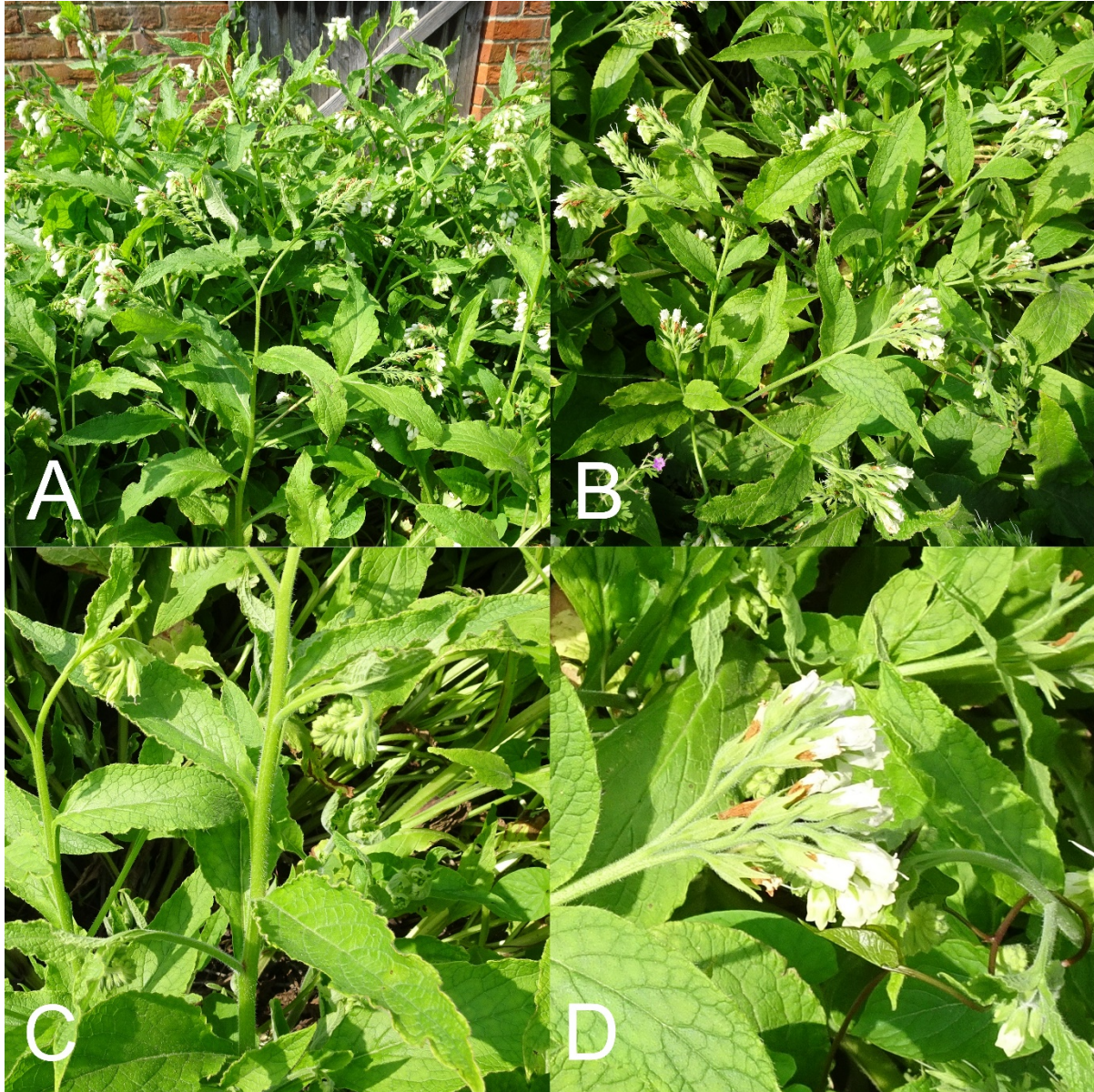
***Symphytum x ferrariense* (*S. officinale* x *S. orientale*) in Cambridgeshire, Cheshire and Norfolk: first records for England**

Robert Leaney¹; [Alan Leslie](#)²; Stewart Hinsley³

¹Wroxham, Norfolk, U.K.; ²Cambridge, U.K.; ³Alsager, Cheshire, U.K.

Three populations of *Symphytum x ferrariense* C. Massal., the hybrid between *S. officinale* L. and *S. orientale* L. are described, in Cheshire, Cambridgeshire and Norfolk, all involving a cream flowered form of *S. officinale*. This is the first time *S. x ferrariense* has been reported in England, and the first time it has been found in the wild outside the coastal department of Var in southern France, where it has not been seen since 1892. All the late 19th century occurrences were close to the port of Toulon and it is suggested that they were escapes or relics from horticulture, having been inadvertently imported along with *S. officinale* for herbal purposes, probably from the Black Sea coast of Russia. The three populations described here, however, seem to be the result of hybridisation in the wild, which is likely to occur more often now that *S. orientale* is spreading from its original urban sites into rural areas close to the wetland habitats favoured by *S. officinale*. The Cambridgeshire population consists of two very different forms, one probably a F1 hybrid and the other the result of backcrossing of this F1 plant with the presumed pollen parent population of *S. officinale*

nearby; the Cheshire and Norfolk populations are also quite distinct. All four forms show good intermediacy between *S. officinale* and *S. orientale*, but differ in habit, upper stem leaf shape and leaf and stem indumentum; they are given separate descriptions, but with a combined description in the Conclusion section. All four resemble a cream flowered form of *S. officinale*, but a quick check for the half-dissected calyx and shorter stem winging should suggest *Symphytum x ferrariense* rather than pure *S. officinale*; another helpful spotting feature is that the open flowers are pure white or greenish yellow rather than cream in colour. Material from the Cambridgeshire population has been deposited in **CGE**.



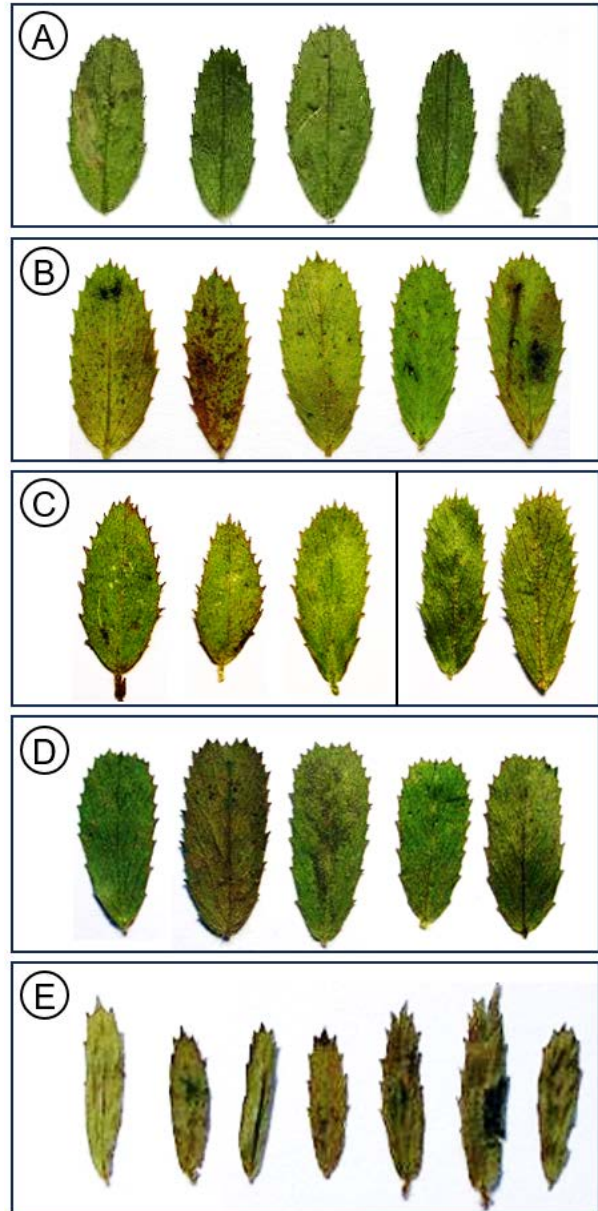
Symphytum x ferrariense, tall, erect, broader leaved form. Chesterton (TL47116005), 22 May 2023. Note A: tall, erect habit, up to 1.25 m; B: fairly broad upper stem leaves; C: stem winging occasionally down to next node, mostly to around halfway; D: calyx dissection to 2/5 – 1/2, and white bulbous open corolla. Photos: Robert Leaney

Variation in the *Ononis repens* (Fabaceae) group: implications for species determination and conservation

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Whilst going through the *Ononis* L. specimens in the British & Irish Herbarium at the Natural History Museum, London (**BM**), problems were encountered with distinguishing some specimens of *O. repens* L. from *O. spinosa* L. due to conflicting morphological characteristics. This may come as no surprise to those familiar with identifying *Ononis*, but it did prompt an interesting investigation into the herbarium specimens at **BM**, as well as a survey of relevant literature and field observations. What emerged is an interesting story in which both genetic and environmental factors appear to influence *Ononis* morphology in ways that could have implications for recording accuracy and conservation. To further explore this, the ploidy levels of putative hybrids collected in the field were assessed using flow cytometry. As expected, *O. spinosa* was confirmed to be diploid and *O. repens* tetraploid, suggesting that any F₁ hybrids should be triploid. However, all morphologically intermediate specimens analysed were diploid. It is therefore hypothesised that these diploid intermediates are a form of *O. spinosa* displaying some morphological features of *O. repens* due to phenotypic adaptation or introgression. The ecological and taxonomic implications of these findings are discussed.



Leaves of *Ononis*. A: collected by Clive Stace from a roadside nature reserve at Earl Stonham, Suffolk; B: collected by Jonathan Shanklin from Orwell Pit, Cambridgeshire. A and B show intermediate shape in being elliptic-oval with rounded apices and are from putative *O. x pseudohircina*. C: Putative *O. x pseudohircina* collected from Blackhall Rocks, Co Durham with narrow teeth and a prominent apical tooth. D: *O. repens* collected from Blackhall Rocks. Note the typical *O. repens* shape of the leaflets D, with a truncate-emarginate obtuse apex and oblong-obovate contour. E: *O. spinosa* with atypically small leaves, collected by David Pearman & Ian Bennallick from Trebetherick Bay, Cornwall.

A new vascular plant Red List for Great Britain

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This report presents a comprehensive revision of the Great Britain (GB) Red List for all native and archaeophyte vascular plants, utilising verified datasets published by the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI) covering three distribution atlas time periods (1930-1969; 1987-1999; 2000-2019). Assessments of threat were undertaken using the latest International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Guidelines and Criteria. Of 1720 taxa evaluated, 434 (25%) were assessed as Critically Endangered (55), Endangered (117) or Vulnerable (262). A further 22 taxa were assessed as Regionally Extinct, and 140 as Near Threatened. Factors associated with threat included rarity, the intensification of management, long-term neglect, development, eutrophication and pollution. Such factors have had a disproportionate impact on the flora of lowland regions. An elevated threat status for numerous historically widespread 'positive indicator' taxa of semi-improved terrestrial habitats, and those of wetland and aquatic habitats, was associated with the degradation or destruction, and increased fragmentation, of suitable habitat, with such taxa increasingly confined to protected refugia. For a small number of montane plants present at their absolute southern European range limits in GB, threat was also linked to the symptoms of climate change.



Liparis loeselii (NT) [Paul Sterry]

BBC Cambridgeshire picked up the BSBI press-release and ran [a story](#) on it. Contrary to the article, *Liparis loeselii* (Fen Orchid) remains NT in GB and is RE in Cambridgeshire, showing once again that the media cannot be considered a reliable source of information. The real message of the new red list should be that ever more species are under threat.

Nature in Cambridgeshire

The 2025 edition of *Nature in Cambridgeshire* (No. 67) will be very late in appearing but could be published in 2026 January. The 2026 edition will aim for a mid-year publication. There will be several papers of botanical interest when the 2025 edition comes out: A paper on the flora of Ten Wood by Alan Leslie, one on Cambridgeshire's arable plants by Jonathan Shanklin; the final vascular plant report by Alan Leslie and reports on the Cambridge Natural History Society field studies and excursions [*These have significant botanical content.*]. Purchase details are on the [NiC web page](#). All [back issues](#) over two years old are now freely available and often offer fascinating views of how some of our sites appeared in the past.

Review of the 2025 excursions

Three different authors have written these accounts, with Monica Frisch, Jonathan Shanklin and Lucy Wilson contributing pieces. If you take part in excursions in 2026 and would like to write an account of one or more do volunteer.

Wednesday, January 1, Cambridge

There were no air frosts in December, which gave good prospects for finding plants in flower. The BSBI had decreed that their New Year Plant Hunts would begin on December 29, though in the event this led to much higher totals than if they had actually started in the New Year. Alan Leslie made a Christmas Day walk from the city centre to Cambridge North station and the Science Park and recorded 101 species. Jonathan Shanklin walked round The Kite on December 29, finding 54 species flowering. The next day he headed out to the Cambridge Research Park at Landbeach, an area chosen for two tetrads without liverwort records and two monads with few botanical records. This produced "only" 29 plants in flower, still over twice the average list reported to the BSBI. It was also successful in finding the liverworts and increasing the botanical totals for the two monads to over 100 species. For a final solo walk he crossed East Road and walked the block bounded by the major roads and the railway, finding 68 species in flower. Chris Preston covered transpontine Cambridge (ie north of the river) and found 60 species on 31 December. Other hunters were also active, with



CFG participants in the NYPH at the Accordia site [Jonathan Shanklin]

Roger Horton, Andy Symes and Penny Maplestone all reporting over 40 plants flowering and 16 others taking part in the county. Altogether 157 species were reported as flowering in the county, though following verification it turned out that some of these were mis-identifications. One advantage of the BSBI app is that pictures can be attached, allowing me to make the correct determination.

The group hunt with the Flora Group and Cambridge Natural History Society was as usual scheduled for January 1. The day before, the weather forecast was pretty dire, though did suggest that the rain might clear through by 1 *p.m.* The planned 11 *a.m.* start was therefore delayed until 1:30 *p.m.* Unfortunately the forecast timing was out, but the rain was easing by 2 *p.m.* and had more or less stopped by 2:30 *p.m.* Much to my surprise people started arriving at the meeting point by the north entrance to New Bit and we had a team of 8 plant hunters. As it was raining I started recording by using a traditional card printed on waterproof paper and we recorded plants in and along the edge of New Bit along Trumpington Road, finding 16 species flowering along this stretch along with a further nine not in flower. Given the rain we were largely only recording plants, but Nick Jardine identified the fungus *Ramaria stricta*. By the time we reached the traffic lights at Brooklands Avenue the rain was easing, so I switched to using the new BSBI Recording app and from this point only recorded species in flower. We crossed the road to the Empty Common allotments and walked through these, debating which plants could be counted as some that were in flower were clearly planted. Crossing the footbridge to the Accordia site we wandered through it. Lucy spotted a slightly different looking speedwell and this turned out to be *Veronica polita* (Grey Field-speedwell), which has blue flowers but a different shaped capsule to *Veronica persica* (Common Field-speedwell).

Leaving the Accordia site we crossed the road and spotted the car park of the Cambridge and County Bowling Club, which being deserted seemed worth an explore. The edge of the bowling green had *Achillea millefolium* (Yarrow) and Lucy found *Laphangium* [*Gnaphalium*] *luteoalbum* (Jersey C udweed) in the gravel of the car park. Numbers were beginning to drop now and the light was fading, but the remaining participants decided to have a quick walk up Bateman Street and then back to our starting point. This added species such as *Cymbalaria muralis* (Ivy-leaved Toadflax), *Parietaria judaica* (Pellitory-of-the-Wall) and *Polypogon viridis* (Water Bent). Although not in flower, there was a good patch of *Orobanche hederæ* (Ivy Broomrape) growing at the edge of one of the Brookside gardens. Back at our starting point the app showed a total of 41 finds, but two were only on the card and close to the start so their exact positions were recorded. Once back in front of the computer I discovered that another four from New Bit hadn't been recorded again, making the total for the day 47 species, which



Orobanche hederæ, All Souls Lane
[Duncan Brooks] CC BY

although a good total given the weather, is 6 fewer than the previous year. This compares with the average list for England of just 12.6 species.

Later that night the skies cleared and there was a frost, with an even harder one the following night. This would certainly have reduced the number of species in flower by removing many of the “stragglers”.

Saturday, March 29, North-east Cambridgeshire Churchyards

It rather looks as if no report on this excursion was written at the time as I was in the throes of preparing for the BSBI Recorders’ Meeting. This short report is cobbled together from the records made on the day.



Checking a specimen during the excursion [Lucy Wilson]

Our first stop was Mount Pleasant cemetery in Wisbech. This had received several previous visits, so there were some axiophyte species that we were hoping to find. In this we were quite successful, finding *Atropa belladonna* (Deadly Nightshade) and three other “nice” species. We also re-found the *Rubus rudis* found in the cemetery by Alan Leslie in 2016. In addition, we found some axiophytes new to the tetrad such as *Stellaria pallida* (Lesser Chickweed) and *Viola reichenbachiana* (Early Dog-violet). In total we recorded 127 species, with 13 new to the tetrad.

From here we headed south to Elm church and cemetery. There were only two species on the “to be found” list here, and we did find the *Rumex acetosa* (Common Sorrel), but failed to find *Asplenium ruta-muraria* (Wall-rue). In total we recorded 77 species, with three new for the tetrad and with *Viola reichenbachiana* in both the churchyard and cemetery.

Friday Bridge, just a short distance away, was our next stop. There was nothing exciting to search for, however we added 32 species to the churchyard list. The most notable additions were *Veronica polita* (Grey Field-speedwell) and more *Viola reichenbachiana*, both of which were new to the tetrad.

Nothing had previously explicitly been recorded from Christchurch churchyard, though a couple of records do have notes that they were from the churchyard. All our 72 records were therefore “new”, with *Luzula campestris* (Field Wood-rush) being the only axiophyte. Four species were new to the hectad, all of which were spring bulbs.

Finally we tackled Welney, which did have a few previous records. Our visit produced only 48 records, the lowest total of the day. Once again *Viola reichenbachiana* was an addition, this time at hectad level.

Saturday, April 26, Hayley Wood

The group met on a cloudy spring day at 10 am at the western end of the railway line, along with several visitors from the Hertfordshire Flora Group who were keen to see *Primula elatior* (Oxlip), a species little known from Herts, but with strong populations in the ancient woodlands of Cambridgeshire, Suffolk and Essex.

The day drew about 15 participants, a third of whom were our visitors from Herts, and started at the usual slow pace of a group of botanists, taking 1.5 hours to

traverse the 300 m of the disused railway line to the northern tip of the wood. This part of the railway line has always been on the edge of the wood and is noted in Oliver Rackham's book as being the most species-rich due to its combination of woodland and grassland flora, with some species likely introduced along with the trains. Almost 80 different taxa were recorded along the railway line, about half of the total number found in the whole day, including *Valeriana officinalis* (Common Valerian), *Cirsium eriophorum* (Woolly Thistle), *Pimpinella major* (Greater Burnet-saxifrage) and *Fragaria vesca* (Wild Strawberry) which are not found elsewhere on the site.

One problematic plant was a rather unusually tidy *Jacobaea vulgaris* (Common Ragwort) on which some time was spent deliberating whether it may be *Betonica officinalis* (Betony) or other *Jacobaea* or *Senecio* possibilities. We also had a good look at our first *Primula elatior* of the day, noting the pale yellow flowers drooping to one side, the long petiole and the hairy leaves. Once at the corner by the former Crossing Keeper's House we ventured into the woodland through The Triangle, which is a relatively new part of the wood established after the railway line was built and cut through an arable field. It has been present for about 100 years and is bounded on its east side by Hayley Lane, an ancient green lane. Although the flora of The Triangle is not as diverse as the rest of the wood, it does contain a reasonable population of *Sanicula europaea* (Sanicle) which was quickly found along the path, some of which was in flower. This area of the wood is also known for its *Neottia nidus-avis* (Bird's-nest Orchid), but we were too early in the season to see it.

We entered the ancient part of the woodland at the north-east end of Main Ride and started by looking at the most recent coppice plots, the one at the corner of Triangle and Main ride having been coppiced about three years ago and recently replanted with a variety of shrubs and trees, mostly *Corylus avellana* (Hazel), all without tree guards except for *Quercus robur* (Pedunculate Oak) which are destined to become the taller standard trees of the coppice plot. Within this plot there was a good showing of the county-scarce *Luzula pilosa* (Hairy Wood-rush) and some *Silene flos-cuculi* (Ragged Robin) and *Galium palustre* (Marsh Bedstraw). Working along the Main Ride yielded the first findings of *Anemone nemorosa* (Wood Anemone), *Betonica officinalis*, *Lysimachia nummularia* (Creeping-Jenny), *Vicia sepium* (Bush Vetch) and *Hypericum tetrapterum* (Square-stalked St John's-wort), which were then seen several times more throughout the day.

Lucy dived into the understorey on the southern side of the ride following a 10 m-precision grid-reference which Jonathan had made in 2023 for *Hylotelephium telephium* (Orpine), a plant noted as Scarce on the Rare Plant Register, known from only 7 monads in the county. It was quickly re-found and the group made their way in to observe what is quite a large colony. Lunch time was declared and the group ate sitting on two large and convenient logs in the most recent coppice plot.



Our lunch spot in the wood [Peter Leonard]



Mercurialis perennis (Dog's Mercury), *Paris quadrifolia* and *Primula elatior* [Lucy Wilson]

We then continued to the Roundabout and made the decision to head north-west up Pond Ride to find *Paris quadrifolia* (Herb-paris), also Scarce in the county, and the first record of *Crepis biennis* (Rough Hawk's-beard) for the wood. Reaching the Great Pond we found *Potamogeton natans* (Broad-leaved Pondweed), *Sparganium erectum* (Upright Bur-reed) and *Lemna gibba* (Fat Duckweed), the latter also being a new record for the wood.

Several of the party needed to head off, so the whole group walked back to the cars along the extraction route and the remaining group walked

back eastwards along the railway line to turn south along Hayley Lane. The first mission was to try to find some *Polypodium interjectum* (Intermediate Polypody), well-recorded by the group studying Hayley on a fallen *Quercus robur* along the track. Although the tree was quickly found, no *Polypodium* could be found on this occasion. We eventually found our first *Ranunculus auricomus* (Goldilocks Buttercup) of the day, which is a shame as one of the group who had left early is currently undertaken the BSBI's Identiplant course and was hoping to find four *Ranunculus* over the course of the day. This was the third, the fourth, *Ranunculus sceleratus* (Celery-leaved Buttercup), was discovered along Triangle Ride at the end of the day.

The final find of interest was a rather pale and chunky-looking *Orchis mascula* (Early-purple Orchid) sitting along with several more typical specimens of the species. It was pondered whether this might be a hybrid (but with what?) and photographs were taken to send to Ian, who had also been in the party departing early. Once reunited with their book collections later in the day Jonathan and Lucy both determined that it was not a hybrid, and that there is quite a large amount of known variation within the species, which this specimen was within.



The pale *Orchis mascula* [Peter Leonard]

The day concluded with a walk back to the cars along the Keeper's Path and Triangle Ride, noting some *Conopodium majus* (Pignut) along the way and finding the two *Pyrus pyraeaster* (Wild Pear) by the exit gate at the northern end of Triangle Ride, though neither were in flower. There were some discussions in identifying hybrid *Priumla elatior* and *P. veris* which resulted in consulting Stace to refresh our memories for further distinguishing features which include green veins on the calyx of *P. elatior* and folds inside the throat of the corolla in *P. veris*. In total 159 taxa were recorded, just under half of the 343 taxa logged on the BSBI's database as previously recorded from the wood.

Tuesday, May 20, Lord's Bridge Observatory CWS

About a dozen people joined Jonathan Shanklin and Lucy Wilson for a visit to the Mullard Radio Astronomy Observatory (MRAO) at Lord's Bridge, just off the A603 north of Harlton. The MRAO is part of Cambridge University and the site has been home to various radio telescopes and other astronomical equipment since the 1950s. Most of the site is a County Wildlife Site because of the expanses of neutral grassland among the observatory equipment with areas of calcareous and damp grassland. It is low-lying, mostly below 20 m above sea level, open and flat – but uneven underfoot – with only short lengths of hedgerows and scattered trees.

Having assembled, a bit after 10 am as some people had to be fetched having gone to the wrong entrance, three monads were surveyed, with Jonathan using the BSBI app to record the species found. After a dull start, the day brightened up and by lunchtime it was warm and sunny. As there has not been much rain this spring, the site was very dry, even the areas which looked as if they had been wet earlier in the year, which meant we did not find many of the species that prefer damper conditions, though *Carex otrubae* (False Fox-sedge) was frequent in some places.

Many of the species found were common species of neutral grassland, with *Anisantha sterilis* (Barren Brome), *Brachypodium sylvaticum* (False Brome), *Carex flacca* (Glaucous Sedge), *Poa angustifolia* and (Narrow-leaved Meadow-grass), *Agrimonia eupatoria* (Agrimony), *Centaurea nigra* s.s. (Common Knapweed), *Jacobaea erucifolia* (Hoary Ragwort), and *Ranunculus acris* (Meadow Buttercup) were also frequent.

We did not find *Ranunculus arvensis* (Corn Buttercup) recorded by Peter Sell in 1967 or any of the more unusual arable plants though there were small amounts of *Convolvulus arvensis* (Field Bindweed) and *Valerianella locusta* (Corns salad). Nor did we find *Orchis morio* (Green-winged Orchid), last recorded in 1997. It should have been visible if present though, so is perhaps lost. Overall there are more losses for this plant than new sites. We did find a few plants of *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* (Common Spotted-orchid) and towards the end of the day, a cluster of *Himantoglossum hircinum* (Lizard Orchid) leaves, which we duly marked with sticks to avoid it being mown. *Himantoglossum hircinum* has now been found in 26 monads in the county, so is no longer rare.

Of plants on the Register of Plants of Conservation Concern (RPCC) we refound *Cirsium acaule* (Dwarf Thistle), *Knautia arvensis* (Field Scabious), *Lithospermum officinale* (Common Gromwell), *Plantago media* (Hoary Plantain), *Stellaria pallida* (Lesser Chickweed), *Torilis nodosa* (Knotted Hedge Parsley), and *Verbascum virgatum* (Twiggy Mullein) most of which had also been recorded in 2012. About a third (55) of the species found are on the county list of axiophytes.

The surprise of the day, near one of the radio telescope dishes, were many scattered patches of *Veronica officinalis* (Heath Speedwell). This is usually a plant of sandy soils and we suspect it will have been introduced when the equipment was installed. It was new for TL35.

In total we made 302 records of 173 taxa including subspecies and hybrids. There were approximately 43 new tetrad



Veronica officinalis [Lucy Wilson]

records, though 8 of these were planted trees or shrubs, so don't really count. In addition, those present refamiliarised themselves with the grasses and some of the less common plants, and enjoyed surveying an area most had never visited.

Tuesday, June 17, Disused Railway (Bartlow) CWS

After a cooler beginning to June summer felt like it had finally arrived and the group spent the day in the sunshine exploring a disused section of the Stour Valley Railway which once connected Shelford to Haverhill carrying passengers and freight until struck by the Beeching Axe in 1967. Most of the day was spent within the boundary of the Shelford – Haverhill Disused Railway (Bartlow) County Wildlife Site, one of four sections of this railway line selected as County Wildlife Sites on account of the calcareous grassland flora they support. While this site lies within the current administrative county of Cambridgeshire, the line with Essex being drawn at the toe of the southern slope of the railway line, the vice-county boundary predates the railway following the River Granta instead. Thus, the morning was spent in vc 29, but most of the afternoon in vc 19 (North Essex). It was unfortunate that the railway line meandered along a northing, meaning that the group kept jumping between different monads, causing Jonathan many headaches whilst using the BSBI's recording app which is limited by the precision of the GPS position provided by the phone.

The morning started near Westloe Farm with a west-facing slope rich with *Astragalus glycyphyllos* (Wild Liquorice), a scattering of *Anacamptis pyramidalis* (Pyramidal Orchid) just starting to flower, *Centaurea scabiosa* (Greater Knapweed), *Clinopodium vulgare* (Wild Basil) and *Cirsium eriophorum* (Woolly Thistle), among others. Nick Millar quickly found *Pseudoprotapion astragalii* a Nationally Scarce weevil which relies on *Astragalus glycyphyllos* as its food plant, the larvae feeding on the seed pods and the adults on the leaves. The host plant is restricted to calcareous



Orobanche elatior [Lucy Wilson]

soils and is declining in England and listed as Vulnerable on the Cambridgeshire RPCC. Discussions were held about a *Hypericum* which had leaves suggestive of *H. x desetangii* (Des Etangs' St. John's-wort), the hybrid between *Hypericum perforatum* (Perforate St. John's-wort) and *Hypericum maculatum* (Imperforate St. John's-wort). The flowers however were very much those of *H. perforatum* although we later located some more which showed some introgression, but all were recorded as *H. perforatum* sensu Stace.

Unfortunately, thick scrub covered the old railway line further east of this slope, and so the group headed westwards and quickly discovered the likely culprit of the mystery plant referred to by the owner as a "strange, big, orchid-like plant" –

Orobanche elatior (Knapweed Broomrape). Several spikes were found, some in full glorious flower, which as a parasitic and primarily self-

pollinating plant is not very colourful as there is no chlorophyll nor much need to attract insects.



Our lunch spot on the railway. [Peter Leonard]

At a slow and steady pace, the group managed to travel about 400 m along the line until breaking for lunch under the shade of a *Betula pendula* (Silver Birch) and *Carpinus betulus* (Hornbeam). Fully refreshed, we continued westwards where the railway line became progressively more shaded by woodland along the southern edge of Bartlow Park. On approach to the village of Bartlow, there is a break in the official County Wildlife Site boundary where the railway line is instead used as a compost and work area for Bartlow Park and the decision was taken to head back to the cars and relocate them to

the western section of the site to the west of Bartlow village.

As we pulled off the road into the designated parking area Peter Jones exclaimed from the back of one of the cars that he could see some *Sambucus ebulus* (Dwarf Elder) to which the immediate reaction was that was very unlikely! But he was correct and we stepped out of the cars to find quite a patch of it, just south of the railway line. Though we were actually in North Essex, this is another plant listed on the Cambridgeshire RPCC (as Rare and Endangered). The Essex Flora (1974) reports that it was plentiful on both sides of the railway bank in the 1960s, and that Camden's Britannica reports it being in the general area in 1753. However, our sighting was the first record since 1991.



Admiring the *Sambucus ebulus* [Lucy Wilson]

The western section of the railway line started off under the shade of a woodland, but soon opened up. While fairly similar to the eastern part of the railway, a further 24 taxa were added to the total, the most notable being *Linum catharticum* (Fairy Flax), *Plantago media* (Hoary Plantain) and *Scrophularia nodosa* (Common Figwort). In all 171 vascular plant taxa were recorded throughout the day, of which seven are listed on the Cambridgeshire RPCC as of local conservation concern and 19 as Cambridgeshire axiophytes (though some were found only in North Essex, but there isn't a published Rare Plant Register or axiophyte list for vc 19).

Saturday, June 28, Dungate Farm

A group of eight botanists met up in the farm yard of Dungate Farm, which Richard Pearce had kindly given us permission to explore by walking along the farm tracks. It promised to be a hot day, so sunblock was applied and water bottles packed in rucksacks. Once again the BSBI recording app was used for recording, though the screen can be difficult to see in bright sunshine.

As usual we started with the farm yard and its environs and soon had a list of 50 species. Willowherbs were a first point of discussion, particularly trying to disentangle *Epilobium ciliatum* (American Willowherb), *E. obscurum* (Short-fruited Willowherb) and *E. tetragonum* (Square-stalked Willowherb). The first of these should have patent glandular hairs on the stem, but maybe only on the upper part of the stem. The other two should be distinguishable by having appressed hairs on the stem, with the first having glandular hairs on the sepals and the second having the hairs appressed. Most of what we found during the day was *E. tetragonum*, but the yard also had some plants with seemingly patent hairs, but was the glandular substance disappearing in the heat? To find out more we may have to wait for the long promised BSBI Handbook.

Moving along the track we came to arable margins and started to find more interesting plants, particularly on the headlands. The first of these was *Anthemis cotula* (Stinking Chamomile), distinguished by its smell, but also by the presence of fine scales in the upper part of the receptacle. This proved to be quite widespread on the farm. Next was a field corner of a beet field where we found *Aethusa cynapium* (Fool's Parsley), *Descurainia sophia* (Flixweed) and *Fumaria officinalis* subsp. *officinalis* (Common Fumitory). The last has more than twenty flowers in the raceme. *Viola arvensis* (Field Pansy) was quite common on the track margin, with a few flowers having violet upper petals indicating some influence from *Viola tricolor* (Wild Pansy). A little further on we found the white flowered *Fumaria parviflora* (Fine-leaved Fumitory) along with *F. officinalis* subsp. *wirtgenii* (Common Fumitory). This sub-species has fewer than 20 flowers in the raceme.

Another field corner had a few plants of *Chenopodium hybridum* (Maple-leaved Goosefoot) along with a somewhat puzzling *Anisantha* (Brome). This was clearly different to the familiar *Anisantha sterilis* (Barren Brome), having a much more compact flower head, but the spikelets weren't much longer than usual. In the field we decided *A. rigida* (Ripgut Brome) was a possibility as the panicle was fairly dense. Back home however, detailed examination showed that the callus scar was rounded, so that despite being at the lower end of the described range it had to be *A. diandra* (Great Brome). Reading up in the various floras each had slightly different

boundaries as to where to split the two species. Maybe there is a cryptic species, or perhaps even a hybrid that is confusing the situation.

We decided that exploration of a chalk scree below a wood that we could see from the track might be interesting, but to get there we had to ascend a hill, which required an ascent of 25 metres, unusually steep for Cambridgeshire. We arrived near the top at lunch time, so made use of the shade of the trees to have a pleasant lunch spot. Looking across the expanse of former downland we could see a series of trucks driving up to a feature, a group of people got out and then formed a line along a field.



The track up the hill with chalk scree below the wood [Lucy Wilson]

Where they looking for plants? The fusilades started to ring out, and it became obvious that it was a party of shooters, probably shooting at clays.

Lunch over, we moved to look at the chalk, with a fairly quick cry of “What’s this?”. It was a single plant of *Valerianella dentata* (Narrow-fruited Cornsalad), a rare species in the county, with only five previous monads in the last 20 years. This was the first time it had been recorded north of the Fleam Dyke. As we moved along the field edge we found other plants along the margin over at least 50 m. With it was some *Fumaria densiflora* (Dense-flowered Fumitory) and *F. officinalis* and *F. parviflora* making this an ideal site for an ELM arable margin. We chose to circumnavigate the wood and then return down the hill and around a wheat field. The upslope side of the wood was less interesting, having a grass “conservation margin”, which probably added little conservation value. There was however a patch of *Ononis repens* (Common Restharrow).



Looking back down the track
[Jonathan Shanklin]

Reaching the bottom of the hill we walked along a strip of more disturbed ground where a bund had been created. Here there was quite a lot of *Nepeta cataria* (Cat-mint), along with some untouched clays suggesting that the shooters had not been that accurate. We made the assumption that the windfarm

was in bounds for our excursion, so crossed a gap in the hedge onto the access track. Part of the windfarm installation had clearly required some chalk grassland restoration along a ditch and we found a good range of the species that had been recorded by David Broughton between 2012 and 2017. David’s work gives an interesting baseline to show up the new species that have come in. These included *Blackstonia perfoliata* (Yellow-wort), *Centaureum erythraea* (Common Centaury) and *Ophrys apifera* (Bee Orchid) as nice additions, *Rhamnus cathartica* (Buckthorn), *Salix cinerea* (Grey Willow) as shrubs, *Clematis vitalba* (Traveller’s-joy), *Schedonorus arundinaceus* (Tall Fescue) and *Solidago canadensis* (Canadian Goldenrod) as less welcome additions and *Persicaria maculosa* (Redshank) as an oddity.

Leaving the windfarm area we progressed a little more rapidly, though wanted to try and reach 100 species as this was one of the under-recorded monads that needed attention. The windfarm chalk grassland had certainly boosted the total and a plantation woodland area added more, including the only sedge of the day, which somewhat surprisingly was *Carex sylvatica* (Wood-sedge) on a grassy track. An arable corner added another half dozen and a final addition was *Hordeum secalinum* (Meadow Barley) on the track, which took us to 98.

We re-entered a monad that we had briefly visited whilst circum-navigating the wood, so added more species here. One field margin had a little Wild-oat, and whilst most was *Avena fatua*, but one plant was clearly *A. sterilis* (Wild Winter-oat). Nearby was a small patch of *Roemeria hispida* (Rough Poppy). Monica noted that there was some ermine moth in the hedge and Jonathan pointed out that it was on *Euonymus europaeus* (Spindle). Charlotte spotted some *Clinopodium vulgare* (Wild Basil) in the hedge, strangely the only time we saw it during the day.

Finally we returned to the monad where we had started. Was the plant on the track *Sherardia arvensis* (Field Madder) or *Galium album* (Hedge Bedstraw) that we

had previously recorded. Jonathan was over-ruled and so nothing was added, but a little further down the track was indisputable *Sherardia* in flower. We now rejoined the track on which we had started in the morning and didn't add anything until back in the yard when dead plant id produced *Erophila verna* sens. lat. (Common Whitlowgrass).

In total we made 408 records of 221 species and added 41 species to the tetrad list. This now stands at 335 taxon names or around 283 species depending on how you do the counting. We found a sufficient number of "countable" arable species to reach a Plantlife score of 66, which makes the arable margins of the farm possibly of national importance. The most exciting was definitely the bare chalk below the hillside plantation and its *Valerianella dentata*.

Tuesday, July 8, Middle Moor CWS

We visited the sedge rich Middle Moor in 2013 and thought that a visit later in the year would be worthwhile. What we hadn't bargained for was the drought and heat of the year, which had removed any trace of the promised marshy ground. We did have a fine day after some overnight rain, however there was little trace of dampness on the ground. We were met at the site by Ashley Arbon, who had arranged permission from Richard Pearce for us to visit the site. He explained a little about the geology of the site noting that it was a relict glacial landscape and this gave rise to several of the less common species in the area.



Looking for *Carex binervis* at the side of the grass runway [Lucy Wilson]

After spending a little time on the commonplace species of the car park, to give late comers a chance to find us, we set off around a series of relatively recently constructed ponds, with one having some *Hippuris vulgaris* (Mare's-tail) and another *Ceratophyllum demersum* (Rigid Hornwort). The ponds would usually have damp ground around them and we found the evidence of normal dampness in the form of a little scattered *Centaureum pulchellum* (Lesser Centaury) with the contrasting paler flowers of *Centaureum erythraea* (Common Centaury) nearby. The *Centaureum pulchellum* was a LORE species, a BSBI Committee for England project to find LOst Rarities in England not seen in a hectad since 2000, in our case focussing on RPCC species. In this case it was last seen near Fowlmere in 1995. Not far away Phil Ricketts found a patch of *Lysimachia tenella* (Bog Pimpernel), near where we had found it in 2013.

A slightly unexpected find made by Nick Jardine was *Linum catharticum* (Fairy Flax) growing under some trees. Ashley explained that the ponds had been excavated down to the Zig Zag Chalk formation and so the bank material was very chalky. In nearby ponds were *Potamogeton lucens* (Shining Pondweed) and *Potamogeton natans* (Broad-leaved Pondweed), the former surprisingly an addition to the site list and a species that hasn't been seen in the hectad since 1984, so another LORE species. On the ditch bank defining the boundary of the CWS we found some more chalk indicator species such as *Inula conyzae* (Ploughman's-spikenard) and *Reseda lutea* (Wild Mignonette). Ashley said that we wouldn't be able reach the northernmost corner from here, so instead we returned towards our starting

point, with a view to finding a spot for lunch. On the way we were delayed by a more weedy patch of ground where we found *Sherardia arvensis* (Field Madder) and smelled the leaves of a conifer to identify it as *Thuja plicata* (Western Red-cedar).

After a rather leisurely lunch Ashley took us to a rather overgrown track which led to the northern point and where *Carex nigra* (Common Sedge) seen in 1991. Ashley had to leave us, but before doing so arranged with his brother to meet us at about 4 *p.m.* at their farm. We failed to find the sedge and the rather shaded habitat dominated by *C. pendula* (Pendulous Sedge) seemed unsuitable for it. We did however add a few species from the banks of the main drain of the site. At the top we crossed a narrow bridge onto the grass airfield area, which had a mown strip with wide grassed margins. Here we found an interesting sedge, which from the first specimen appeared to be *C. distans* (Distant Sedge), but was it? Close examination showed that it had a fimbriate ligule, so was *C. binervis* (Green-ribbed Sedge), although at this stage of the season was not showing its characteristic colours. On the other side of the strip Jonathan Shanklin found the two sedges growing adjacent to each other and called everyone over to compare them. The habit of the two was different with the *C. binervis* quite tufted, whilst the *C. distans* was more spread out. Later reading of the BSBI Sedge Handbook entry for *C. distans* noted a throw-away line “Also in inland wet meadows and then less tufted”, so it was showing the expected behaviour. At this point, even though the position was logged, the BSBI recording app appears to have lost its synch to the central server and records were lost for half an hour or so. It was clear however that the runway area would make a valuable addition to the CWS.

By now it had gone 3 *p.m.*, so the group was shepherded back towards the cars. On the way we found another patch of disturbed ground where we added another dozen species, including *Chenopodium hybridum* (Maple-leaved Goosefoot) and also *Senecio vulgaris* (Groundsel), which was last recorded from the site in 1980! Lucy Wilson then navigated us to a few of the positions that had 8-figure grid references from 2013. We duly found another patch of *Lysimachia tenella*, but failed to spot *Carex lepidocarpa* (Long-stalked Yellow-sedge), not surprisingly given the drought and the fact that most of the bank area was close mown. However close inspection at its grid reference did reveal leaves of *Veronica officinalis* (Heath Speedwell) in a slightly different position to the previous record.



Bromus interruptus [Lucy Wilson]

We eventually got back to the cars and made it to Ashley’s farm on the dot! Jonathan Arbon then showed us a few highlights such as *Bunias orientalis* (Warty-cabbage) and *Hyoscyamus niger* (Henbane) though we could only see dead plants of the latter. He then took us to the area where *Bromus interruptus* (Interrupted Brome) had been introduced, but we failed to spot any. Fortunately, at this point Ashley returned and said we had been looking in the wrong place. Sure enough we had walked right past it! Sadly the *Lolium temulentum* (Darnel) had failed in the drought so we couldn’t add that to our list. We debated whether we had time to visit the pingos at

Stanmoor Hall, which we had permission to visit. A smaller group decided we did.

This area is part of the Whittlesford – Thriplow Hummocky Fields SSSI, which is designated for the presence of *Lythrum hyssopifolia* (Grass-poly) and *Chirocephalus diaphanus* (Fairy Shrimp) in the pingos. Overall the soil is quite light and on the way to the pingos we saw a good amount of *Silene noctiflora* (Night-flowering Catchfly) and a small amount of both species of *Kickxia* (Fluellen). The first pingo proved rather disappointing, but a bare area in the second had a good quantity of the *Lythrum*, albeit surrounded by *Juncus articulatus* (Jointed Rush). We also found some of the other species mentioned in the SSSI citation: *Juncus bufonius* (Toad Rush), *Persicaria maculosa* (Redshank), *Plantago major* subsp. *intermedia* (Greater Plantain) and *Polygonum aviculare* (Knotgrass), but did not notice *Persicaria mitis* (Tasteless Water-pepper), which in fact has not been recorded in the area since 1958.



Lythrum hyssopifolia [Lucy Wilson]

Overall we re-found around 30 species from Middle Moor CWS that hadn't been recorded since 2000 and added 39 more to the site list. Equally there could be over 50 species that haven't been seen this century. As with many locations, the complexity of site names clouds the picture, so that in 2013 "Middle Moor" was included as part of the location name for the airfield, whilst on this occasion it was referred to as West Side Farm. We recorded at least 220 species (some are missing thanks to the app failure) of which 30 are listed in the RPCC. As promised Middle Moor was sedge rich, with 10 different species noted.

Saturday, July 19, Wicken Fen vision area

For what was forecast to be a rather rainy day - as per tradition on the first day of the school holidays - the day started well with only one brief shower before lunchtime.



Botanising in the rain [Lucy Wilson]

However not long after lunchtime the forecast heavy rain eventually came and the small group of three who had dared to brave the elements admitted defeat and decided to head home.

Even with a group of three progress was relatively slow with only two monads recorded, but as both of these monads had only three previously recorded taxa each it wasn't difficult to find new ones. 135 were added to TL5366 and 87 to TL5367, amounting to

22 new taxa for the tetrad (TL561). One missing species was *Populus nigra* subsp. *betulifolia* (Black Poplar) which had been recorded by Graham Easy in 1994 and although there were several *Populus deltoides* x *nigra* (Hybrid Black Poplar) in the vicinity, a large stump of a tree was found where the 1994 specimen was recorded and so perhaps was the very same one, but was impossible to determine.

Nick M was as usual armed with a sweep net and got quite excited by a patch of *Azolla filiculoides* (Water Fern) in a ditch spotted by the keen-eyed Lucy from the banktop, but the associated weevil was not present. *Azolla* can be problematic, but only a small patch was found. Its presence was somewhat surprising as it is usually found in calcareous waters, as was the relatively frequent occurrence of *Reseda lutea* (Wild Mignonette) also usually associated with calcareous soils. The area is underlain by the Gault Clay and generally quite peaty, but the geological map suggests there is a lens of Quaternary River Terrace deposits over quite a large part of the area visited, presumably with a relatively high calcareous content brought in from the sediments further west.

Patches of *Spirodela polyrhiza* (Greater Duckweed) were found in the next ditch among a thick carpet of *Lemna gibba* (Fat Duckweed). The former is again usually a species of more alkaline conditions, the density of the latter suggests the water is quite nutrient enriched. Stands of *Typha latifolia* (Bulrush), *Phragmites australis* (Common Reed) and *Sparganium erectum* (Branched Bur-reed) lined the ditch, but other aquatics were few. Along the tracks several species of arable land were found including *Chenopodium hybridum* (Maple-leaved Goosefoot), *Descurainia Sophia* (Flixweed), *Kickxia elatine* (Sharp-leaved Fluellen) and several amaranths, variously determined by Jonathan and Lucy as *Amaranthus bouchonii* (Indehiscent Amaranth), *A. retroflexus* (Common Amaranth) and *A. hybridus* (Green Amaranth).

The route took us to a large reservoir with a relatively disappointing list of only three fully aquatic species - *Potamogeton trichoides* (Hairlike Pondweed), *Myriophyllum spicatum* (Spiked Water-milfoil) and *Elodea nuttallii* (Nuttall's Waterweed) – though the first two are currently listed as Vulnerable in the county context. However, the banksides held quite a bit of interest with several specimens of the Nationally Scarce *Torilis arvensis* (Spreading Hedge-parsley), plus *Stachys palustris* (Marsh Woundwort), *Lycopus europaeus* (Gypsywort), *Scrophularia auriculata* (Water Figwort) and *Centaureum erythraea* (Common Centaury).

With a relatively ambitious route planned and the day cut short by the much-needed rainfall there is still plenty of ground to cover and it is hoped that the group will return next summer.



Stachys palustris [Lucy Wilson]

Tuesday, August 12, Waterbeach New Town

After some recent days with rain, mid August saw another heat wave and although the morning started cloudy, the sun broke through and temperatures climbed over 30°C. Waterbeach New Town in being constructed on the site of the former Waterbeach aerodrome and barracks, an area which had several notable plants, particularly *Oenanthe pimpinelloides* (Corky-fruited Water-dropwort) and *Euphrasia nemorosa x confusa* (Eyebright). In the end we didn't find either of these. The Group met in the car park on Gillyflower Lane. No sooner had we started recording than a lady in a fluorescent orange jacket approached, wondering what we were up to. We

explained, but were forbidden to climb any fences, an instruction we interpreted literally and didn't worry too much about going through open gates.

Indeed we took one at the first opportunity in order to get a closer view of a patch of *Polypogon monspeliensis* (Annual Beard-grass). By the side of the track there were several species of fleabane, with the parallel sided inflorescence and glabrous capitula of *Erigeron canadensis* (Canadian Fleabane) contrasting with the open topped *Erigeron floribundus* (Bilbao's Fleabane) and the hairy capitula of *Erigeron sumatrensis* (Guernsey Fleabane). There are various keys for distinguishing between these species and they are not entirely consistent. Perhaps the most useful is [that by Bob Leaney](#), which appeared in BSBI News 135 [2017 April, despite the date in the url].

I had planned a route around the site, but reaching the end of Gillyflower Lane there was a large unmissable notice telling us to go no further, so we had to retrace our steps. In the gardens of some currently vacant properties we spotted a few weeds, including a rather odd willowherb that had some of the features of *Epilobium parviflorum* (Hoary Willowherb), but others of *Epilobium tetragonum* (Square-stalked Willowherb) or *Epilobium ciliatum* (American Willowherb). For the moment it remains un-named.

Leaving the housing for a more open area, we found a winter wet patch of ground which had *Carex flacca* (Glaucous Sedge) and a planted sedge that appeared to be seeding. We didn't get any further at the time, but later found other planted groups one with a flower stem. Careful consideration of the fact that it had "false" stems and that the leaves had a tiny gland close to the sheath suggested that it was *Carex leporina* (Oval Sedge). A speedwell with small blue flowers was closely inspected, but with no fruits it was difficult, eventually being determined as *Veronica polita* (Grey Field-speedwell). We moved on towards a small lake, which had some introduced species, but with water levels low it was possible to get to an emergent zone. *Potamogeton natans* (Broad-leaved Pondweed) was growing in the mud, and the grapnel brought out *Elodea nuttallii* (Nuttall's Waterweed), *Myriophyllum spicatum* (Spiked Water-milfoil), *Potamogeton pusillus* (Lesser Pondweed) and *Zannichellia palustris* (Horned Pondweed).

It was lunchtime, so for a bit of shade we headed for the awning of the café. Opening anything sweet immediately attracted several wasps, but lunch was completed without incident and we were joined by Lucy for the second half of the day. We returned to complete a circumnavigation of the lake, adding a few more species, then headed for the former landing strip, but there was little trace of its former diversity. We contemplated going down one site of a larger lake, but access to the bank looked poor, so we went the other way, which conveniently would lead us to the café again. However first we encountered the most exciting plant of the day *Oxybasis* [*Chenopodium*] *glaucum* (Oak-leaved Goosefoot). Most people just walked past, but Jonathan noticed the glaucous colour of the somewhat wilted leaves. To be



The group determining and admiring the Oak-leaved Goosefoot [Peter Leonard]

certain we checked the vegetative key, which mentioned the red striped stem, which the plant showed beautifully.

An ice-cream at the café was very refreshing and we then continued down the lake edge, which in places was purple with *Odontites vernus* (Red Bartsia). At the end Lucy accidentally picked up a small piece of *Galium parisiense* (Wall Bedstraw), one of the notable plants that we were keeping an eye out for. Given the heat we opted to head back towards the cars, but it was leisurely progress.

We had thought it unlikely that we would see any gillyflowers, however a clump of a planted stock was perhaps intended to be one. As it was blatantly planted and not obviously setting seed it wasn't counted. Another small lake gave us an additional pondweed: *Potamogeton lucens* (Shining Pondweed), along with several species introduced in a wildflower mix. A bit further on, Nick found a patch of *Dianthus barbatus* (Sweet-William), growing in several colour forms, and probably established. This could be another gillyflower. A final diversion was made when Chris pointed out a round leaf floating in the water on an arm of a SuDS feature. Jonathan headed off towards a larger patch and reported *Nymphoides peltata* (Fringed Water-lily).



The Oak-leaved Goosefoot [Peter Leonard]

With records going straight onto the BSBI database it has become fairly easy to check what was recorded. It is also quite easy to add records of plants forgotten at the time, or updating the grid reference when it wasn't recorded by the app. The system says we made 325 records, of which 31 were of RPCC species and 43 were new for the tetrad. However we were in a largely artificial site that had more introductions than was necessary. Whilst there is space for nature in the New Town, it was fairly obvious that little attention had been given to what was there prior to the development.

Tuesday, August 19, Chippenham Fen NNR

The Norfolk Flora Group ventured into vc 29 for some botanical tourism, inviting the Cambridgeshire Flora Group to join them. In total there were just over 20 participants for the day, about a third being regulars to the CFG. The main focus of the day was a visit to Chippenham Fen (NNR, SSSI, SAC and Ramsar!), though this finished at about 3 pm and then the two county groups went their own ways, with the Cambridgeshire group returning home and the Norfolk group with a further planned stop at Santon Downham to visit *Scleranthus perennis* (Perennial Knawel) and *Filago lutescens* (Red-tipped Cudweed) on their journey home. The NFG had such a good time at the second site that they didn't get to the pub until 7 pm.

With the Norfolk group being out-of-county the focus was very much on finding certain taxa of interest, rather than a detailed recording visit, and progress around the site was rapid. Such a large group of botanists inevitably splintered into sub-groups which reformed and split away again and again, and with the ease of recording via the BSBI app several people took on the job of recording the finds. The net result was that while a total of 180 taxa were recorded (43 listed on the Rare Plant Register), there were 427 individual records!

Highlights of the day included three site specialities, *Selinum carvifolia* (Cambridge Milk-parsley), the fen being the only remaining place in which it occurs natively in the UK, *Sparganium natans* (Least Bur-reed), also a local specialty as this is the only known extant site for it in Cambridgeshire, though it is common much further north in the UK and *x Beruladium procurrens*. The latter is an inter-generic hybrid between *Berula erecta* (Lesser Water-parsnip) and *Helosciadium nodiflorum* (Fool's Water-cress), first discovered by in 1979 by Max Walters and originally thought to be a hybrid between *Helosciadium repens* (Creeping Marshwort) and *H. nodiflorum*. Molecular analysis initiated by Alan Leslie in 2014 confirmed it to be the inter-generic hybrid.



Cladium mariscus (Great Fen-sedge) [Sharon Yardy]

Another hybrid which is quite local to the site (also occurring at Wicken Fen, but otherwise mostly known from Wales, Cumbria, Northern Ireland and Scotland) is *Carex x fulva*, that between *Carex hostiana* (Tawny Sedge) and *C. lepidocarpa* (Long-stalked Yellow-sedge) which can be identified, among other traits, by the continuation of the ligule to form a flap on the opposite side to the leaf, a feature of *C. lepidocarpa*, and brown glumes more characteristic of *hostiana*. One of the NFG found an unusual-looking *C. lepidocarpa* close to the *x Beruladium*, which Alex Prendergast later determined to be *C. lepidocarpa* subsp. *jemtlandica*; this was then confirmed by the referee to be the first known record from Great Britain!

Salix myrsinifolia (Dark-leaved Willow) is another plant usually found in the north but with a population at Chippenham Fen, and while none of the pure form was identified on the day, its hybrid with *Salix cinerea* (Grey Willow) was, known as *Salix x puberula*. Other finds included *Trifolium fragiferum* (Strawberry Clover), *Triglochin palustris* (Marsh Arrowgass), a huge mass of *Chara hispida* (Bristly Stonewort), *Calamagrostis canescens* (Purple Wood-reed), *Lonicera caprifolium* (Perfoliate Honeysuckle) and *Lysimachia tenella* (Bog Pimpernel), which was in abundance putting the small amount found earlier in the season at Middle Moor to shame.

Saturday, August 30, RSPB Ouse Fen

The previous few days had seen a return of wet weather, but the day dawned fine, though clouds gradually built up. A group of 14 botanists met in the discreetly hidden car park of RSPB Ouse Fen. We started by recording some of the clearly introduced species around the car park and then set off around the reserve. Jonathan suggested that we should aim to return between four and five pm as he expected rain by 16:30.

We moved on a little to look at a wide ditch, which had a selection of aquatic species for us to identify. There was the *Carex pseudocyperus* (Cyperus Sedge), which has something of a stronghold in this area, though we added it to several monads. In and near the water was *Oenanthe aquatica* (Fine-leaved Water-dropwort), which turned out to be widespread across the site. At the margin we found an *Alopecurus geniculatus* (Marsh Foxtail) going to seed, but elsewhere we found *Alopecurus aequalis* (Orange Foxtail) in flower. There was a little *Elodea canadensis*

(Canadian Waterweed), which although an alien species is on the RPCC because of its decline. It was last seen in this monad in 1962.

We took a clockwise course around the site, which is dominated by beds of



The group in one of the marginal zones
[Peter Leonard]

Phragmites australis (Common Reed), but there were areas that were winter wet and in one of these we found a sward of *Polypogon fugax* (Asian Minor Bluegrass) mixed with patches of *Polypogon monspeliensis* (Annual Beard-grass) and a little *Polypogon viridis* (Water Bent). How the first of these got to Cambridgeshire can only be guessed, but possibly by birds that had visited the south-west. It was first recorded near Trowbridge in 2006, then found at Chippenham (Wiltshire) in 2024. Keep an eye out for it as it may spread rapidly.

Nearby seemed a reasonable spot for lunch, though we were only in the second monad. Continuing on, we decided we could reasonably walk into a conservation area, which was boarded by a wide ditch with staggered banks. Dropping down to the water's edge we found several pondweeds including *Potamogeton pusillus* (Lesser Pondweed), *Stuckenia pectinata* (Fennel Pondweed) and *Zannichellia palustris* (Horned Pondweed). Surprisingly a stream seemed to feed into the ditch, perhaps assisted by pumps, and on its bank we found a much larger *Polypogon fugax* and rosettes of *Barbarea vulgaris* (Winter-cress) and *Cardamine pratensis* (Cuckooflower). We climbed back to the track and returned along it, finding a patch of *Nepeta cataria* (Cat-mint) an unusual fenland plant. On the track there were a few knotgrasses. One was *Polygonum arenastrum* (Equal-leaved Knotgrass) which was scattered across the site, often in large mats. After some debate the other was determined as *Polygonum rurivagum* (Cornfield Knotgrass).



The group on the bank of the wide ditch
[Peter Leonard]

We rejoined the public track and continued into the next monad. Here we found another species to debate: an *Erigeron* (fleabane) with purple tipped ligules and faint streaks of purple in the bracts. In the end we concluded that it was just *Erigeron sumatrensis* (Guernsey Fleabane) rather than *Erigeron bonariensis* (Argentine Fleabane), as the branches were short and the bracts were not purple tipped. Fleabanes were scattered about and by the end of the day we had found five species (the three former *Conyzae*, *Erigeron acris* (Blue Fleabane) and *Pulicaria dysenterica* (Common Fleabane)). Another winter wet area gave us a different selection of species, including *Nasturtium microphyllum* (Narrow-fruited Water-cress) [long pods with a single row of seeds] and some terrestrial *Hippuris vulgaris* (Mare's-tail).

Former gravel pits often have abundant *Buddleja davidii* (Butterfly-bush), but today we only found one plant

With the cars in sight, Oli Glenister spotted a Pampas Grass over-topping a reed bed. Could we get to it to determine the species? Fortunately the answer was yes, though it involved fighting through the reed bed to find the leaves, which were taller than the adventurous trio, hence *Cortaderia selloana* (Pampas-grass). Reaching the car park, a few decided on a quick walk round of the north side of the car park. Just beyond we found another ditch, which had recently been slubbed out, leaving strands of *Potamogeton lucens* (Shining Pondweed) on the bank. Almost on cue, the first spots of rain began to fall at 16:30, so it was quickly into the cars and back home. During the day we had recorded 179 taxon entities, which included 39 new tetrad records.

Saturday, September 27, Fenland Drains

For the final excursion of the season, the group headed into the Fenland District to visit some of the drains within the catchment of the Curf and Wimblington Combined



Lucy going fishing
[Peter Leonard]

IDB, managed by the Middle Level Commissioners. Thirteen members of the group assembled at a disused barn and headed out to explore, a number considered unlucky by some, and perhaps particularly by the one member of the group who ended slipping into the water of one of the larger drains! Luckily the warmth of the late September sun meant that they did not get too cold.

The route took the group past a variety of drains, some small and dry with little interest, the largest several metres in width, with a water depth of up to 1 m, steep banks and a freeboard of about 2 m. The latter are maintained by

the Middle Level Commissioners, each at a different stage of the management cycle, designed to keep the drains clear and the water flowing, but also benefitting the aquatic flora. Using a variety of tools (some looking like rather lethal weapons) the aquatic plants were sampled, and while numerous were found, over the course of the day it was noted that the diversity across the area was not high.

Potamogeton natans (Broad-leaved Pondweed), *Myriophyllum verticillatum* (Whorled Water-milfoil), *Sparganium erectum* (Branched Bur-reed), *Stuckenia* [*Potamogeton*] *pectinata* (Fennel Pondweed), *Phragmites australis* (Common Reed), *Alisma plantago-aquatica* (Water-plantain) and *Sagittaria sagittifolia* (Arrowhead) were the main components within the water, but over 30 taxa associated with water or banksides were recorded, 15 of which are either listed on the local Register of Plants of Conservation Concern (RPCC), or regarded as axiophytes. Of these, *Chara hispida* (Bristly Stonewort), *Ranunculus circinatus* (Fan-leaved Water-crowfoot), *Hippuris vulgaris* (Mare's-tail), *Torilis arvensis* (Spreading Hedge-parsley) and *Thalictrum flavum* (Common Meadow-rue) are regarded as Vulnerable on the county RPCC and both *Myriophyllum verticillatum* and *Torilis arvensis* are Red Listed at a national level. The latter is not particularly a plant of ditches, but is often found in

profusion in this habitat within Cambridgeshire due to soil disturbance on the steep banks and shelter from agricultural sprays.

Between the drains the land is intensively managed as arable fields, which also held some botanical interest. At the start of the day, the group took some time discussing an array of *Solanum* (Nightshade) in the corner of one field, which turned out to be a mixture of *S. nigrum* subsp. *nigrum* (Black Nightshade) and *S. nitidibaccatum* (Green Nightshade), but it took some time to rule out *S. schultesii* (Hairy Black Nightshade) which, like *S. nitidibaccatum*



has glandular hairs, and the fruits are green when unripe. However, in *S. nitidibaccatum* the sepals enlarge when in fruit, and this was clearly the case. Aply, these discussions were taking place in the corner of a field of *Solanum tuberosum* (Potato)!

Above: Discussing *Solanum* [Lucy Wilson]
Below left: *S. nigrum* subsp. *nigrum*
Below right: *S. nitidibaccatum* [Peter Leonard]

A *Mentha* (Mint) in a vegetative state provoked further discussion. Was it *Mentha arvensis* (Corn Mint), Near Threatened in England and with only 4 known records from a 5 km radius? Or



perhaps *Mentha aquatica* (Water Mint) which had escaped from the nearby drain? Poland provides one distinction based on smell – ‘lemon-minty’ (*Mentha aquatica*) or ‘fruity, sometimes fetid’ (*Mentha arvensis*), though to most it didn’t appear to fit either of those rather subjective descriptions. Considering other evidence, the group settled on *M. arvensis*, which Flora Incognita agreed with, identifying it as such with 98% ‘certainty’. Not long afterwards some *M. aquatica* was found, and some of the group were satisfied that the two plants do indeed have quite distinctive smells.

For what is often regarded as a rather desolate landscape in terms of biodiversity, the group managed to find over 140 taxa, with the two most explored monads of the day yielding 100 taxa each.

Thursday, November 20, Cambridge University Herbarium

Twelve members of the Flora Group came out of winter hibernation for a short day at the Cambridge University Herbarium (CGE). Meeting on a chilly but dry Thursday morning the group were greeted by Juliet Anderson and a surprise appearance of Chris Preston and descended into the bowels of the Sainsbury Laboratory where the herbarium is currently situated. Juliet and Chris had put together several tables of specimens, mostly from Cambridgeshire but with others such as some of Darwin's fungi from South America. Items ranged from the personal herbarium of John Martyn from the 18th century, to Alan Leslie's Type specimen of x *Beruladium procurrans* (hybrid of *Berula erecta* (Lesser Water-parsnip) and *Helosciadium nodiflorum* (Fool's-water-cress)) from 2014. A few homemade boxes containing some of Oliver Rackham's *Ulmus* (Elm) from Cambridgeshire were shown plus several of John Henslow's beautifully laid out sheets including *Moenchia erecta* (Upright Chickweed) from Gamlingay Heath and *Liparis loeselii* (Fen Orchid) from Burwell Fen. The

herbarium is proud to have the specimens collected as the first naturalised examples of *Senecio squalidus* (Oxford Ragwort) from both Oxford (1792) and Cambridge (1832), the former older than that lodged in the herbaria of its namesake. Juliet also showed us one of her favourite items, a book containing some beautifully pressed seaweeds from the 1850s of Devon which retain their colour amazingly well.

Juliet provided a detailed explanation about what the herbarium collection holds, and at over one million specimens it is one of the largest herbaria in the UK and the collection is particularly rich in type specimens, of which there are about fifty thousand. The vascular plants are broadly divided by geographical area and include 300,000 from Britain and Ireland (most of which are organised according to Sell and Murrell's taxonomy) and 250,000 from Europe (arranged to the taxonomy of *Flora Europaea*). Those from the wider world are somewhat anachronistically arranged corresponding to Bentham and Hooker's *Genera Plantarum* from the late 19th century. A few collections are kept separately, such as Darwin's, of which **CGE** has about three-quarters of its total of 1300, the rest mostly at Kew. John Henslow, Charles Babington, Charles Bunbury, Peter Sell and Oliver Rackham are among the main contributors to the collection, and currently only Alan Leslie and Chris Preston regularly submit specimens.

Discussions ensued about the uses of the collection, how the existence of some specimens has helped verify records decades or centuries after they were found, and how



Chris Preston showing us some local herbarium sheets [Jonathan Shanklin]

are we to know what future researchers might find useful for us to add. Questions were raised about whether the collection could be digitised, including photographs and links to associated references. Juliet informed us that this process has started, with about 60,000 specimens already photographed, but there isn't yet an underlying database. Lucy, who in the past was responsible for the creation of the British Antarctic Survey's type and figured fossil database agreed that this is a prolonged process, not only of the construction of the database itself and populating it with images and other data, but finding many of the specimens and their associated references also took a lot of effort.

Most of the group continued to The Alma for an indoor lunch and further discussion. Six of the party then ventured into the Botanic Garden to make the most of the short afternoon with a focus on conifer trees and early land plants. Most of the latter were within the glasshouses and included representatives of all three extant genera of gnetophyte (*Ephedra viridis* (Green Ephedra), *Welwitschia mirabilis* (Welwitschia) and *Gnetum gnemon* (Belinjau)), three quite different lycopods (*Isoetes lacustris* (Quillwort), *Selaginella canaliculata* (Spike Moss) and *Huperzia* spp, (Club Moss)), *Dioon edule* (Cycad), *Dicksonia antarctica* (Tree Fern) and a hornwort, *Phaeoceros laevis* (Smooth Hornwort), which despite being in its own box was somewhat swamped by a liverwort *Riccardia*. Outside along the Main Walk, the group took time to determine the difference between the three main cedars seen in the UK (*Cedrus atlantica* (Atlas Cedar), *Cedrus deodara* (Deodar Cedar) and *Cedrus libani* (Cedar-of-Lebanon)) which usually have the tips of their branches ascending, descending or level, respectively, and discussed Henslow's collection of *Pinus nigra* (Black Pine) subspecies. With the help of two adjacent specimens, Jonathan demonstrated the difference between *Larix decidua* (European Larch) and *Larix kaempferi* (Japanese Larch).

All agreed it was an excellent day out and good to do something a little different. As a follow up to this we hope to be able to organise another visit to explore how to collect and prepare specimens for accession into the herbarium collection.

Excursions for 2026

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. 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 normally 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 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 some meetings are not suitable for all participants.** Please do read the [BSBI advice to participants on field meetings](#) and consider whether your attendance will adversely affect how much ground can be covered. Cambridgeshire meetings are usually “green” (ie easy going) or “amber” (some more rapid walking required or over rough ground). Some meetings have been deliberately arranged to allow wide participation. 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.



The Flora Group on the Bartlow railway [Lucy Wilson]

Tuesday, February 17, 10:00, Cambridge University Herbarium

Following on from our visit last November, this session will aim to teach participants about preparing herbarium specimens. Numbers are limited, so you will need to book with Lucy. We may have a pub lunch and visit the Botanic Garden in the afternoon.

Saturday, March 28, 10:30, Northern churchyards: Green

Continuing our usual start to the main recording year with visits to churchyards and cemeteries, we'll begin at Whittlesey, St Andrew (TL267969), followed by St Mary (TL271970) and the cemetery (TL274973). From there we will head east to Coates (TL305978), then on to Wimblington St Peter (TL416920) and cemetery (TL411919) and finally Doddington cemetery (TL395908).

Saturday, April 18, 10:00, woodland

We plan to hold our usual spring woodland excursion. Details will be sent by email.

Wednesday, May 13, 10:00, Great Wilbraham Temple: Green

The Group last visited Wilbraham Temple in 2009 and there is a report in the [2010 newsletter](#). There have been changes since then and the owner has created large areas of species-rich restoration grassland, with some additional species coming in naturally. We will explore the estate and record the range of species present. Meeting details will be sent by email.

Saturday, May 30 and Sunday, May 31, 10:00, Cambridgeshire meadows: Green

This is a main BSBI meeting joint with Huntingdonshire, so you will need to book for it. We will be visiting two meadows each day, with the idea that some members who are only able

to walk for a half day will be able to take part. The vc 31 meadows are likely to be Brampton racecourse and Portholme. For the vc 29 day we will visit a Soham meadow in the morning and part of Newmarket racecourse in the afternoon.

Wednesday, June 17, 10:00, Pampisford Hall

We have permission to visit the Pampisford Hall estate, which hasn't previously been visited by the Flora Group. A visit by the bryologists in 2024 showed much of interest and we hope to find relict grassland, arable and woodland species that were last seen in a summer visit in 1997. Meeting details will be sent by email.

Saturday, July 11, 10:00, Lord's Grounds Farm

We hope that the weather will be better for a second visit to the Lord's Grounds Farm area. We will select an unexplored area and proceed from there. Meeting details will be sent by email.

Saturday, August 15, 10:30, north fenland

We hope to visit a farm in the area around Turves. Meeting details will be sent by email.

Tuesday, September 15, 10:00, Dernford Fen

Dernford Farm Grassland County Wildlife Site, now known as Dernford Nook Campsite, is being used by the Scouts with the mantra "wildlife first, camping second". Their [website](#) gives you a flavour of some of the plants we may find and a link to a report on Dernford Fen (which includes the adjacent grassland) from the 1950s by Bishop's Stortford College Natural History Society. The River Dern flows through the site, though over time has been modified to create large ponds, in which *Potamogeton coloratus* (Fen Pondweed) may be found and is one of the reasons it is selected as a County Wildlife Site. There is also one record of *Carex demissa* (Common Yellow-sedge), a plant which, though not uncommon elsewhere in the UK would be well worth re-finding in Cambridgeshire. We are also hoping to be able to venture into the adjacent Dernford Fen SSSI or up to Dernford Reservoir pending permission. Meeting details will be sent by email.



Middle Moor in July
[Jonathan Shanklin]

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 has returned to the river corridor between Newnham and Grantchester. There may also be further "Nature in my neighbourhood" visits to explore Cambridge streets, and there are visits to Coton Countryside Reserve, Wandlebury Country Park and Magog Down. Dates for all these additional meetings will be included on the [county web page](#).

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