

Flora News



Newsletter of Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust's Flora Group

Autumn 2001

Dear Flora Group Member

We look forward to seeing you at the events planned for the coming autumn and winter months. A number of suggestions for future events were made at the AGM in July and the Committee will be taking these forward. However if you have any other ideas for events, training sessions, practical conservation tasks, places to visit next year, please pass them to any of the Committee members or let Catherine Chatters (Flora Group Secretary) know. Catherine's address is given at the end of this newsletter.



Hay Scented Buckler Fern *Dryopteris aemula*
(Illustration by Sarah Murphy)

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Saturday 22 September 2001

10.00 am

**Rosa agrestis Identification
Training Day on Breamore Estate.
Leader - Paul Stanley**

During Autumn 1998 Paul Stanley led an interesting day in the New Forest introducing us to the many different wild rose species and hybrids. Paul has kindly offered to lead another *Rosa* training day, this time concentrating on *Rosa agrestis*. As explained in Paul's article in this newsletter, it is probable that the distribution of this species in Hampshire and adjacent parts of Dorset and Wiltshire is only partially known, presenting an opportunity for some significant discoveries. Come and join us, together with botanists from Dorset and Wiltshire, and hunt out important new localities for this species. We will meet near Breamore Church, where cars can be parked, at grid reference SU 153 189. Bring a packed lunch and hand lens, if you have one.

Saturday 20 October 2001

2.00-4.30 pm

**BSBI Winter Exhibition Meeting
Bishopstoke Community Centre
Organiser - Pete Selby**

Pete has arranged another get-together at Bishopstoke to which all Flora Group members are invited.

This will be a good opportunity for everyone to talk to each other, plan next year's plant-hunting trips and review last season's finds. Any exhibits or specimens for identification will be welcome. The meeting will be held at Bishopstoke Community Centre (grid reference: SU 467 198) on Church Road. Approach via St Margaret's Road and Sydney Road.

Sunday 18 November 2001

10.30 am

**Red-tipped cudweed *Filago
lutescens* conservation at
Broomhurst Farm**

Leader - Chris Hall

Chris Hall has once again kindly offered to lead a task to help conserve this important population of red-tipped cudweed at Broomhurst Farm. Last year we ran out of time to manage the entire site and consequently Chris reports that there has been a 70% reduction in plants in this part of the site. The good news is that there are good numbers in the parts we did manage; on 30 June 2001 Chris counted 335 plants. This shows that it is important we continue to manage the site. This year we need to dig out invasive bramble and gorse and weed perennial grasses. If you would like to help with the work, which will only take a couple of hours, please meet at 10.30 am at the entrance to Broomhurst Farm off

the B3013 north of Fleet at grid reference SU 812 563. Tools will be provided by the Wildlife Trust but bring along a garden fork if you have one.

Saturday 1 December 2001

10.30 am

**Hampshire Museums Biological
Collection, Chilcomb House,
Winchester.**

Organiser - Pete Selby

Pete has arranged a guided tour of the biological collection held by the Hampshire Museums Service at Chilcomb House in Winchester. During the tour we will be shown the full collection which includes insects, mammals, birds, lichens, bryophytes and vascular plants. The vascular plant collection is extensive and includes many specimens now extinct in Hampshire and also Paul Bowman's herbarium of some 2,500 specimens. After the guided tour we will be able to browse the herbarium to look for particular specimens. Please note that the collection is housed in a temperature-controlled environment, which is cold! Please wrap up warm. Meet at 10.30 am at Chilcomb House, Winchester (grid reference SU 491 284). From the M3 take the exit for Winchester Park and Ride at Bar End. Then turn right off the B3330 to Chilcomb House.

Rosa agrestis

Despite recent discoveries of this species as a result of the Rose Handbook, most populations still only contain single figure populations, the exceptions being three localities in Somerset, Hampshire and East Sussex, so the Red Data Book classification of low risk, nationally scarce is probably an accurate description of the information presently available. Certain characteristics of the species' habitat and present knowledge of its distribution in the British Isles generally, however, points perhaps to the species being slightly less rare than it is at present described. With most locations only consisting of a few individuals, and an appearance from a distance similar to forms of the ubiquitous dog rose (*R. canina*), discoveries of *R. agrestis* are mainly a matter of chance. Intensive recording in Central Ireland by groups of recorders looking for the species has shown its presence in a large number of locations. A caveat to this, however, might be that from present knowledge *R. agrestis* shows a westerly preference, with the location at Donkey Lane in Norwich being an outpost.

With these points in mind, it seems probable that the distribution for this species in Hampshire and adjacent parts of Dorset and Wiltshire is only partially known, presenting the opportunity for some significant finds. The following pointers are useful in identifying this rose:

- free-standing shrub with superficial appearance to *R. canina*
- it is the only glandular rose, with a glabrous pedicle
- a high proportion of foliage with cuneate bases and acute tips
- margins of leaves bi-serrate
- only faint apple scent
- hip with an orifice only about one fifth of the

- diameter of the disc slightly convex top to disc
- styles either slightly hirsute or glabrous.

Brewis, Bowman and Rose. 1996. *The Flora of Hampshire*. Harley
Graham and Primavesi. 1993. *Roses of Great Britain and Ireland*. BSBI
Grose. 1957. *The Flora of Wiltshire*. Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society
Lousley, J E. 1976. *Flora of Surrey*. David and Charles
Petch, Dr C and Swann, E L. 1968. *The Flora of Norfolk*. Jarrold
Wigginton, M J (Ed). 1999. *British Red Data Book (Vascular Plants) 3rd Edition*. JNCC

Paul Stanley

A day of Sedges at Ashford Hill

On Sunday 8 July, despite the alternative attraction of Tim Henman's Wimbledon semi-final, more than 20 Flora Group members assembled at Ashford Hill National Nature Reserve for a sedge identification training day.

The day was organised and led (with military precision) by John Norton and Pete Selby. NCO Selby quickly organised the troops into groups of four with the aim of testing out a new key to sedges of Hampshire. The key had only recently been devised by John and Pete and we were undertaking the first major 'field trials'.

Ashford Hill is a superb mosaic of neutral and acid grassland with many damp flushes, so a fair variety of sedges were available to be identified. Before referring to the key, each species was assessed against a checklist of features, a process that caused not a little dispute!

The key worked well for most species, including *Carex otrubae*, *C. ovalis*, *C. remota*, *C. hirta*, *C. panicea* and *C. pallescens*. Some difficulty was noted with the *C. nigra/C. acuta* group, but these

teething troubles should be easily ironed out.

As Barry Goater observed, one great benefit of using the key and the checklist that accompanied it, was that it made you look closely at species you thought you were familiar with, often seeing new features in the process.

I would like to express my thanks to John and Pete for an extremely useful day, which was made all the more enjoyable for me by the sight of John Norton in an Arabian headscarf.

Pete Durnell

Flora News from the North West

John Moon reports that the two patches of purple milk vetch *Astragalus danicus* on the Perham Ranges can still be found. The conservation work undertaken last winter by John and the Flora Group has reduced the surrounding scrub. The intensive rabbit grazing is preventing flowering but at least keeps the turf open in what is otherwise an ungrazed area.

The arable field under Harewood Forest where ground pine *Ajuga chamaepitys* and cut-leaved germander *Teucrium botrys* grows has had a poor year. The field has not been cultivated due to the bureaucracy associated with permanent set-aside complicating management and taxing the goodwill of the estate. We hope to find some help and incentives to bring the site back into management.

There is better news on the cornsalad *Valerianella ramosa* site near Overton. The area is being managed under a Countryside Stewardship scheme and has supported 500 plants this year.

The news from John that Ground Pine is still present in the Freefolk Wood site in North Hampshire is therefore very welcome.

Small Fleabane at Ashford Hill

Since 1990, the Flora Group, assisted by friends in Surrey, has been monitoring the status of the last surviving populations of small fleabane *Pulicaria vulgaris* in the UK. Whilst still widespread and locally common in the New Forest, the plant has suffered a dramatic decline throughout lowland England.

The only local extinction of the plant in recent decades has occurred in the Ashford Hill National Nature Reserve. The plant was last recorded there in 1988. During the Flora Group's recent visit, Peter Brough showed me the precise locality of the former population. The habitat present today is entirely unsuitable for the species being tall, marshy grassland rather than the open poached muddy conditions of its surviving populations elsewhere.

Through the 1990s, attempts were unsuccessfully made to encourage a change in grazing practice at Ashford Hill to reinstate the historic 'pinch point'. Unfortunately the reassurances offered to the Wildlife Trust at that time did not result in the necessary management.

The seed of small fleabane may have a long-term viability. It still may be possible that conservation management could reinstate this Red Data Book protected species in the National Nature Reserve.

Watsonia 18(4) 405-406

Clive Chatters

Ashford Hill Woods and Meadows

I originally stumbled across this remarkable complex in 1979 and was amazed that such grassland could still exist apparently unnoticed. Having brought together owner and Nature Conservancy Council (as they were then) and helping to smooth negotiations between them, I looked forward to a future of enhanced floristic and

invertebrate interest. Sadly, the past 15 years have seen the loss of both plant and invertebrate species, in my opinion through under-management. On the plant side, there has been a disappearance of *Dactylohriza incarnata* ssp *incarnata*, *Epipactis palustris*, *Pulicaria vulgaris* and *Menyanthes trifoliata* and a marked decline in species such as *Carex pulicaris* dependent on a well-grazed turf, some such species now only just hanging on. Invertebrates lost include small pearl-bordered fritillary, dark green fritillary and marsh fritillary. The woodlands have lost pearl-bordered fritillary and high brown fritillary, with silver-washed fritillary and white admiral in serious decline due to under-management.

Meanwhile, one of the meadows within the Site of Special Scientific Interest has been repeatedly ploughed. The latest occasion was this year when the owner re-ploughed it because, apparently, they had not been contacted by English Nature after the previous occasion two years ago, despite this having been brought to their attention.

Can anyone else think of examples where NNR or SSSI status does not necessarily mean maintenance or enhancement of conservation interest? I can certainly think of several others ...

Dr Peter Brough

The Status of Marsh Clubmoss *Lycopodiella inundata* in North East Hampshire

Twenty years ago there was a belief among Hampshire botanists that the nationally scarce marsh clubmoss *Lycopodiella inundata* was extinct on the Thomas Basin heaths of North East Hampshire. The last confirmed records had been from Hawley Common and Aldershot Common in 1956 and from Hazeley Heath in 1963. A botanical survey of the Aldershot training areas by the local MoD Conservation Group

in the late 1970s failed to re-find it in that area and in 1976 heath fires had extensively damaged the other two heaths.

Old herbarium and literature sources confirm three additional former sites: Ewshot Heath (last seen in 1895), Eversley Common (1893) and Hartfordbridge (1920). All three places became forestry plantations during the 20th century. The more recent records were each in areas where possibly suitable habitat remained, but the first rediscovery of *Lycopodiella* in the region actually came from a wholly new place, a small area of humid heathland on Crookham Common adjacent to Fleet (now part of the Bourley and Long Valley SSSI), in 1983.

This discovery was quickly followed by more. Three additional populations were found near Crookham, at the largely overgrown Crookham Bog and on wet heathland nearby at Gelvert Bottom. Large populations were rediscovered on Aldershot and Hawley Commons, and a relic site was found on a forestry ride at Railroad Heath. Within two years the species had also been found at Bramshill, Heath Warren, Yateley Heath Wood and another site near Aldershot. By the middle of the decade, there were recent records of 16 populations totalling some 4000 plants. *Lycopodiella* seemed secure and gave no conservation concern.

These populations have been monitored, in some cases almost annually, for the past 15 years, and the reality is very different to the complacency we felt in the beginning. In 1985 only one of the sites (Heath Warren) was a SSSI and none were actively managed nature reserves. Since then Aldershot and Crookham Commons have been included within the Bourley and Long Valley SSSI. The Bramshill and Hawley sites fall within proposed extensions to existing SSSIs. However, all

remain essentially unmanaged for biological conservation.

The result of 15 years of neglect and human activities inconsistent with good conservation practice has been a decline to just about four extant populations with an estimated total of 1150 plants. This is even worse than it looks, for about 850 plants are at a site not known until 1997 and therefore not included in the original sixteen. Those 4000 plants in 1985 have decreased to little more than 300 now.

The reasons are not hard to deduce. Top of the list of suspects is neglect. Lack of management has led to an increase in scrub, a maturing of heather, a build-up of *Molinia* litter and associated drying out or over-shading. Add to this forestry operations and the fact that three quarters of the populations were on army training land, then the survival of any becomes a small miracle. 'Conservation areas' marked on maps filed away are worthless if the information is not communicated to, and understood by, the people working out on the sites.

Here then is the grim catalogue of how not to conserve a nationally scarce plant:

Aldershot Common: The original large population had an army trench dug through it in about 1990. A small group of about 20 plants survived this, but have dwindled to just three now as the heather has matured. A small secondary colony became established for a time nearby, but this too is now overgrown. Two other small populations in the vicinity were churned up by army vehicles. One recovered after six years and is extant; the other subsequently become overgrown by heather. The site near Jubilee Hill had become overgrown by heather in 1987.

Bramshill: The original site became overgrown by young pines and was last seen in 1989. A new site was

discovered in 1997 and currently has the strongest population in the district.

Crookham Common: The population that marked the rediscovery of this species in North East Hampshire has, against the odds, survived. It has varied in size from around 300 plants to as few as five; currently there are about 125. Since 1983 the original site gradually became smothered by *Molinia* then was hit by a heath fire in 1989. Just before this a few plants became established on another patch of bare peat four metres away. These increased to over 300, but recently the *Molinia* is gaining the advantage. A prolonged period of inundation during winter 2000/2001 seems to have further reduced numbers.

The three other populations included a strong colony of 200-300 plants. The site was trenched during an army exercise in 1989 and never recovered. The other two were small populations of up to 40 plants. One was overgrown by heather and young pines by 1989; the other survived a heath fire in reduced numbers in 1985, recovered (peak count 42 in 1992), but gradually declined as the heather matured. It was last seen in 1998.

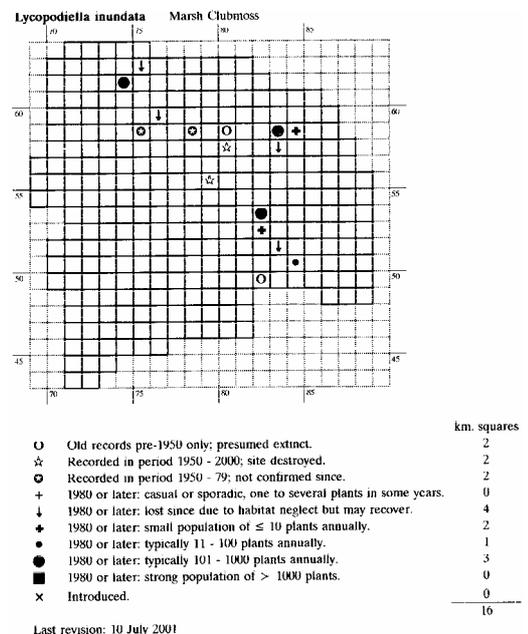
Hawley Common: There were five populations here. Two became overgrown by heather in 1988, one had spoil dumped over it by the army and a fourth succumbed to heath fire followed by a new track cut across the heath. The fifth and by far the largest population at one time supported an estimated 1250 plants. The habitat has diminished and heath fires took their toll, but 165 plants were found in 2001. There is much potentially suitable habitat on Hawley Common and a systematic search of the wet heath might locate other sites.

Heath Warren: Became overgrown by heather and birch scrub; last seen in 1993.

Railroad Heath: In 1985 the site was used to store and load logs during timber harvesting. It is now a housing estate.

Yateley Heath Wood: A rough heathy track was surfaced in 1987 to improve access for forestry operations, burying the wet heath flora that grew along the margins.

Habitat neglect has therefore been contributory to declines and losses in 12 sites, followed by army activities at six, heath fires at two and forestry operations at two. Winter inundations and summer droughts may also have been contributory, though the role played by climate cannot be quantified.



Chris Hall

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