

Border Bryologists 2011

Mark Lawley presents his annual account
of the Border Bryologists' meetings.

The Border Bryologists met on a mild day in January to explore deciduous woodland and acidic sandstone cliffs towering above the River Severn at Apley Park (SO7295 to 7297), a mile or so north of Bridgnorth in Shropshire.

Willows near the river sported *Cryphaea heteromalla*, *Leskea polycarpa*, *Orthotrichum affine*, *Radula complanata*, *Syntrichia latifolia* and *Zygodon viridissimus*, but the Severn was in spate, so we could not do justice to the bryophytes of the flood zone, many of which were out of reach or underwater. However, it's always good to have a reason for going back another day.

The sandstone cliffs proved dry and acidic, so were not notably bryodiverse – a relief to folk learning to identify common species. *Cynodontium* (*Oreoweisia*) *bruntonii* and *Dicranoweisia cirrata* grew near to each other on the rock, and could only be reliably distinguished by their microscopic features. Where cuttings through the rock had been hewn long ago to facilitate carts and carriages to pass, damper conditions suited modest quantities of *Cephalozia lunulifolia* and *Tortula marginata*, bringing our tally to 76 species before a grey curtain of rain closed proceedings for the day.

It was still raining when we reconvened in February on the National Trust's estate at Brockhampton near Bromyard in eastern Herefordshire (SO6854), in order to boost the number of species recorded in the county's most bryologically neglected hectad. After briefly examining the churchyard, where Jonathan Sleath found *Zygodon stirtonii* and Ralph Martin came across a luxuriating colony of *Fossombronia pusilla* on shallow soil in one grave, we moved a mile north to the top of Paradise Wood (SO6756/6856). The stream in this wooded dingle

cuts through a thin band of limestone, enabling tufa to form and endowing more extensive areas of ground with a rather base-enriched flavour. This explains the presence not only of *Palustriella falcata* and *Eucladium verticillatum* on the tufa (along with both species of *Conocephalum*), but also the mosses *Isothecium alopecuroides*, *Mnium stellare*, *Oxyrrhynchium schleicheri*, *Rhynchostegiella tenerifae*, *Rhynchostegium murale* and *Scleropodium cespitans*.

A muddy track through the wood had been disturbed too recently to sport a very diverse ruderal flora, but nevertheless produced several weeds new for the recording card, including a mixed sward of *Bryum sauteri*, *Pohlia annotina* and *P. lutescens* growing with each other.

Returning to the top of the dingle, we searched for an old abandoned quarry in Hillfield Coppice (SO6756), finding several additional species, but our most notable discovery came just outside the quarry, where a colony of the *Hypnum* look-alike *Herzogiella seligeri* was fruiting prolifically on a rotting tree stump. This moss's first appearance in Herefordshire was unexpected, for the county lies well to the west of its main British distribution in south-eastern England.

Field bryology emerged into the public gaze, entering a new era of exposure to mass audiences at our meeting in March at Mawley (SO6874/6875) near Cleobury Mortimer in south Shropshire, as a television crew from BBC's *Midlands Today* filmed us. The programme was shown during the BBC's *Midlands News* programme in June 2011. (For a full report on the filming, see Jim Lawley's article in vol. 104, pp. 32–35.)

Sixteen screen stars enjoyed a delightfully mild, sunny day as they explored a pretty wooded



△ (Left) Exploring the stream in Paradise Wood. (Right) BBC cameraman Gary Darfield at work. Xiaqing Li

dingle and gorge beside the River Rea, and with the aid of the film crew's boroscope (a device that enables highly magnified images to be filmed) introduced viewers to the diminutive beauty of *Platygyrium repens* on a tree trunk beside the River Rea.

Other epiphytes included *Dicranum fuscescens* growing on some trunks beside its much smaller congener *D. montanum*, *Orthotrichum pulchellum* and *O. stramineum*, and on other trees we compared the tiny leaves of *Frullania dilatata* with the larger *Radula complanata* alongside each other. The film crew were much taken with the hygroscopic

attributes and behaviour of dry *Anomodon attenuatus* on wetting, and spent a considerable time filming this attractive moss in action.

On a bank of soil, a colony of the ubiquitous *Didymodon insulanus* sported capsules, a rare accoutrement for this species, and nearby *Mnium stellare* attested enriched base status in its substrate. Ledges of shallow soil in a tiny, disused quarry carried *Fissidens incurvus* with its characteristically inclined capsules, John Day found *Oxyrrhynchium schleicheri*, and a rotten stump sported *Plagiothecium latebricola*, the first time this moss had been vouched from Shropshire for more than 50 years.

The BBS's 'media tarts' and screen stars fell to earth again in October, meeting at Glasbury (SO1739/1839) in southern Radnorshire. On a delightfully mild day, low levels of water enabled us to explore the flood zone of the River Wye in its middle reaches, and correct bryological neglect of this under-recorded hectad. A combination of stone at the base of the bridge, soil banks and inundated tree trunks, together with other species from the village itself brought 60 species to notice. *Didymodon insulanus*, *D. luridus*, *D. nicholsonii* and *D. rigidulus* grew on stone, tarmac or soil in



◁ Film crew and bryologists enjoy sunshine and bryophytes by the weir at Mawley. Xiaqing Li

▷ Ralph Martin
investigates the
River Wye's riparian
bryoflora. *Xiaoqing Li*



the village, and *D. nicholsonii* appeared again in the river's flood zone. *Cinclidotus fontinaloides*, *Fontinalis squamosa*, *Hygroamblystegium fluviatile*, *H. tenax* and *Schistidium rivulare* favoured stone in or by the river, and on inundated soil grew the liverworts *Fossombronina pusilla* and *Leiocolea turbinata* as well as *Atrichum crispum*, *Bryum gemmiferum* (and *B. dichotomum*), *Epipterygium tozeri* (not previously vouched for Radnorshire for many a long year) and *Plagiomnium cuspidatum*. Tree trunks in the flood zone supported *Eurhynchium crassinervium*, freely fruiting *Leskea polycarpa*, *Orthotrichum sprucei*, *Scleropodium cespitans* and *Syntrichia latifolia*.

After a picnic on the river bank, we drove 3 miles north to Boughrood (SO1239) in order to look for different species in other habitats. There, Ralph Martin found *Syntrichia virescens* new to the county on a flat gravestone – sufficient reason to continue a little further north up the Wye valley and celebrate with tea and cake on the platform of a café that has colonized the disused railway station at Erwood. There could have been no more civilized way to conclude our day's excursion.

For our last meeting of the year, Border Bryologists met members of the Montgomeryshire Field Society and North Wales Lower Plant Group at Dolforwyn (SJ1595/1695), near Abermule in south-eastern Montgomeryshire. This meeting replicated the one in Radnorshire in two important respects: the day was wonderfully mild and increasingly sunny, and our site was chosen from a 10 km square that was in need of bryological attention ahead of the forthcoming new edition of the *Atlas*.

We passed our morning in deciduous woodland, where air by the stream in the valley bottom was sufficiently humid for freely fruiting *Radula complanata* to be one of the dominant epiphytes, alongside lesser quantities of the smaller *Frullania dilatata* and still smaller *Lejeunea cavifolia*. Beginners were also able to compare *M. violacea* (whose attenuated shoots bear gemmae all the way round their tips) and *M. consanguinea* (whose attenuated tips of its thalli bear gemmae only at the margins) with *Metzgeria furcata* (which also produces gemmae, but not on attenuated shoots raised away from the bark). Other epiphytes included *Neckera complanata* (also growing on rock nearby) and *Orthotrichum pulchellum*. The diminutive pleurocarps *Hygroamblystegium tenax* and *Rhynchostegiella teneriffae* grew on stones in and by the stream, and another small plant may have been *H. varium*, but was not sufficiently typical of that species to pass as a satisfactory voucher for Montgomeryshire.

After picnicking on a sunny bank, we walked down the lane to investigate the sides of the Shropshire Union Canal and bank of the River Severn next to the canal, where *Scleropodium cespitans* looked in splendid form on an alder trunk.

By exploring several habitats during the day, we amassed a list of 90 species, so helping to redress previous bryological neglect in this under-recorded hectad, and bring down the curtain on our adventures for another year.

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