

BBS Spring Meeting 2014 Rolvenden

17–25 April 2014

Tom Ottley reports
on this year's Spring
Meeting in East Sussex
and Kent



△Above *Dumortiera hirsuta* at the Dripping Well in
Fairlight Glen. J. Denyer

The meeting was based in Rolvenden Village Hall where we had the use of almost the whole building over the long Easter weekend. In fact, this was the reason why the meeting was held at Easter; no suitable field centres being available in the area and village halls being usually very busy. The only other activity in the very modern hall that we witnessed was a rather amusing curling session with pucks running noisily on ball bearings across the polished wood-block floor.

The meeting started for the organiser with an impromptu search for *Pterygoneurum papillosum* (a recent addition to the British flora) at Rye Harbour with Tom Blockeel. It couldn't be found having had a poor winter compared with when it was first found the previous year and it being rather too late in the season. This addition to our flora will be published in due course. Then back to base and welcoming early arrivals, ably assisted by Jan Hendey who had an equal interest in the meeting since it was designed to straddle

the border between East Sussex and, somewhat improbably, East Kent. This part of the country is always in need of more records, not helped by many sites of potential interest being on private land.

Rather fewer people attended than had been anticipated resulting in not all planned trips being feasible. At one time or another the following could be found peering through a hand lens: Judith Allinson, Ambroise Baker, Jim Barrett, Jeff Bates, Joyce Bates, Richard Bickers, Joan Bingley, Tom Blockeel, Sam Bosanquet, Chris Carter, Rachel Carter, Joanne Denyer, Richard Fisk, Jonathan Graham, Jan Hendey, Peter Howarth, Jacqui Hutson, Alison Jukes, Liz Kungu, Tom Ottley, Oliver Pescott, Gordon Rothero, Georgina Southon, David Streeter, Malcolm Watling and Sharon Yardy.

Several new or updated county records were made during this meeting and, as is customary in these reports, they are marked with an asterisk.



△Above right. Liz Kungu and Alison Jukes admire *Leucodon sciuroides* on a barn roof above Fairlight Glen. J. Denyer

Friday 18th April

Fairlight Glen

This is a well-known site and most people went there over the course of the meeting. It is justifiably famous for the strong colony of *Dumortiera hirsuta* which drips off the rocks at the aptly named Dripping Well.

On the way to the glen a strong colony of *Leucodon sciuroides* was admired on a barn roof. A large colony of *Tortula freibergii* with massed setae was another attraction of this remarkable site but less rare species, including *Fissidens rivularis* and *Heterocladium heteropterum* var. *flaccidum* provided plenty of interest.

Local naturalist Jim Barrett led the group further down the glen to the rapidly eroding cliffs. Although the undercliff was reached it was obviously all-too-recently eroded to be a valuable bryophyte habitat yet and was not explored further. A video of a large section of these cliffs

tumbling down had even made the national news during the winter storms.

Maplehurst Wood

Maplehurst Wood is just inland from Hastings, on a north-facing slope. It was found to be very pleasant SSSI woodland with incised streams cutting through the sandstone rocks in places. This is a large site so half a day was optimistic to allow the group to explore it adequately. *Hookeria lucens* was found to be abundant, many patches still bearing capsules. *Jungermannia pumila* was growing just above water level but, without perianths, its identity was subject to some debate although it is frequent in this habitat in the Weald, particularly in East Sussex on rocks of the Hastings Beds. Other species of interest included *Fissidens rivularis* and *Heterocladium heteropterum* var. *heteropterum*. The wood is not rich in epiphytes as is true for many coastal sites in Sussex.



◀Left. Streamside habitat in Old Roar Ghyll. G. Southon

Long Wood

Long Wood is a small but interesting area of mixed woodland, part coppice, with an attractive stream. It is owned by Heather Martin and Rodney Taylor who gain much pleasure from looking after its wildlife. Most of the commoner woodland species were found to be present and the group led by Tom Blockeel were able to add several species to its known flora, including *Herzogiella seligeri* found in some abundance on conifer logs. *Hookeria lucens* and *Lejeunea cavifolia* were also spotted. The *Herzogiella* was to be seen several more times during the meeting and it will probably prove to occur frequently in the area.

Old Roar Ghyll

Old Roar Ghyll is on the same part of the Hastings Beds as Fairlight Glen but has been rather neglected by bryologists, probably as a consequence of it being in the middle of Hastings itself. The field trip only had 3 participants who found the valley to be very peaceful in spite of being surrounded by housing estates.

The stream has cut through the thinly bedded sandstones with alternating layers of clay and this has created a rather unstable but decidedly base-enriched habitat. Parts of the ghyll have been recently opened up as a project involving many bodies including the Sussex

Wildlife Trust and volunteers from the Hastings Trust and the Prince's Trust. The site is owned by Hastings Borough Council. There is an abundance of *Fissidens rivularis* here, much more than in neighbouring glens but what makes the place unique in Sussex are the numerous strong colonies of two species of *Rhynchostegiella*. *R. curviseta* is probably the more frequent here but *R. teneriffae* is certainly also present. Capsules borne on short papillose setae were still present on many patches. A more detailed survey would be needed to establish just how much of each species is here but both are rare in the county.

Also on the cliffs along the stream valley were patches of *Jungermannia atrovirens* in what may be its only extant locality in VC14 (East Sussex) growing with *Leiocolea turbinata* and *Eucladium verticillatum* to underline the base content of the rock. Epiphytes were rather thin on the trees but *Cololejeunea minutissima* was found.

Saturday 19th April

Rye Harbour

Rye Harbour is a very extensive area of shingle, gravel pits and interconnecting dykes complete with a castle and a Martello tower. Although well known for its birds and flowering plants there are few bryophyte records, at least until recently. As had been noted on a recce visit over a year before, the Martello tower provided the best range of species. To be strictly accurate, it wasn't the tower itself, which is largely inaccessible anyway, but the surrounding mound of gravelly soil that has become colonised by a wide range of species. At a different time of year this is where *Pterygoneurum papillosum* had been found but, even though small winter annuals had long withered, there were still extensive sheets of *Pleurochaete squarrosa* to look at and much *Bryum algovicum*, some of it already with nearly ripe capsules. A pleurocarp

with coastal tendencies, *Scleropodium touretii*, covered large parts of the ground, looking rather like pale worms. Jim Barrett led the group further out towards the sea where there was a large area of *Tortella flavovirens* which didn't appear to have been affected adversely by being inundated during the last winter. We had been asked to survey a corner of what was, until 5 years ago, a farmer's field. The surface had been scraped so it was interesting to see what had colonised. All the usual suspects were there including *Bryum algovicum* again, although Avocets don't usually get recorded in arable bryophyte surveys. A short report has been given to the warden of the nature reserve who wants to monitor this part of the site. We then headed for Camber Castle for lunch which proved rather uninteresting in spite of initially looking promising. The walls were however cleaned up a few years ago which no doubt accounts for the impoverished flora. Nearby drainage ditches held *Drepanocladus aduncus*, a rare plant in East Sussex due to the lack of suitable habitats.

Ashdown Forest

Jacqui Hutson led a field trip to land adjoining Ashdown Forest. This was the only one that Sam Bosanquet could attend and he was able to arrive before the rest of the group, finding *Ulotia calvescens** not far away. It's by no means obvious whether this plant is spreading or has lain undetected for many years. If you read the Field Guide you could be forgiven for not bothering to check every tuft of *Ulotia* with long setae and sparsely hairy calyptrae in SE England. However, based on a recent paper (Blockeel & Turner, 2013), it is now known that the distribution is not confined to extreme western coasts after all and also that the calyptra is not always nearly hairless. After the meeting this author set out to find more and was quickly rewarded with two



△Above *Herzogiella seligeri* on a rotting log. J. Denyer

more sites 10 to 20 miles distant, although many more recently surveyed sites didn't have it.

Sam also found *Herzogiella seligeri* before the meeting but that was seen later on by the group as well, the long curved capsules appearing incongruous arising from a *Hypnum* look-alike. Then the group found *Rhynchostegiella teneriffae* on the stream bridge – this same bridge also has a large colony of verified *Fissidens crispus*. Then not far away Sam spotted *Sematophyllum substrumulosum** on a log. This is perhaps the best record of the meeting as it extends the range of this uncommon plant by nearly 50 miles eastwards from its West Sussex stronghold in Kingley Vale. Further interesting finds followed including a troublesome *Jungermannia* (probably *J. pumila*), both varieties of *Heterocladium heteropterum*, *Orthotrichum stramineum* which is now turning up quite frequently in Sussex, *Cololejeunea minutissima* which at one time would have been rare here, more *Herzogiella seligeri*, *Sciuro-hypnum plumosum*, *Neckera pumila* on the edge of its range and *Syntrichia papillosa*.

Update: During the *Orthotrichum* Workshop held in Dorset in May (see report on pp. 76-77),

the invited guest from Spain, Francisco (Paco) Lara looked at a small *Orthotrichum* that Sam had collected from an Oak tree in open woodland. It didn't take long for him to identify it as *O. rogeri**, new to Britain! Subsequent searches of the area where it was found have so far failed to find any more but this is definitely one to watch out for and the sexually dimorphic branches make it easier to identify than some members of the genus.

Bedgebury Forest

Bedgebury is not only the home of the National Pinetum, it is also a large managed forest with an extensive network of sandy tracks that have proved valuable in the past with records of rare *Atrichum* spp. There are also several streams and lakes with associated boggy areas. A pleasant morning was spent here, recording 57 species. Amongst the epiphytes, six species of *Orthotrichum* were noted, of which *O. stramineum* and *O. striatum* were new site records. At ground level, the most notable discovery was *Herzogiella seligeri* found by Tom Blockeel at the base of a *Castanea* stump, also new for the site. A picnic table beside Louisa Lake provided a pleasant lunch stop after which the group departed to other venues. Some of the party had to get back for committee meetings but

Jonathan Graham and Richard Fisk decided to take a look round Cranbrook on their way back. This was a very valuable recording session and generated a lot of good records of which the best was probably fruiting *Orthotrichum cupulatum* in a churchyard.

Sunday 20th April

Ecclesbourne Glen

This is one of several deeply incised stream valleys running south along the stretch of coastline in the Hastings area. Although not as rich as Fairlight Glen it has some good sandstone cliffs with numerous patches of the gametophyte of the fern *Trichomanes speciosum* and *Trichostomum brachydontium* nearby. There are patches of *Rhynchostegiella curviseta* on rocks in the stream. Also in this habitat is a small amount of *Trichostomum tenuirostre*. This appears to be var. *tenuirostre* whereas colonies of the species that have recently been refound on sandstone in ghylls around Ardingly have been shown to be var. *holtii* now that the distinction has been clarified (Blockeel, 2013).

Combwell Wood

We had the help of the local woodsman, Mark Herbert, who does a good job of advising the various owners of this woodland about habitat management. So the group were pleased to be able to help him but could have had longer actually looking along the miles of rides. The best finds of the morning were probably *Dicranum montanum* and *Orthotrichum stramineum* but this is not a rich location for epiphytes. It used to be a site for *Atrichum angustatum* but that species remains to be refound another day.

Hothfield Common

Jan Hendey had kindly offered to show a group

around the main bog at this site, but that was before it became clear that it was going to be a very wet day. Nevertheless, 5 members were undeterred and recorded 24 species in often difficult conditions. The bog has recently undergone much habitat regeneration and is still very much in the 'recovering' phase so it was good to have an opportunity to monitor how the bryophytes were faring. Jan had thoughtfully prepared a list of 11 species not seen since 2002 of which 6 were refound on this visit. Apart from the expected *Sphagna*, it was pleasing to be able to refind *Campylium stellatum* and a few strands of *Straminergon stramineum*. Separating *Cladopodiella fluitans* from *Gymnocolea inflata* with wet hand-lenses proved challenging but the former was subsequently confirmed and indeed has been known from Hothfield since 1947. *Riccardia multifida* was another nice find being generally very scarce in this part of the country and mostly found in *Sphagnum* bogs. Although *Sphagnum magellanicum* was not refound on this occasion, it survives at one other site in Kent and there is hope it may yet return to Hothfield. Needless to say, no photographs were taken that day.



△Above. Tunbridge Filmy Fern, an honorary bryophyte in Sussex. G. Southon

Eridge Rocks

The rocks at Eridge have long been known for their 'Atlantic' bryophyte flora. They went through a crisis in the latter half of the last century when large areas became infested by *Rhododendron*. This was completely cleared in one go about 5 years ago with some concern as to whether the bryophytes would survive. In fact they recovered very well although inevitably not all the species known to Nicholson can be found today. The rocks are still unfortunately used by climbers but the best areas seem to be mostly left alone. We found all the specialities that are known to occur there. *Orthodontium gracile* was admired in one of its monitored locations but although the capsules appeared smooth they were too immature for positive identification in the field. *Lophozia ventricosa* was frequent and does well at this site. Four species of *Cephalozia* were identified, testing the field skills of all present. *Cephalozia connivens* is probably the easiest with the very large cells clearly visible. *C. catenulata* was growing in great profusion on some of the cliffs and boulders, the small leaves with parallel lobes giving it a herring-bone appearance not shared with other members of the genus, at least at this site. It often looked very yellow. *Kurzia sylvatica* was frequent on vertical shaded cliffs, as was *Calypogeia integristipula*. A single patch of *Nowellia curvifolia* which has only recently been added to the site list by Pete Howarth is unusual in that it too is on a vertical rock face. *Harpanthus scutatus* was admired growing very close to some of the *Hymenophyllum tunbridgense* that has escaped the notice of modern-day fern collectors. *Scapania nemorea* was seen although it is scarce on these particular rocks. *S. gracilis* was observed a few times with some patches much larger than others and the very tiny *S. umbrosa* was found and admired by all. *Barbilophozia*



△Above Folkestone Undercliff. J. Denyer

▽Below *Tortella inflexa*. J. Denyer



attenuata does very well at this site but *Dicranum scottianum* is rare here although one good patch was found and the group were able to compare it against the superficially similar *Campylopus flexuosus*. After lunch the group were taken to a track on the adjacent Broadwater Forest and



shown *Atrichum tenellum* by Pete who had found it there new to East Sussex only the previous year.

Monday 21st April

Folkestone Undercliff

The woodland here is surprisingly moist with acres of Hart's-tongue Fern on the south-facing wooded slopes growing around large boulders of chalk that have broken away from the sheer cliffs above. An early find was a patch of *Cephaloziella*. Although no perianths could be located the immature female inflorescences strongly suggest this is *C. baumgartneri*. Elsewhere on the cliffs there were large patches of fruiting *Seligeria calycina* and a little *S. calcarea*. On the boulders in the woodland were sheets of *Tortella inflexa*, spottable at a distance just by its improbable colour. This is the largest population known to this author, by some margin.

Also here was much *Rhynchostegium murale* with the remains of capsules still visible. The group managed to make a circular walk and a pleasant day was had looking at butterflies as well as trying to name all the spring flowers. Of particular interest was the sight of *Porella platyphylla* growing on chalky soil at the top of the south-facing cliffs. The day finished with an obligatory ice cream.

Charing Chalk Pit

The chalk pit at Charing has recently been shown to have a large population of *Lophozia perssonii* and this was the main reason for visiting it. It occurs on loose spoil along a bank on rather impure chalk nodules and is one of the most distinctive members of the genus. *Leiocolea turbinata* grows with it in abundance. Elsewhere in the quarry the group, admirably led by Jacky Langton, spent some time looking for rare *Aloina*

△Above *Hypnum lacunosum* in fine condition. J. Denyer

spp. but the season was really too far advanced to collect material adequate for identification. The tricky species pair *Campyliadelphus chrysophyllus* and *Campylium protensum* were separated without difficulty. After lunch, a nearby sunken track was explored which resulted in *Oxyrrhynchium schleicheri* being found and the group admired large sheets of *Campylophyllum calcareum* fruiting abundantly.

Anglely Wood

It was over-ambitious on the part of the organiser to try to fit in Anglely Wood in an afternoon's visit, so it was apparently disappointing. It has had numerous good records over the years but the site is large and the group didn't have time to get to all the best spots. Nevertheless 62 species were found by the group led by Tom Blockeel including *Dicranum montanum* and *Dicranum fuscescens**.

Tuesday 22nd April

Herstmonceux Castle

Herstmonceux Castle is adjacent to what used to be the Greenwich Observatory and is brick-built, surrounded by a moat. It's impressive to look at and the old walls harbour a few mosses of

interest. Our group had access to the whole site. A small acrocarp on damp brickwork under the main entrance causeway caused a few problems until small *Didymodon tophaceus* was considered and it suddenly became obvious to everyone. Some extensive patches of *D. rigidulus* were a little easier in the field and *Pseudocrossidium revolutum* could be spotted from a distance with its particularly bright green colour. Rather less common in SE England, a patch of *Grimmia trichophylla** spotted by Ambroise provided one of several VCRs of the meeting, with only a few unsubstantiated records in East Sussex. Later on, near the lakes, a small piece of *Plagiothecium latebricola* was another good find and even *Hylocomium splendens* in short grassland was of real interest in this part of the world.

On the way back, Rachel Carter called in at Parsonage Wood which at one time was on the list of places to visit as a group. Natural England will be pleased with her records for the SSSI.

Lydd Ranges

Lydd Ranges was bound to be interesting from a geographical point of view since it's part of the great coastal shingle spit that is Dungeness. The military look after the site well and it has a very wild feel about it. After a compulsory talk on the work of the MOD at Lydd and warnings about safety on the site, the group packed into three cars for Richard Goslett to lead them to the four sites he had selected. On many areas of stabilised shingle a lichen and bryophyte heath has developed with much of the expected species such as *Dicranum scoparium*, *Brachythecium albicans* and *Hypnum lacunosum*. A small pond added *Drepanocladus aduncus* and rather surprisingly *Aulacomnium palustre* on damp peat. The willows here and elsewhere were devoid of the epiphytes that can be relied upon

at inland sites.

As is so often the case at BBS meetings, members spent some time peering into rabbit burrows. On this occasion they found a patch of *Lophocolea* that, although looking exciting, proved to be *L. heterophylla* and not *L. semiteres* as had been hoped.

Behind the sea wall, *Bryum algovicum* (immature but just about identifiable) was expected as was *Tortella flavovirens* although perhaps not the large expanses of it that were found. Out of the identifiable species of *Bryum*, *B. torquescens** was collected from gravelly soil and subsequently confirmed by Tom Blockeel who also found *B. archangelicum*.

After that, the indefatigable Richard Fisk still had time to get a useful list together from Lydd churchyard.

BRECOG recording

Jeff and Joyce Bates, and sometimes also Rachel Carter, recorded quadrats from several sites. These included Fairlight Glen, Beckley Woods, Ashdown Forest, Eridge Rocks, Broadwater Forest, Marline Wood, Benenden and Wye Downs. Although most of the bryophytes seen in this study were common things, the occasional more unusual find must have been welcome. All these records are very useful of course, common or not.

Acknowledgements

Numerous people helped with this event and the Society is very grateful for their assistance. Jim Barrett, a local naturalist with only a passing interest in bryology, acted as a guide at several sites. Jan Hendey, county recorder for Kent, suggested many sites as being potentially suitable and then led parties round most of the ones we went to; she ended up travelling many miles but was justifiably pleased with the results. We also thank the following: Jacqui Hutson for leading the group who went to Ashdown Forest; Jacky Langton for guiding the party around the chalk pits at Charing; Jo Denyer acting as Safety Officer



△Above. Ambrose, Tom, Oli and Rachel admire a cushion of *Grimmia trichophylla* on a sandstone wall at Hertmonceux Castle. C. Carter

for the meeting and producing a very impressive document for members to sign; Murray Davidson, the Environment and Natural Resources Manager from Hastings Borough Council for helping with access to the large tract of land that encompasses Fairlight Glen and neighbouring sites; the Forestry Commission and their representative Christina Gallagher for arranging access to several woodland areas; the Woodland Trust; Kent Wildlife Trust; Alice Parfitt from Sussex Wildlife Trust for allowing us to visit Eridge Rocks; Mandy Babbage for facilitating the use of the hall; Ian Johnstone for sorting out access to Bedgebury; Phil Williams (NE) for arranging visits to several sites in Kent of which we really only managed to get to one; Janet Whitman (NE) for arranging access to Maplehurst Wood; Terry Drinkwater and Martin Felstead for access to the LNR at Old Roar Ghyll, Hastings; Martin Haymes for allowing access to land adjoining Ashdown Forest; Barry Yates, the reserve manager at Rye Harbour for facilitating access to the Sussex Wildlife Trust reserve there; Penny Green from the SxBRC for invaluable help in preparing maps and for being generally very helpful; Heather Martin and Rodney Taylor, the owners of Long Wood; the MOD and their team of land

management experts for access to Lydd Ranges and in particular Richard Goslett; Caroline Harber, the Operations Manager at the Bader International Study Centre for kindly facilitating access to the castle and grounds at Hertmonceux.

But most of all, thanks to all members who came and made this a successful meeting.

References

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