

Reports of local meetings

The Border Bryologists, 2003

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Last winter was the first in the BBS's three-year Survey of the Bryophytes of Arable Land, so for our first meeting in 2003 we decided to explore tilling-fields at **High Meadow Farm** (SO5172) near Ashford Carbonell, a couple of miles south of Ludlow, near Shropshire's border with Herefordshire. The BBS's illustrated guide to identifying arable bryophytes proved popular and useful as we contributed to the national survey, and eight 'muddy buddies' had a fine time playing in their favoured substance, which was wet and adhesive after recent rain.

The morning's field seemed unremarkable, the least expected discovery being *Bryum gemmiferum*. After lunch we headed up to higher, better drained soil on Tinker's Hill, where *Phaeoceros carolinianus* grew alongside *Anthoceros agrestis*, enabling everyone to familiarise themselves with the features and generic differences of these hornworts. *P. carolinianus* is monoicous but otherwise apparently indistinguishable from *P. laevis*, and with increased attention being paid to our arable bryoflora, *P. carolinianus* has come to notice sufficiently frequently of late to leave one wondering whether it remains entitled to elevated status as a Red Data Book species.

We noticed that the *Phaeoceros* and *Anthoceros* were confined to moist, well-drained soil in one corner of the field, where a rubbly tilth thinly cloaked bedrock of mildly calcareous mudstone. An adjoining plantation of Sweet Chestnuts shaded this ground, and had probably kept the soil moist in late summer, enabling several unusual arable weeds to germinate and develop sufficiently to

fruit in winter. The *Phaeoceros* was new to Shropshire; so was *Fossombronia caespitiformis* a few yards away. And not every arable field is moist enough for *Riccardia chamedryfolia*.

After the somewhat tedious two-dimensional topography of arable fields, February found us exploring Eleonora Armitage's stamping ground on **Chase Hill** (SO6022) near Ross-on-Wye in south Herefordshire. Nine hardy souls braved cold, dry air; indeed, the fame of our meetings had spread so far that Bryan Edwards came all the way up from the south coast to join us for the day.

We found a respectable range of calcicoles on the sandstone outcrops of the hill's wooded slopes – *Porella platyphylla*, *Anomodon viticulosus*, *Bartramia pomiformis*, *Brachythecium glareosum*, *Campylophyllum calcareum*, *Didymodon luridus*, *D. sinuosus*, *D. tophaceus*, *Eurhynchium crassinervium*, *E. pumilum*, *Fissidens dubius*, *F. viridulus*, *Gyroweisia tenuis*, *Mnium stellare*, *Neckera complanata*, *Rhynchostegiella tenella* and *Rhynchostegium murale* – alongside *Zygodon viridissimus* var. *stirtonii* and species less enamoured of lime. However, we did not re-find Miss Armitage's *Blepharostoma trichophyllum* or *Scapania gracilis*. Botanical interlopers had once again infiltrated our party, and burst into song before an outcrop bearing the lichen *Cladonia caespiticia*, with *Leptogium lichenoides* nearby. Mental rigour soon supplanted this momentary lapse into lichenology.

In March we met at **Castlemorton Common** (SO7638) by the eastern slopes of Swinyard Hill

on the Worcestershire side of the Malverns, as brilliant sunshine and pleasant temperatures of early spring brought a new World and Olympic record in attendance, with eighteen naturalists from five counties. During our leisurely ramble over the common and hillside we inspected two flushes. The first was unshaded and sported *Sphagnum palustre* and *S. subnitens* (not bad for Worcestershire!) alongside *Aulacomnium palustre* and *Palustriella commutata* var. *falcata*. The second flush lay in the shade of a copse, where *Chiloscyphus pallescens* and *Riccardia chamedryfolia* flourished. Epiphytes were prominent on the trunks and boughs of many trees, and Rita Holmes found *Microlejeunea ulicina* new to Worcestershire on a mature hawthorn, alongside *Dicranum montanum*. *Radula complanata*, *Orthotrichum byellii* and *Zygodon conoideus* also came to our notice.

A patch of Wild Daffodils, beautiful in bloom, adorned Swinyard's slopes, and John Davies kindly gave directions for finding a flock of nine Waxwings just off the Ledbury bypass on our way home.

In April we met on the **Stiperstones** (SO3697 and SO3698) in western Shropshire, a National Nature Reserve where a scorched earth policy for re-establishing heather-moor ('back to purple') is inimical to bryophytes, save for such as *Campylopus pyriformis*, *Ceratodon purpureus*, *Funaria hygrometrica* and those rampant asylum-seekers *Campylopus introflexus* and *Orthodontium lineare*. One suspects that the tourist industry – so vital for the economy of local resorts – has influenced this policy of gardening the wild, for purple is pretty, and therefore profitable too. And the public does so love to see fritillaries frolicking over the flowers. Heather blooms better when unshaded, so native deciduous trees with varied epiphytic floras and much other wildlife have gone the same way as planted conifers in some parts of the Stiperstones, making much of the reserve a bryological desert.

Yet richer bryofloras do survive in a few spots where flames cannot reach into flushes or into

deep declivities between boulders on scree. On our visit we examined a flush on the hill's south-eastern flank, finding the mosses *Calliergon stramineum*, *Sphagnum capillifolium*, *S. fallax*, *S. inundatum*, *S. palustre*, *S. papillosum*, *S. quinquefarium*, *S. russowii* and *Warnstorfia exannulata*, and the liverworts *Cephalozia bicuspidata*, *C. connivens*, *Cephalozia hampeana* (autoicous and fully fertile), *Pellia neesiana*, *Riccardia chamedryfolia* and *R. multifida*. In the western scree below the summit, *Lepidozia cupressina* lurked in a few of the most humid declivities beneath and between the largest boulders. Perhaps this beautiful and delicate liverwort may take comfort from being ethnically cleansed by 'friendly' fire, a weapon of mass destruction – crisped and cremated at the hands of caring conservationists.

After our summer recess, normal local service resumed in October, when Jonathan Sleath hosted our meeting at the **Biblins** (SO5415 and SO5515) near Symonds Yat in south Herefordshire. Calicoles were much to the fore on the Carboniferous Limestone, among the first being *Gymnostomum viridulum* in an old quarry, one of Harold Whitehouse's sites. It had suffered in the dry summer, but sufficient remained on show to enable comparison with *G. calcareum* and *Gyroweisia tenuis*, seen later in the day. Homage paid, we moved east to a quarried cliff-face, where dark mats of *Marchesinia mackaii* sprawled over the rocks.

Dropping down to the River Wye, *Orthotrichum sprucei* grew on silted trunks of alders in the river's flood-zone, with *Eurhynchium crassinervium* and *Scleropodium cespitosum* nearby. *Cinclidotus fontinaloides*, *Fissidens crassipes* and *Rhynchostegiella teneriffae* grew on stones by the water, and *F. exilis* had found a crevice with soil. We walked north along the riverside to Dropping Well, where prodigious quantities of *Eucladium verticillatum* and *Palustriella commutata* var. *falcata* flourished alongside more modest amounts of *Aneura pinguis*, *Jungermannia atrovirens*, *Leiocolea turbinata* and *Gymnostomum calcareum* on huge mounds of tufa encrusting the cliff-face. Further

along the path, trees near the river offered the epiphytes *Cryphaea heteromalla* and *Platygyrium repens*, with *Taxiphyllum wissgrillii* on a boulder.

In November, our last outing of the year began in the churchyard at **Grosmont** (SO4024) in north-east Monmouthshire, where Sam Bosanquet soon found *Orthotrichum cupulatum*, a rare moss on the eastern side of the county. *Dialytrichia mucronata* growing on the sloping bottom of the church also drew comment, for it usually favours the flood-zones of watercourses. Perhaps the wall's gradient retained sufficient water to suit this moss.

A heavy downpour hurried us back to the cars, but fortunately abated as we arrived at the southern side of **Graig Syfyrrdin** (SO4021 and SO4022), which formed the main interest of the day. No startling discoveries came to light, but the wooded slopes, outcrops of calcareous or

basic sandstone and forestry tracks yielded well over 100 species, with plenty for elementary bryologists to study. Some stones and boulders in the wood supported *Heterocladium heteropterum* var. *flaccidum* and *Seligeria recurvata*, and the face of a small quarry gave us *Aloina aloides*, *Eurhynchium crassinervium*, *Rhynchostegium murale* and *Tortula subulata*. We took advantage of opportunities to compare and contrast several species in the same genera, with *Plagiothecium curvifolium* (cells too narrow to easily distinguish using a lens) alongside *P. nemorale* (cells in rows), *P. succulentum* and *P. undulatum*. The sides of a forestry track carried *Pohlia annotina*, *P. lutescens*, *P. melanodon* and *P. wahlenbergii*. *Fissidens pusillus* went in the notebook along with *F. bryoides*, *F. taxifolius* and *F. viridulus*, and Sam and Graham Motley found *Racomitrium ericoides*, *R. heterostichum* and *R. lanuginosum* by a track at the top of the wood. But enough – it was time to go into the tilling-fields again, and work.

SBAL training day in Kent, 19 October 2003

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On a cool windy day during the great drought of 2003, a party of eight BBS members met to apply the methods of the Survey of Bryophytes of Arable Land (SBAL) to fields in Kent. Roy Hurr had arranged for us to visit a randomly selected tetrad in the Isle of Grain (v.-c. 16). He warned us against the desert-like conditions, but we proceeded anyway, accompanied by two anthropologists from Lancaster University who have been studying our culture and behaviour.

The two randomly selected fields were near St Mary Hoo, about 9 km south of Canvey Island. The first field was wheat stubble and had a notably acid soil (pH 5.6). The few bryophytes were poorly grown and very droughted, with the only appreciable cover on the north side of a stand of trees at the edge of the field. We found



SBAL in Kent: not many mosses on the ground during the drought.