

Reports of local meetings

South-East Group

Orlestone Forest (v.-c. 15), 21 March 2004

To the south of Ashford, the Weald of Kent falls away southward onto Romney Marsh at the former Saxon shore. On the edge of this low escarpment are the woodlands of the Orlestone Forest, sitting largely on Weald Clay. The slopes have exposures of the underlying Tunbridge Wells Sands, with ponds and streams fed by the artesian system in this layer, which includes ragstone, the calcareous sandstone of building fame. Two of the woods with this structure received the attention of Jeff Duckett, Sylvia Priestly, Roy Hurr and myself on a calm, mainly bright day after a week of storms.

In the morning we visited Ham Street Woods National Nature Reserve, next to the village of that name, accompanied by David Maylam, the English Nature warden. He showed us the way to the two ponds at the top of the wood and the return route back down the stream system. David was unfortunately not able to carry out his original intention of spending the rest of the day with us but we were very grateful for his help and useful information. The wood has had a chequered past, having been affected by various local industries and work on the Marsh, and consequently the bryoflora was fairly standard. In places, the streams cut nice gullies, which contained a fair selection of the commoner species and *Chiloscyphus pallescens*, scarce here at the edge of its range. One of the ponds yielded small amounts of *Sphagnum fallax* and *S. palustre*, some consolation for the fact that the ponds had been misguidedly cleared of Sphagna in the past. The sole reason for choosing this wood for a visit was the fact that in September 1969 a meeting of the Kent Field Club had found *Discelium nudum*. It was spotted by Peter Wilberforce in wheel ruts in the clay of

the ride near the reserve entrance and identified by Trudy Side. This is the very gathering illustrated in the article by Trudy and Harold Whitehouse in *Journal of Bryology* (1987) **14**: 741-743 about the rhizoidal tubers of *Discelium*. Despite 35 years of forest development and the building of the standard gravel paths, fences and notice boards, Jeff was able to find more of the characteristic light-green protonema with scattered gametophores; starch-filled tubers were confirmed later under the microscope. This time it was at the top of the steep clay bank of the stream, but clearly within yards of the original location. This was a triumph for recording, communication and experience from members past and present!

The afternoon location was Fagg's Wood, one of several large woods in the Forest owned by the Forestry Commission. The area skirting the stream that we followed was quite variable: conifer plantation, young oak and birch, and scrub and willows around a couple of ponds at the top end. As with Ham Street, the river cut a pleasant course into the sandy layer, providing substrates of variable pH with a good range of the common bryophytes. Then, of course, there was the inevitable spectacular find by Jeff: *Ulota coarctata*, growing with *U. crispa* on a willow overhanging one of the ponds. This rarity is found mainly in western Scotland, with only two locations currently known in the south of England. We were further privileged that Jeff made sure that all the members of the party had a good lens-full of the pale, round-topped, narrow-mouthed capsule. *Cryphaea heteromalla* was found on elders amongst a stand of young birches; this is widespread but scarce in east Kent, and is a new 10-km square record. Also recorded were *Plagiochila porelloides*, *Orthotrichum lyellii* and *U. phyllantha*, more local rarities.

The day's exploration and findings were a good appetite-whetter for further study, particularly of the ponds, in these woodlands. The impermeability of the clay and the reliable water-table in the sandstone make them a good habitat

for bryophytes in an otherwise relatively dry area.

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BBS Tropical Bryology Group

Progress in 2003

During 2003, a document was compiled reporting on the first fifteen years of the Tropical Bryology Group (TBG). This was published in *Field Bryology* 83: 23-30, and is also available on the BBS TBG website at http://www.nhm.ac.uk/hosted_sites/bbstbg/tbg66.pdf. The TBG website is also accessible via the BBS website from the *Activities* or *Bryology Portal* buttons. The document summarises the activities of the TBG up to 2002, as well as providing a listing of all publications produced by TBG members through the various TBG research focus areas or projects (especially Malawi and Uganda). A great deal of progress, mostly effected under the guidance of the longstanding TBG co-ordinator Brian O'Shea, has been made by TBG members under the various objectives outlined in the original TBG discussion paper (document 1 on the TBG website).

The 18th TBG newsletter was produced in August 2003, and is available on the TBG website. It covered the Mosses and Liverworts of Uganda (MALOU) and Malawi projects, ideas for future expeditions, information on the Eustace Jones Flora of West African hepatics, a report on the 5th Tropical African training course, news from the bryology research group in Göttingen, and information from TBG members.

There were three new TBG members in 2003:

- Dr Christine Cargill, Centre for Plant Biodiversity Research, Australian National Herbarium, Canberra, Australia
- Prof. Dr Eberhard Fischer, Institut für Biologie, Universität Koblenz-Landau, Koblenz, Germany
- Aino Juslén, Nationaal Herbarium Nederland, Utrecht University, Utrecht, Netherlands

During 2003, advances were made on several projects involving TBG members (Mosses and Liverworts of Uganda, E.W. Jones' Flora of West African hepatics, and the Guide to Bryophytes of Africa), as described in the 18th TBG newsletter. This is especially true of the E.W. Jones' Flora of West African hepatics book, which was nearing completion by the end of 2003. We now come to the point where we can build upon the success of the first fifteen years of TBG activities with a continued effort to focus on bryophyte research in Africa, as well as develop new research objectives and directions.

Contributions to the TBG are very welcome and members of the BBS with an interest, or potential interest, in tropical bryophytes are encouraged to contact the TBG co-ordinator, Michelle Price.

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