

Taxonomic workshop 2005, Cambridge

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The 2005 taxonomic workshop, held in Cambridge on 25-27 February, was devoted to the plants traditionally considered to be the northern European members of the Amblystegiaceae. We were most fortunate in having Dr Lars Hedenäs from the Swedish Museum of Natural History, Stockholm, as our guide for the weekend, and many of us came armed with his recent account of some of these species in *Meylania*.

Sixteen participants met on Friday 25 February for the 'optional' field excursion to Roydon Common National Nature Reserve, West Norfolk (v.-c. 28), kindly arranged by Robin Stevenson (see Figure 1). A few decades ago this site, like many Norfolk mires, must have been remarkably rich, but like the rest it has suffered from under-grazing, the spread of trees, drying out and eutrophication. Dr Hedenäs commented that it was 'rather like Denmark', which one



Figure 1. Lars Hedenäs demonstrating an amblystegiaceous moss to Bob Ellis, Robin Stevenson, Liz Kungu and Mark Hill. Roydon Common, 25 February 2005. Photo: Jonathan Sleath.

gathers is not a term of approbation in Sweden. Nevertheless, we managed to find a number of relevant species that are rare in East Anglia, including *Calliergon cordifolium* c.fr., *Campylium stellatum*, *Scorpidium revolvens* c.fr. and *Straminergon* (*Calliergon*) *stramineum*. *Scorpidium scorpioides* here was so small that we were advised to disregard it as positively misleading! Afterwards, the main group went to a nearby quarry to see *Lophocolea semiteres*, while a splinter group recorded a nearby millet field for the SBAL project. We reunited at Robin's house in King's Lynn for tea and most excellent cakes.

The party increased in size to 28 on the Saturday, extra members joining the group for the main business of the weekend at the Anglia Polytechnic University, Cambridge. Excellent laboratory facilities had been made available for us by Dr Helen Roy, to whom many thanks must go for providing the venue and for setting up the arrangements.

We started with an introduction to the terminology and ecology of Scandinavian mires and other wetlands, illustrated with mouth-watering pictures of Swedish localities. The importance of water chemistry and nutrient status in determining wetland types and bryophyte distribution was discussed. We were then introduced to the concept of the Calliergonaceae, which includes the genera *Scorpidium*, *Hamatocaulis*, *Loeskeypnum*, *Warnstorfia*, *Calliergon* and *Straminergon*. The UK species were described and illustrated with superb photographs and drawings that demonstrated

both field and microscopic characters of taxonomic importance. Further presentations during the two days spent in the laboratory covered other members of the Amblystegiaceae s.l., together with genera such as *Calliergonella*, *Sanionia*, *Tomentypnum* and *Conardia* whose familial status is rather uncertain.

Dr Hedenäs had kindly provided a large selection of herbarium material which we were able to dissect and study under his guidance. This was very useful in helping us to appreciate some of the finer taxonomic differences amongst this critical group of plants. We also brought our own material for study, and this resulted in the quite unexpected identification of *Amblystegium radicale* from arable fields in south Wales and north-east Scotland. As a break from the lab work, Dr Hedenäs also treated us to an on the whole convincing explanation of why we have to abandon our old understanding of traditional genera such as *Drepanocladus* and embrace the new taxonomy. His arguments were supported by cladograms derived from morphological and molecular data. There clearly remains considerable uncertainty about the affinities of many of these plants, and it was obvious that we had not heard the last word on the subject.

Particular thanks must go to Chris Preston, whose diligence as local secretary in arranging the speaker, venue, parking and eating places, ensured a most enjoyable weekend. We all left the meeting with an increased understanding of this group of plants, and many of us also took away some packets of Swedish bryophytes.