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Reports of BBS meetings

Spring field meeting 2007, Northamptonshire

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Introduction

Throughout the following account, new vice-county records are indicated with an asterisk (*). Nomenclature follows Paton (1999), *The liverwort flora of the British Isles*, and Smith (2004), *The moss flora of Britain and Ireland*, 2nd edition.

The headquarters for the meeting was Moulton College. Located in Moulton village, just to the north of Northampton, it was well placed for visiting sites both to the northeast and to the southwest of the county. The college staff members were

friendly and helpful, contributing to a very relaxed atmosphere. The food was good student fare, and plentiful! We appreciated the compact size of the campus, as the car park, the accommodation blocks, the dining room and the classrooms were all in close proximity. Another plus point was the very short walk to the local pub, The Telegraph, which was literally next door to the college.

We had the use of two classrooms. After the first evening, the larger of the two became our microscope room (Figure 1), where we could examine and discuss our specimens on return from the

field. We had managed to borrow a large display board on which we put a map of v.-c. 32 (bigger than modern Northamptonshire) with the sites to be visited marked, plus several species lists that included the v.-c. list and the Northamptonshire bryophytes mentioned by H.N. Dixon 100 years or more ago. Rachel's husband Chris took on the role of official photographer and entertained us in the evenings with a continuous slide show of the day's activities. He was also invaluable in ferrying people and equipment. The second classroom was used for BBS Committee meetings on the Friday and Saturday.

Thirty-six people stayed at the college, some for the whole meeting, others just for a day or two. Those who stayed in college were: Ian Atherton, Joan Bingley, John Blackburn, Tim Blackstock, Tom Blockeel, Sam Bosanquet, Tessa Carrick, John Davis, Sean Edwards, Joan Egan, Bob Ellis, Maren Flagmeier, Richard Fisk, Lorna Fraser, Mary Ghullam, Martin Godfrey, Mark Hill, Rita Holmes, David Holyoak, Joan James, Roy Jeffery, Elizabeth Kungu, Jill Lang, Mark Lawley, Graham Motley, Brian O'Shea, Mark Pool, Ron Porley, Chris Preston, Jonathan Sleath, Rod Stern, Robin Stevenson, Christopher Tipper, Jo Wilbraham and Jacqueline Wright.

Seven members – Rachel Carter, Chris Cheffings, Frances Higgs, Nathalie Hueber, Colin Wall, Martin Wigginton, David Wildman and Sue Wildman – commuted from home. Ken Adams, David Rycroft and Mike Walton attended for Council meetings.

Thursday 12th April

Several people arrived at the college in the mid to late afternoon and after being shown to their rooms, met up over a cup of tea in the kitchens at the end of the corridors in the residential blocks.

At 7.30 pm, we assembled in the larger classroom for the introductory talks. The first was given by Rachel on Northamptonshire, its bryophyte habitats, and the life history of its famous bryologist, H.N. Dixon. The second, on the geology of Northamptonshire and its possible influence on bryophyte substrates, was given by Joan's husband, David.

After the talks, Rachel directed a challenge to all assembled to try to find the mosses on Dixon's list – and to see how many we could add to it. She then discussed the practical arrangements for the following days of the meeting.

Friday 13 April

Twywell Hills and Dales, the venue for our first excursion, is a former ironstone quarry which is now a nature reserve with limestone grassland, woodland, and the 'gullet' – the old quarry itself (Figure 2). The excavation through several strata and the mixing of soils in the spoil-heaps has led to a mosaic of substrates; any preconceived ideas about likely finds had to be abandoned quickly, as calcifuge species like *Polytrichum juniperinum* were found close to calcicoles such as *Homalothecium lutescens*.



Figure 1. The classroom at Moulton College. Photo: Chris Carter.



Figure 2. Close examination of Twywell Gullet. Photo: Chris Carter.

We were met by Bernard Jackson, the warden of the site. Bernard escorted a small group to the “dangerous” section of the gullet, where steep unstable banks drop down to a deep pool. Agile bryologists more used to mountain terrain were unimpressed by the supposed hazards of Northamptonshire quarries either here or at Irchester, and all emerged unscathed, with a good list of bryophytes.

A second group walked across to the woodland. This has an area of acid soil, unusual in Northamptonshire, and produced a good crop of calcifuge species. Many people probably didn't realise that *Hylocomium splendens* is a real rarity here! Other notable species included *Bryum pseudotriquetrum*, *Hypnum jutlandicum* and *Rhytidadelphus triquetrus*.

The main part of the gullet proved to be the most interesting area bryologically, with a variety of habitats in a sheltered environment. *Racomitrium heterostichum* was soon found, followed by *Brachythecium glareosum*, *Campyliadelphus chrysophyllos*, *Campylophyllum calcareum*, *Cephaloziella divaricata* and *Trichodon cylindricus*.

Overall, Twywell is the richest Northamptonshire site visited during this meeting; 98 taxa were re-

corded, all within a single 1km grid square.

Setting the pattern for the following days, we split into several groups for the afternoon, so that we could cover more sites in this under-recorded county. The three sites – Fermyn Woods Country Park, Irchester Country Park, and Whiston Quarry and Spinney – all included former quarries, plus adjacent woodland. Maren Flagmeier and Mary Ghullam found *Cololejeunea minutissima** simultaneously, at Whiston Quarry and Fermyn Woods respectively. Irchester also produced a new county record: Rod Stern found *Microlejeunea ulicina** in the quarry, which was also the only place *Brachythecium salebrosum* was recorded during the meeting. *Chiloscyphus pallescens*, *Gyroweisia tenuis* and *Riccardia chamedryfolia* were there as well. *Herzogiella seligeri* was found in the woods at Irchester, only the second site in the county for this scarce species, and *Palustriella commutata* was growing on tufa in Whiston Spinney.

Saturday 14 April

On the Saturday nearly 40 people met in the morning mist on the roadside by Mantles Heath, and Tony Balbi led us to High Wood. Tony has been warden of the Wildlife Trust reserve High Wood and Meadow for many years and could answer all our questions about the site and its management. Sheltered in a valley draining to the west, High Wood is one of the most favourable sites in the county for bryophytes, and with the bluebells already in flower it was also very attractive. A total of 70 bryophytes were recorded. Chris Preston pointed out *Platygrium repens*, Tom Blockeel recorded *Metzgeria temperata*, Tim Blackstock discovered *Cephalozia lunulifolia** and Mark Hill found *Plagiothecium latebricola**. *Dicranum montanum* would also have been a new county record if we'd not heard that Nick Hodgetts found it at the same site a few months previously.

Recording in the meadow was initially disappointing as we struggled to reach double figures, but things improved when we reached a patch of willows, with *Metzgeria fruticulosa*, *Orthotrichum pulchellum* and *Radula complanata*, and we eventually got to 28 species.

By midday the mist had cleared; coats were stripped off, sun hats and sun cream put on, and we spread out over the hillside to enjoy lunch with a view over the wood, its big cherry trees in bloom, and the rolling Northamptonshire countryside beyond.

After lunch most people walked over to Mantles Heath, another stand of ancient woodland, but less sheltered than High Wood and more affected by inappropriate management in the past, so we expected it to be less interesting. In the event we were favourably surprised, with 57 species recorded, as against 70 at High Wood. Tom Blockeel soon found our third (and last) colony of *Cololejeunea minutissima* (Figure 3).

Plagiothecium latebricola and *Platygyrium repens* were present again, and Robin Stevenson's group recorded *Plagiothecium undulatum*, very rare in the county.



Figure 3. *Cololejeunea minutissima* at Mantles Heath. Photo: Nathalie Hueber.

Some people went off to record other sites in the vicinity. Ramsden Corner has acid grassland alongside a small wood, but there weren't any very exciting bryophytes. Woodford Halse reserve is a disused railway line which yielded an unexpectedly good list of 55 species, including Mark Lawley's *Weissia brachycarpa* var. *obliqua*. Everdon Stubbs, although renowned locally as a bluebell wood, was comparatively dull and was soon abandoned in favour of some cross-country exploration. Parkland churchyards at Brockhall and Holdenby were both species-rich, notably with *Tortula marginata* at Holdenby. At a canal-side site Chris Preston recorded *Rhynchostegiella curviseta*, and Jonathan Sleath found the similar but apparently distinct *Rhynchostegiella teneriffae**. Here he also got the only record this meeting of *Didymodon australasiae* var. *umbrosus*.

Sunday 15 April

Rose Pride greeted us at Ring Haw on Sunday morning, and led us to the field station at the heart of the Wildlife Trust's extensive reserve at Old Sulehay. Once again we split up to cover the large area. Joan's group went back along the track to look at the old quarry area and Ring Haw wood. Martin Godfrey recorded *Gymnostomum calcareum**, and also "de-bracketed" *Orthotrichum striatum*; a few plants of *Climacium dendroides* were seen as well, and *Anomodon viticulosus* was found in the wood.

Rose took people down to the marshy area, and then round the limestone grassland of the old calcining banks and the newly restored Sammocks Hill. The wet area proved to be the most interesting, with *Amblystegium varium*, *Aneura pinguis*, *Bryum pseudotriquetrum*, *Didymodon tophaceus* and *Syntrichia laevipila*, all infrequent in Northamptonshire, plus another small clump of *Orthotrichum striatum*.



Figure 4. *Ditrichum gracile* at Stonepit Quarry. Photo: Chris Carter.

Rachel led a group back to the entrance and across the road to the former quarry area at Stonepit Close. A small patch of *Ditrichum gracile* immediately attracted interest; as we progressed further we saw it covered a remarkably large area (Figure 4) – Chris Preston thought there might be more here than in the whole of East Anglia!

A small liverwort growing on the quarry floor occasioned some discussion; Ron Porley later confirmed that it was *Leiocolea badensis*. There was a patch of plentiful *Encalypta streptocarpa*; there is only one previous record of these two species in vice-county 32, both from this site. Other notable records included both *Trichostomum crispulum* and *T. brachydontium*, and, remarkably, fruiting *Pseudoscleropodium purum*. The card also recorded “lizard”, evidently elevated to honorary bryophyte.

Sunday afternoon was the only time we strayed out of Northamptonshire, to Bedford Purlieus NNR, which is in Cambridgeshire, but still in v.-c. 32. Bedford Purlieus is a large, varied and bryologically rich tract of ancient woodland. Even our large group couldn’t cover it all, but they recorded assiduously and logged 89 species, including *Rhytidadelphus loreus* and *Calypogeia arguta* as well as *C. fissa*. Rita Holmes found *Nowellia curvifolia*

– only one previous record from v.-c. 32.

Rachel took Mark Hill and a few others to an adjacent small wood where rumour said that *Sphagnum* once grew. Bryophytes such as *Pleuridium acuminatum* suggested that it is unusually acidic for this area, but most of the deep hollows are now dry, and there was no *Sphagnum*. A pond at the far end had some huge *Fontinalis*, but again no *Sphagnum*.

Monday 16 April

An extra excursion was arranged on Monday morning; *Ricciocarpos natans* grows abundantly in some of the bunker ponds in Yardley Chase, and members who were not familiar with this scarce liverwort eagerly took up the opportunity to be escorted into these private woods by Tony Richardson, voluntary Conservation Advisor to Compton Estates. The growth was not as extensive as it had been a few weeks earlier (and indeed was again a few weeks later), but there was enough to show to people, and for a collection to be made for the Edinburgh liverwort barcoding project.

Some of this group proceeded homewards after seeing the *Ricciocarpos*; the rest went on to Stan-



Figure 5. *Ricciocarpus natans* from Yardley Chase. Photo: Rachel Carter.

wick Lakes, an area of recent gravel workings in the Nene Valley which are being developed as a multi-faceted leisure complex. In spite of an unpromising appearance, they managed to record a very creditable 56 species. The highlight was *Oc-todiceras fontanum*, found by Sam Bosanquet on brickwork at the side of the river below the weir; other notable species were *Amblystegium humile*, *Bryum gemmiferum* and *Fissidens crassipes*.

Everyone else spent the morning around more mature gravel pits at Thrapston. About 50 species were recorded here, including *Amblystegium varium*, *Oxyrrhynchium speciosum* and *Syntrichia virescens*. The hard-standing around the sailing club provided material for a very useful lesson in *Brachythecium* identification from Mark Hill, since *B. albicans* and *B. mildeanum* (which Mark calls “car park moss”) were growing side by side, with the ubiquitous *B. rutabulum* nearby.

The group fragmented in the afternoon to undertake recording on several small Nene valley sites: gravel workings at Ditchford Lakes and Wilson’s Pits, and also an area of elder and hawthorn scrub at Wadenhoe on the banks of the river Nene, where there were copious quantities of epiphytes, especially *Zygodon* and *Homalothecium*, although not a wide range of species. *Plagiomnium elatum* was also recorded there.

Chris Preston and Sam Bosanquet explored Withmale Park Wood, finding *Plagiothecium succulentum* and *Pellia neesiana*, neither of which are common in Northants, and Mark Lawley found *Grimmia trichophylla** at Earls Barton church. Several churchyards were visited in the course of people’s journeys back to Moulton College, making this an extremely productive day for adding to our knowledge of Northamptonshire bryophytes, with over 500 individual records logged, the highest daily total of the meeting.

Tuesday 17 April

By Tuesday numbers had dwindled, but we still had enough people for two groups to cover four more sites. In the morning we visited Hollowell and Ravensthorpe reservoirs, both fairly small reservoirs managed by Anglian Water, as is the much larger Pitsford Reservoir. Pitsford includes a nature reserve where Frances Higgs has recorded 100 different bryophytes over a period of several years – so 74 species at Hollowell was excellent, especially as the water was very high and there was no marginal mud at all. Ravensthorpe yielded 53, still a creditable number for a Northamptonshire site, including the locally rare *Cinclidotus fontinaloides*. *Hygroamblystegium tenax* was found at both, doubling the number of sites in the county for this species (... and it isn’t on the Pitsford list ... yet).

At lunchtime the Hollowell contingent moved on to Kelmarsh, where a disused railway line – now the Brampton Valley Way foot- and cycle-path – skirts the Kelmarsh Hall Estate. New Covert is a small wood on the north side of a little hill; there were plenty of epiphytes. The north end of the Kelmarsh tunnel must have been the richest few square metres of the whole meeting, with 22 species recorded including *Brachythecium plumosum**,



Figure 6. Recording done. Photo: Chris Carter.

B. populeum, *Calypogeia fissa*, *Campylopus flexuosus*, *Cephalozia bicuspidata*, *Didymodon tophaceus*, *Fissidens dubius* and *Riccardia chamedryfolia* as well as commoner species.

The Ravensthorpe party drove south to Buckingham Thick Copse NNR, where we met Nicola Orchard, Natural England conservation officer for Northamptonshire. Nicola gave a short introduction to the wood, which is notable for its veteran oak trees, and then escorted us round. The bryophyte population was good but not special; *Dicranum montanum* was found again, along with other commoner woodland species including *Cirriphyllum piliferum* and *Tetraphis pellucida*.

Conclusion

The remaining few people elected to head for home on Wednesday morning. Roy Jeffery and Mark Pool called in at three churchyards in the Brackley area on their way, and logged another 98 records (surely they could have managed a couple more!), including two more healthy populations of *Leucodon sciurooides*, and two of the week's four records of *Porella platyphylla*.

The final statistics were: over 2000 individual records, of over 200 taxa. There were 3 new liverwort records for the vice-county and 5 new mosses, plus several "de-bracketings". This isn't a large number compared with the results of meetings in other under-recorded counties – confirming the view that the dearth of interesting bryophyte records in Northamptonshire reflects the poverty of the flora as well as a lack of recording activity. Nevertheless, there seemed to be plenty to keep

people interested, in spite of very dry weather, and the warm spring sunshine contributed to the comfort of bryologists, if not the bryophytes. We succeeded in extending the species lists for every site we visited, and recorded in parts of the county which had been almost unexplored previously: thus almost 100 records (from 3 sites) were added to a 10km square for which there had been only a handful of unlocalised records, mostly by H.N. Dixon.

Dixon's moss list for Northamptonshire comprised 199 species (excluding a number of very common ones which Dixon must have regarded as ubiquitous and not mentioned specifically). Of these, we found 125. The remainder range from species now rare, such as *Antitrichia curtipendula*, several for which the appropriate habitat now hardly exists – *Polytrichum commune*, *Pleurozium schreberi*, etc. – to some, like *Leptobryum pyriforme*, which we simply didn't come across. In addition, we recorded a further 19 species, including some very scarce mosses and recent introductions like *Orthodontium lineare* and *Campylopus introflexus* which have become commonplace. Instances where changes to classification makes comparison dubious have been disregarded; we had a dozen or so more taxa which were not recognised in Dixon's day.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank everyone who contributed to the success of the Field Meeting, especially those who made their sites available for us to visit, the people who came out to show us round, and the staff at Moulton College.