

Border Bryologists 2008

Judging by the number of species recorded at the meetings reported here by **Mark Lawley**, wintry weather is clearly no barrier to this intrepid group of bryologists.

Given the Meteorological Office's doom-laden pronouncement, it helped to be insane if you were thinking of attending our January meeting, led by Ray Woods at Carngafallt SSSI (SN9563/9564) near Llanwrthwl in north Breconshire (v.-c. 42). As ever, of course, the weather was far less frightening than the forecast had been, and nothing more perilous than passing blustery showers dampened the ardour of a few die-hards who emerged from their burrows to investigate the bryoflora of a south-facing block scree in deciduous woodland. Choice among about 100 species recorded during the day, the wooded scree harboured several species characteristic of humid, western woodlands – *Dicranum fuscescens*, *Fissidens celticus*, *Isoetecium alopecuroides*, *Leucobryum juniperoideum*, *Loeskeobryum brevirostre*, and the liverworts *Cololejeunea minutissima* and *Plagiochila spinulosa*. A small stream and gorge contained a surprisingly large colony of *Jubula hutchinsiae*, whose greyish hue contrasted with pale green mats of *Trichocolea tomentella* and bright, shiny green *Hookeria lucens* nearby. Above the wood, a rather base-enriched flush at the edge of the moor held bright orange *Sphagnum subsecundum* and spindlier shoots of *S. teres*. But perhaps the weather wasn't so marvellous after all, and a cup of tea at the farmhouse below made a pleasant end to the day.

We met in February on a cold, clear day at Croes Robert Wood (SO4705/4805/4806), a Gwent WT reserve in Monmouthshire, where Sam Bosanquet led 10 bryologists to explore the reserve's north-facing wooded slopes. These cloak the Brown-

stones – the upper part of the Old Red Sandstone, which forms much of the Black Mountains and Brecon Beacons, and occur as an outlier on the Trellech Ridge in eastern Monmouthshire. This sandstone proved to be sufficiently calcareous in one or two places for *Neckera crispa* and *Tortella tortuosa*.

Our fun began in the lane, where the comparatively stiff shoots of *Oxyrrhynchium schleicheri* grew on a soil bank alongside *O. hians* for comparison. Stones in rivulets in the wood held *Fissidens rivularis*, and epiphytes included some fine colonies of *Cryphaea heteromalla*, as well as *Orthotrichum pulchellum* and *O. tenellum*. Tracksides gave us *Archidium alternifolium*, *Ephemerum minutissimum*, *Fissidens exilis*, *Pohlia wahlenbergii* and *Fossombronina pusilla*. Indeed, with 11 pairs of eyes searching, and numerous habitats in the wood, we made a commendably large list of 110 species.

To end the day, we drove a couple of miles to Trellech Quarry (SO5007), where acidic rock and soil held *Ditrichum heteromallum* and the liverworts *Diplophyllum obtusifolium* and *Lophozia bicrenata*. In addition, Jonathan Sleath found *Cephaloziella rubella*. However, boy-racers were enthusiastically rejuvenating the habitat on very noisy motorbikes, so we called time for tea.

In March, we met to explore Wilderley Hill and Long Rough (SJ4100/4200) at the northern end of the Long Mynd in Shropshire, where small *Sphagnum* lawns occur in mires, and tiny streams added further variety to the bryological scene. Conditions proved unpropitious, with a cold wind blowing, but we nevertheless recorded over 50 species, including half a dozen sphagna and *Straminergon stramineum*. However, the most encouraging aspect

of our meeting was the appearance of several new bryologists who came as part of the Field Studies Council's 'Biodiversity Training Project'. Despite the weather, they saw a number of common bryophytes, and later at home were able to refresh their memories by examining the same species in greater comfort on the web pages of the BBS *Field Guide*.

October's meeting went off at Brynmawr Farm (SO2184) in the upper Clun valley of western Shropshire, a couple of miles from the Welsh border. Brynmawr is an 'organic' farm of permanent pasture, with a little arable land. After a morning spent identifying common species using the recently printed prototype of the *Field Guide*, we passed the afternoon by first inspecting an arable field resplendent with large hemp-nettle (*Galeopsis speciosa*) but which required a few fallow months for a varied bryoflora to develop. Nearby, a wet pasture held *Hypnum imponens*, new to Shropshire. *H. imponens* resembles *H. jutlandicum*, but can be distinguished in the field by its red-brown stem, and under the microscope by its toothed paraphyllia.

In November we met for our final meeting of the year at Swardon Quarry (SO5738), south-east of Hereford, where Jonathan Sleath showed us over mildly calcareous Silurian ground on the Woolhope dome. The quarry itself held *Cirriphyllum crassinervium* and *Porella platyphylla* on exposed rock. From there we walked up a track on to Backbury Hill (SO838), with *Fissidens incurvus*, *Oxyrrhynchium pumilum* and *Rhynchostegiella tenella* beside the track, and *Cryphaea heteromalla*, *Ulota bruchii*, *U. crispa*, *U. phyllantha*, *Metzgeria fruticulosa* and *Radula complanata* on trees. At the top of the hill, patches of unshaded soil held *Aloina aloides* and *Didymodon acutus*. A little further on, the limestone exposures of Adam's Rocks gave us *Fissidens viridulus* and *Zygodon viridissimus*, and Pete Martin found a colony of *Cololejeunea rossettiana* – a fittingly classy liverwort with which to complete our adventures.

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