

Cambridgeshire Bryophyte Group
22 December 2024: Haddenham

Present: Astrid Biddle, Mark Hill, Chris Preston, Jonathan Shanklin, Pete Stroh, Lucy Wilson.

We normally have a midwinter excursion in deepest Fenland, aimed at recording tetrads which offer no great prospect of bryological excitement, and this was the purpose of our current meeting. (I wondered whether this was the nearest we had ever met to the shortest day, 21 December, but in fact plenty of records have been made in Cambridgeshire on 21 December, though no-one has ever recorded a bryophyte in the county on Christmas Day.) We didn't this time have a named storm to combat, but the bitterly cold wind seemed at times as strong as Bert and Darragh on our last two excursions.

Our rendezvous was at Haddenham church which we visited in 1987 and I recorded on a solo visit in 2004. Though we didn't skimp on time in the churchyard, we found only 23 of the 34 species previously recorded. We did add six species to the list, thanks in large part to a productive cherry tree which gave us *Lewinskya affinis*, *Pulviger a lyellii*, *Syntrichia virescens* and *Frullania dilatata*. In addition to finding *Frullania* on the tree, Jonathan spotted a small patch on a gravestone in its partial shade. *Zygodon viridissimus* was in good quantity on the north wall of the church – did we really miss this on earlier visits? Although our failure to re-find 11 species seems rather reprehensible, our overall total of 29 species was in fact greater than the totals in 1987 (25) and 2004 (28).

Mark had cunningly chosen a block of three monads west of the village for the main part of the day, each of them in a separate, under-recorded tetrad. We stopped at a single site in each. In tetrad TL47I, from which we had records of just two aquatic bryophytes (*Fontinalis* and *Ricciocarpos*), we looked at a shelter belt of willow and poplar at New Cut Bridge on clay soil, recording 17 species. There were abundantly fruiting patches of *Fissidens incurvus* on the ground, a good sign of clay soil in the Fens, and *Cryphaea heteromalla* had reached this isolated spot.

We went on to two tetrads with no records at all. In TL47H we had a standing lunch (there was nowhere to sit) near Causeway Farm. As we ate, we noticed a Great-spotted Woodpecker climbing up a nearby telegraph pole – trees are few and far between in Fenland. After lunch we looked at a muddy track, roadside trees and shrubs, and farm buildings. Here we got 20 species, the most abundant being *Syntrichia ruraliformis* which was present in a dense sheet not only on the roof of an outbuilding but hanging off the edge. Astrid pointed out the alga *Vaucheria* on damp mud, looking like any other filamentous alga at first but rather characteristic when seen under the lens. She also recorded the bryophilous fungus *Octospora wrightii* on *Amblystegium serpens*. Finally, in TL47C, the owners of New Farm allowed us to explore their garden. Thanks to their kindness, we got 24 species at this site. *Orthotrichum anomalum*, *Schistidium crassipilum* and *Syntrichia montana* had colonised the coping stone of their roadside wall, as well as the commoner *Grimmia pulvinata* and *Tortula muralis*.



Top left: long shadows near near Causeway Farm – where do we look for bryophytes? *Astrid Biddle*. Rest: the hanging carpet of *Syntrichia ruraliformis*. *Chris Preston* and (close-up) *Astrid Biddle*.



Two bonus species, *Vaucheria canalicularis* and *Octospora wrightii*. *Astrid Biddle*.

Although the light was beginning to fade at lunchtime, the day brightened and there was time in the sunnier afternoon to go to Guppy's Pond, a County Wildlife Site in Haddenham to which Jonathan led us. This seemed to me rather Scandinavian in feel, with modern houses built at the edge of the water. Here we recorded 21 species, including for the first time in the day the increasing frequent *Syntrichia papillosa*.

The tetrads we visited, excluding the church on the 'fen island', bring to mind Rory Hodd's notorious claim that there are more bryophytes on a single rock in Co. Kerry than in a tetrad in Cambridgeshire. However, we enjoyed this pre-Christmas outing in Fenland, and the challenge of adding to meagre species lists. In all we recorded a creditable 50 species.

Chris Preston 12 January 2025



Guppy's Pond. *Astrid Biddle*.