

The Fenland Flora at the end of 2014

Owen Mountford and Jonathan Graham

Progress in the *Fenland Flora* during 2014

In 2013, the *Fenland Flora* project went public after seven years of work by the two of us getting to grips with the distribution of plants in the Fenland basin – described in articles in *BSBI News*, *Nature in Cambridgeshire* and the *Lincolnshire Naturalists' Union Communiqué*. A year ago, we issued our first annual newsletter for collaborators and those who might contribute to the *Flora*. These efforts at outreach and information have been since augmented through an article for the *Wicken Fen Research & Recording Newsletter*, a poster paper for the Ouse Washes Landscape Partnership event (St Ives, November 2014) and a lecture to the Cambridge Natural History Society (February 2015).

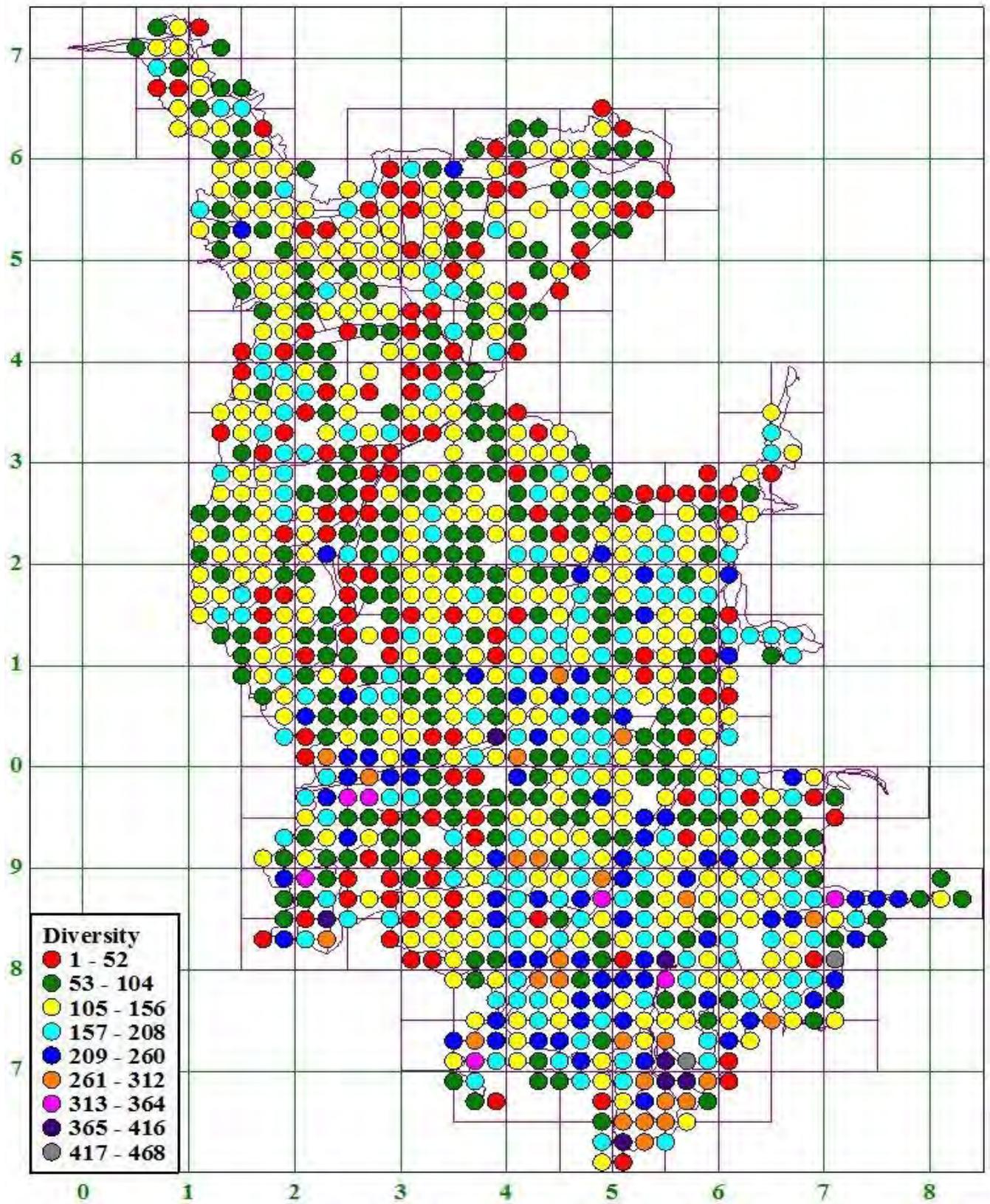
Close collaboration continued with BSBI recorders for the Fenland vice-counties (Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire, Lincolnshire (north & south), west Norfolk, Northamptonshire and west Suffolk). In 2013 Martin Sanford had provided to us all relevant tetrad data, and during 2014, three other counties followed suit with their post-2000 records: David Broughton in Huntingdonshire, Rob Wilson in Northamptonshire and Jonathan Shanklin for Cambridgeshire. Transfer of Lincolnshire data has begun with recent records from Sarah Lambert. Jeremy Fraser (Lincs Wildlife Trust) has alerted us to his detailed coverage of County Wildlife Sites (CWS), especially for drains, and these data are held by the Lincolnshire Environmental Records Centre. Similar data on Norfolk CWS have been offered to us by the Norfolk Wildlife Trust (Helen Baczkowska and Emily Nobbs). The *Fenland Flora* project is very grateful for these data which have improved our coverage greatly.

As we had hoped, the most significant change between 2013 and 2014 has been the increase in recording by other botanists focussing on Fenland, with Steven and Lizzie Heathcote contributing records all over southern Lincolnshire, and Robin Stevenson and Lewis Saunders concentrating on the area between Guyhirn and King's Lynn. Lewis made two of the most surprising records of 2014 near Wisbech: the mainly western *Fumaria capreolata* by a factory and *Epipactis helleborine* in a poplar wood. Fumitories are becoming something of a special genus for our survey: having added *Fumaria parviflora* to Lincolnshire in 2013, we found *F. muralis* ssp. *boraei* near Tumbly Woodside (vc 54), the first site for the subspecies in Lincolnshire and only the fourth recent record for the species (with all others in being in vc 53). Several scarce species have been found to be locally frequent in our project area, with the Fenland forming an important refuge e.g. *Baldellia ranunculoides*, *Groenlandia densa*, *Potamogeton trichoides* and *Torilis arvensis*.

We have continued to arrange joint field meetings with flora groups, and in 2015 these will also include excursions with the Lincolnshire Naturalists Union. In late summer 2014, the Cambridgeshire group visited several tetrads near Chatteris and Doddington finding *Sonchus palustris* scattered all along the Forty Foot Drain as well as *Potamogeton compressus* – this rare pondweed seems to have spread back into Fenland (Graham & Preston *Nature in Cambridgeshire* 2012). We made excursions attempting to define the edge of Fenland in river floodplains and were rewarded with finding *Potamogeton praelongus* twice in the River Little Ouse on the Norfolk/Suffolk border.

This much increased activity and data transfer is reflected in the coverage map below, which both celebrates the progress of the *Flora* and helps focus our efforts for 2015 and beyond.

Fenland Flora coverage at the end of 2014
Numbers of species recorded since 2000



What should we do and where should we go in 2015?

With each successive year, the priorities for *Flora* survey change and/or become refined. However, our main concerns for 2015 do resemble those of 2014, and we have summarised where we believe effort should now focus in a document listing priority tetrads for survey:

- Precedence should go to those areas where we have as yet no *Fenland Flora* data (blank on the map), especially in TF23 and TF33, generally in vice county 54 (North Lincolnshire) and in the sliver of Fenland north from King's Lynn on the east shore of the Wash (West Norfolk).
- As we noted in our first newsletter (and supported by Paul Kirby – BSBI North Lincolnshire), we would expect even the most uniform arable fenland with few wet ditches and no village to have 100 species. Hence those tetrads with ≤ 52 species recorded (marked red on the map) are likely to be under-recorded and should also be prioritised for survey. Even some "green tetrads" (53-104 species recorded) seem to need more attention. Certain types of "red tetrad" might actually have relatively complete coverage *i.e.* those that only include salt-marshes of the Wash.
- The data we have received from Suffolk and Cambridgeshire include a number of "Fen edge" tetrads where we cannot always distinguish records for Fenland from those referring to the uplands. Our work along the Little Ouse helped clarify the situation, but we need to continue to look at Lark, Nar, Wissey and Witham floodplains below 5m aOD, as well as the Fenland shore near Isleham and around Ramsey and Soham.

Nonetheless, our conclusion must remain as we described last year: much of our area still remains rather under-recorded and if botanists are anywhere in Fenland, the data they gather will be useful and we encourage you to record your observations and pass them on to us.

Anyone interested in contributing to the Fenland Flora should contact:

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Jonathan Graham at jonathan.graham@ntlworld.com

To help recorders, we will provide on request:

- Standard BRC record cards and those specific to each of the Fenland counties
- Documents defining what we mean by Fenland – especially important at the edge of our recording area
- Prospectus for potential recorders, outlining what the project is trying to achieve and how other potential recorders can help
- The revised listing of priority tetrads for survey, identifying those with no *Fenland Flora* data or with fewer than 52 species recorded (sent to active recorders with this newsletter)
- Back-up with difficult identifications

We wish you happy botanising in 2015, thank you for your efforts to date and look forward to your future contributions toward putting the flowers of Fenland on the map.

Jon and Owen, 10th February 2015