

The Fenland Flora at the end of 2015

Owen Mountford and Jonathan Graham

Progress in the *Fenland Flora* during 2015

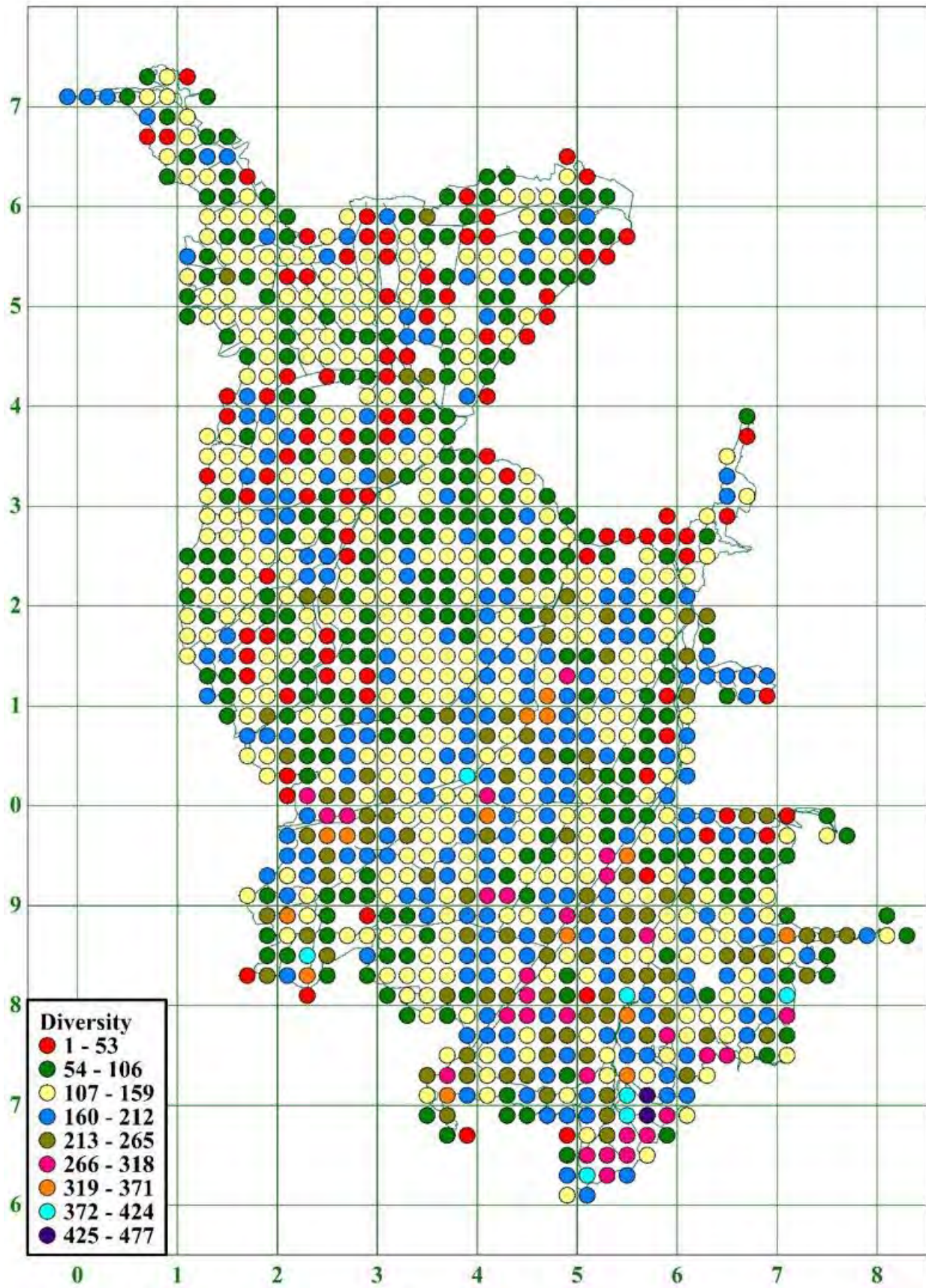
The *Fenland Flora* project has now been gathering data formally for 10 years and 3 years ago we began the “big push” toward completion, publicising the work in local and national naturalists’ journals, as well as creating a web-page on the BSBI website (<http://www.bsbi.org.uk/fenland.html>) and receiving numerous data from other botanists. The project has become increasingly a team effort. In 2015 we continued to give talks, describing the project and providing progress updates: at the Cambridge Natural History Society and to the Fens for the Future steering group. Similar talks are planned in early 2016 for U3A Cambridge and the Hunts Fauna and Flora Society, as well as possibly to the Lincolnshire Naturalists Union.

The project worked closely with BSBI recorders for the Fenland vice-counties (Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire, Lincolnshire (north & south), west Norfolk, Northamptonshire and west Suffolk). The transfer of BSBI data to the Fenland Flora project continued, with Jonathan Shanklin being especially active in the Cambridgeshire (vc 29) Fenland. Jeremy Fraser (Lincs Wildlife Trust) provided more information on County Wildlife Sites (CWS) in preparation for transfer of data from the Lincolnshire Environmental Records Centre. The sheer size of the Fenland means that the *Fenland Flora* project is hugely dependent on inputs from other botanists and naturalists and we want to express our gratitude to these colleagues and everyone else who has donated data.

Probably the largest number of records from previously unworked tetrads has some from Lewis Saunders, based in Wisbech but ranging widely from southeast Lincolnshire to the “border country” between vcs 28 and 29 and from Robin Stevenson (working between Wisbech and King’s Lynn). Their impact can be discerned on the coverage map (below) with Wisbech town becoming a “hot-spot”. Other significant inputs came from Steven and Lizzie Heathcote, as well as Charles Turner and Jeremy Halls. The importance of Fenland for nationally vulnerable species was confirmed, notably *Baldellia ranunculoides*, *Groenlandia densa*, *Myriophyllum verticillatum* and *Torilis arvensis*. In Lincolnshire, our surveys found *Ceratophyllum submersum* in a pit in TF23 (the first post-2000 record for vc 53) and confirmed that *Equisetum ramosissimum* survived near Boston. However, the most important new Lincs record in Fenland was made by Jeremy Fraser in 2013 for Deptford Pink (*Dianthus armeria*) on the bank of the Risegate Eau. This species is endangered on the GB and England Red Lists and now has less than 20 native populations. The population has since increased, partly due to sympathetic management by the IDB.

Joint meetings with county flora groups have contributed greatly to the increased coverage for some tetrads. Four Norfolk Flora Group meetings were held in Fenland: near Heacham, Hockwold, the upper Wissey and South Lynn, all helping to define the Fenland edge. The Cambridgeshire group visited Wisbech, the area west of Littleport and Soham Mere. Despite being so close to Wicken Fen, Soham Mere was a complete blank for the Cambridgeshire scheme and for the Fenland flora, and we’re grateful to Jonathan Shanklin for negotiating access to this one of several fenland tetrads with no public right of way. Our visit brought the tetrad up to a “respectable” total and included the spreading alien *Senecio inaequidens* and the rare archaeophyte grass *Bromus secalinus*. The map below describes the progress of the *Flora* project and will again focus our efforts for 2015 and beyond.

Fenland Flora coverage at the end of 2015
Numbers of species recorded since 2000



What should we do and where should we go in 2016?

The project priorities alter subtly as more areas are covered and we edge closer to completion, but the main concerns for the forthcoming year derived from those for 2014 and 2015:

- Precedence should go to those areas where we have as yet no *Fenland Flora* data (blank on the map), especially in vice county 54 (North Lincolnshire) between Swineshead and Wainfleet and in area north from King's Lynn on the south and east shores of the Wash.
- As we've stated in the past, it should be possible to find at least 100 species even in the most uniform arable fenland with few wet ditches and no villages. Thus, although the number of blank tetrads is now quite low, there are plenty of "red tetrads" (≤53 species recorded) and "green tetrads" (54-106 species recorded) which merit more attention. Only a few Wash shore tetrads and those where the great majority of the area is outwith Fenland should have many less than 100 species.
- We need to make a number of targeted visits to "Fen edge" tetrads in Suffolk and Cambridgeshire (and possibly other counties), where we have good totals for the tetrads but where some non-Fenland records are included. We have focussed in 2015 on "beating the bounds" and that must continue in 2016 and 2017.

Despite these core priorities, data from anywhere in Fenland will be useful. Our underlying motive has been to improve the botanical knowledge of this region of the UK and a species total that goes beyond 150 may not mean that the job is complete.

Anyone interested in contributing to the Fenland Flora should contact:

Owen Mountford at om@ceh.ac.uk (NERC Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, Maclean Building, Benson Lane, Crowmarsh Gifford, Wallingford, Oxfordshire, OX10 8BB [From November 2016: 193 Great North Road, Eaton Socon, St Neots, Cambridgeshire, PE19 8EE] or

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 53 species recorded (sent to active recorders with this newsletter)
- Back-up with difficult identifications

We wish you happy botanising in 2016, 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, 16th January 2016