

# HUNTINGDONSHIRE NEWSLETTER

## Spring 2010

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### First Full Rare Plant Register Published

In May the second edition of the Rare Plant Register was published on the BSBI website (see [www.bsbi.org.uk/rare\\_plants.html](http://www.bsbi.org.uk/rare_plants.html)). This represents the first full Register, covering all species, subspecies and hybrids for which a case for inclusion can be made.



*Cardamine amara* at Hemingford Meadow  
(photo courtesy of Bridget Smith)

Publication has triggered updates of several of the oldest records. In particular, I am grateful to Sheila Wells for updating Greater Chickweed (*Stellaria neglecta*), Bridget Smith for updating Large Bitter-cress (*Cardamine amara*) and Kevin Royles for updating Rustyback (*Asplenium ceterach*).

There is still a long list of species for which we have no recent records and that must be priorities for future investigation. I hope that as many people as possible will continue to support this project, so that by the next edition in 2011 we will have an even better picture of the state of our most notable flora. Certainly I have identified a strong need for the publication of detailed information on the locations of our scarcest flora. Increasing knowledge on where these species grow can only be beneficial, as recent events have shown that even populations within some of our most important nature reserves are vulnerable to loss or damage.

### *Hyacinthoides hispanica* and *H. xmassartiana*

This Spring there has been a flurry of records of odd bulbs growing in semi-natural settings, with records including Summer Snowflake (*Leucojum aestivum*), Crown Imperial (*Fritillaria imperialis*) and Hyacinth (*Hyacinthus orientalis*).

Most recently I have found Spanish Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides hispanica*) at Paxton Pits and it therefore seemed a good opportunity to draw attention to both this species and its hybrid with our native Bluebell (*H. non-scripta*). The hybrid (*H. xmassartiana*) is by far the commonest cultivated and escaped non-native bluebell, but it is still mis-identified for Spanish Bluebell which is much rarer. Indeed Spanish Bluebell is so

uncommon and over-recorded that the onus must very much be on the recorder to demonstrate that their record is correct.



*Hyacinthoides hispanica*



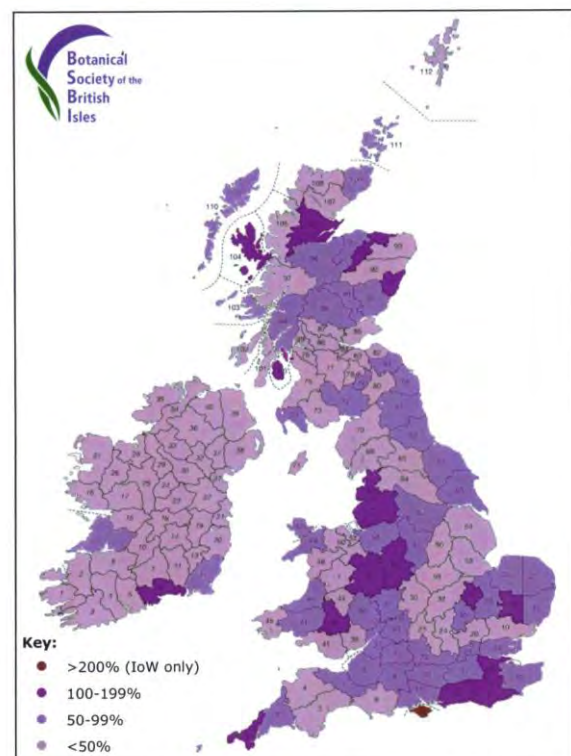
*Hyacinthoides x massartiana*

One handy tip to assist in distinguishing the two taxa is to dissect a flower and look at the stamens. In pure Spanish Bluebell the stamens are all of comparable length, in the hybrid the stamens alternate between long and short (see photos above). Once familiar with the two taxa they aren't particularly challenging to tell apart in most cases. Spanish Bluebell is a rather waxy, plastic looking plant with large flowers and very wide leaves. The hybrid, while still inferior to our native species, inherits a bit of the natural grace of the native plant and is typically less robust in character.

### Goodbye Date Class 4, Hello Date Class 5

In the last newsletter I drew attention to the significant progress that had been made in updating the records for Huntingdonshire. Given this progress was in no small part a result of the hard work of members of the BSBI and HFFS, I thought the attached map would be of interest. It clearly shows how well VC31 has performed in Date Class 4.

The challenge now is to maintain this progress in Date Class 5 (2010 to 2019). As such, I hope to receive records from as many people as possible over coming seasons.



Map of 'recording coverage' achieved since 2000 compared with 1987-1999: based on data submitted electronically to the BSBI to the end of 2009. (Some Vice-counties with lower percentages had very active recording schemes in the 1987-1999 period and therefore have not yet completed full re-surveys.)

### ***Valeriana officinalis* ssp. *collina***

The publication of the new edition of Clive Stace's *New Flora of the British Isles* has opened up the identification of our two subspecies of Common Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*) to the masses. As such, I hope that more people will try to distinguish the two taxa.

Ssp. *sambucifolia* is the commoner of the two subspecies both nationally and locally, being found in wet meadows, marshes, river banks and other wet places. In contrast, ssp. *collina* is much more restricted in distribution. It is widespread in adjacent Peterborough (VC32) where it can be seen in abundance in limestone grassland at Barnack Hills and Holes and on Ailsworth Heath, Castor Hanglands. Both locations are worth a visit to familiarise oneself with this subspecies. It is also a plant of boulder clay woodlands.

It is very poorly known in VC31 and is so far only recorded from very small areas of Monks Wood and Brampton Wood. It is likely to have a distribution comparable to Small Teasel (*Dipsacus pilosus*) but unlike that species is much more sensitive to shading and a lack of woodland management. As such, I feel it is under pressure and have included it in the Rare Plant Register.

The two subspecies can be distinguished as follows:

Plants without stolons and single-stemmed; middle stem leaves with 15-27 leaflets, the terminal not wider than the middle lateral leaflets; flowering stems typically 1-1.2m in height....ssp. *collina*

Plants with stolons so that they comprise multiple stems; middle stem leaves with 5-9 leaflets, the terminal distinctly wider than the middle lateral leaflets; flowering stems usually taller to 2m...ssp. *sambucifolia*

### **Publication of a New Edition of the 'New Flora of the British Isles'**

As indicated above, there is now a new edition of Stace's Flora. This has produced a range of name changes which are summarised at <http://www.bsbi.org.uk/blog.html>. These are not the only changes and I would recommend getting hold of the new edition as it is likely to stand botanists in good stead for the foreseeable future and it is not practical for me to list all new combinations here.

I don't want to dwell on the nomenclatural changes too much, but there are various splits that pose challenges to botanists and that everyone should start to familiarise themselves with as they will dictate how we record certain species groups. This includes the splitting of several challenging taxa into several new species (or in some cases the re-establishment of old species concepts). Examples of subspecies and aggregate taxa raised to species level include those historically in: *Dryopteris affinis*, *Sagina apetala*, *Hedera helix*, *Arenaria serpyllifolia* and *Centaurea nigra*.

The identification of some of these will be beyond many people or will require expert verification. I would emphasise that this is nothing to be ashamed of but would also emphasise that in such circumstances we should make the effort to clarify this in the records we submit. If a plant has been recorded in the aggregate sense then this should always be noted e.g. *Dryopteris affinis* agg. rather than just *Dryopteris affinis*.

## Novelties

Finally, it wouldn't be VC31 newsletter without at least one oddity to entertain those with a keen eye.

Miyabe Maple (*Acer miyabei*) is the working name for those Field Maples with huge



leaves and hairy fruit (see photo which contrasts Miyabe Maple with the smaller leaves of Field Maple). The largest leaves on a tree are greater than 10cm long, the petioles are up to 10cm long and the samaras are 60-70mm long.

The affinity with this Japanese species is not yet 100% certain but

Miyabe Maple is a good enough working name until the situation is clarified.

There are also plants with identical leaves but glabrous fruits e.g. at Cow Lane Pits. These do not fit within the current circumscription of Miyabe Maple and may be something else, part of the range of variation of the non-native *Acer campestre* var. *leiocarpum* or evidence of hybridisation with it.