

Warwickshire Flora Group

Newsletter No. 18 April 2020.

The BSBI has cancelled all of its field meetings until further notice and the Wild Flower Society has done the same. All local Natural History Societies have stopped functioning and the Wildlife Trust is currently working with a skeleton staff. Ecologists are either working from home producing outstanding paperwork or have been laid off. To keep its members amused Warwick Natural History Society has started a weekly newsletter, and every now and then a quiz for members is sent out by the Wildlife Trust. You may have come across a new citizen science project, the BSBI Garden Wildflower Hunt started by Louise Marsh and Kevin Walker. This is similar to the RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch but without binoculars. You can find out more about it on www.bsbi.org.

In spite of all the doom and gloom, spring has definitely sprung and we have received records from Bastiaan Brak, Agni, Louise Sherwell, Brian Laney and Adrian Smith, spotted when either shopping or taking their “essential exercise”. Gary Hillier is even trying to find a species name for the Marton Doronicums. Although we are not square bashing this year, we still welcome records, especially of any of the rarer species.

We have chosen to survey 10 monads around our village and have been walking all of the local footpaths and have discovered some excellent wet woodland, explored a disused railway line, found a flower-filled green lane called “Green Lane” and found *Barbarea intermedia* (see below).

We have also been threatened by a very angry man who thought we had the Covid-19.

Like everybody else, we are rather frustrated that we are unable to visit reserves like Draycote Meadows where the Green-winged Orchids will soon be swaying in the breeze and you never know, the Moonwort might just pop up a leaf while there is nobody there to see it!

Anyway here is some botanical news.

***Barbarea intermedia* – is it being overlooked?**

On April 12th our daily essential exercise led us to an arable field about 200 metres from our house in Baddesley Ensor. We noticed some plants of a *Barbarea sp.* (Wintercress) and took a shoot from one of the plants to check at home expecting it to be a specimen of *B. vulgaris* (Common Wintercress) which is widespread in the area (260 Warwickshire records since 2000).



We were wrong! The upper stem leaves were pinnate rather than toothed and the petals were also smaller than those of Common Wintercress. We had found ***Barbarea intermedia*** with the not very imaginative English name of **Medium-flowered Wintercress**, with only 14 Warwickshire records since 2000. We sent a photo of the specimen to the BSBI crucifer referee and received a reply within an hour from his phone. (If only all BSBI referees were as conscientious!)

Walking the lanes of North Warwickshire the following day we came across another plant next to the A5 in Grendon and half an hour later found yet another on a heap of soil at Dairy House Farm. Two days later a fourth plant turned up beside the road in the middle of our village. It makes you wonder how many records of Common Wintercress in the past are not correct. Please look out for it. 2020, with its warm winter may just be a good year for it.

***Ficaria verna* (Lesser Celandine) subspecies.**

Now that the flowers are fading on Lesser Celandine plants this is the perfect time to look at the base of the leaf stems for little white bulbils. If you find some you will have **subsp. *verna*** and if you don't you will have **subsp. *fertilis***. Both subspecies are common.

Try www.thewildflowersociety.com/wfs_articles/february_article.htm for a guide and photos.

New and Interesting Records

During the winter and early spring we have managed to add just two new species to the county plant list. The most impressive was the naturalized ***Scilla sardensis* (Lesser Glory of the Snow)** that Bastiaan Brak discovered in Lea Valley Nature Reserve that you have already read about in a previous e mail. ***Pulmonaria rubra* (Red Lungwort)**, a garden escape, was seen growing in woodland near the village of Baxterley in January. The second county record of ***Bergenia x schmidtii* (Schmidt's Elephant-ears)** was seen by the railway bridge in Woodshire Road, Exhall in March. This plant was a true garden throw-out or rather a true garden throw-over. A colony had developed behind an impenetrable metal security fence and had probably developed from a plant lobbed over the top of it. We have four records of Elephant-ears from the county two of *B. crassifolia*, one of *Bergenia cordifolia*, and an extra record of *B. x schmidtii* from Yardley, Birmingham. Poland reckons that *B. schmidtii* is the most widespread in Britain and you will need Stace and Poland and the key and photos on the Manual of Alien Plants of Belgium website to identify it.

Book Reviews

Out in May is a new photographic guide to **Britain's Ferns, Clubmosses, Quillworts, and Horsetails** by **James Merryweather (WILDguides)** that aims to cover every British species. This will be a good companion for his indispensable The Fern Guide, published by the FSC and can be bought for under £20. Another book that caught my eye was the second edition of **London Street Trees** by **Paul Wood and Sadiq Khan** which will be published shortly. It isn't a field guide but a celebration of urban planting and highlights the huge range of species that are able to survive in the heat island of Britain's capital city. He has also published a map to the Great Trees of London, and writes a blog on www.thestreettree.com, he can also be found on Instagram and Twitter. One for the professionals is Volume 20 of the BSBI Handbooks on the **Hawkweeds of South-east England** by **Mike Shaw**. Looking at the previews on the NHBS website it seems to have good coloured photos of all the bits that matter for identification and may help us to identify a few more of the Warwickshire species.

Monika has just bought a German grasses book and here is a very quick **QUIZ QUESTION** from it.

**Which species of grass with a very English name is known as "Woolly Honeygrass"
(Wolliges Honiggras) in German? (answer in Newsletter 19).**

A Little Bit of Politics to end with.

The BSBI has at last formed an English committee to work alongside the Scottish, Northern Ireland and Welsh ones to discuss particular matters affecting England, and we moved into the 21st century and took part in our first video conference of vice-county recorders. Amongst the issues raised, dealing with the huge numbers of records from citizen science projects was a bugbear. Such projects are great for beginners but some recorders had to check, correct and even dismiss many records as they were so inaccurate. Another recorder was worried about the inaccuracy of some of the phone apps that give grid refs. If there was no good signal they can be up to 200 metres out. Please use them with care.