

HUNTINGDONSHIRE NEWSLETTER

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This is the third in my series of newsletters for VC31 and now that winter is almost upon us it is also likely to be the last one I produce until next spring. As such, it provides a good opportunity to review some of this year's highlights and to look to the future.

New County Records

The current Vice-County Census Catalogue currently lists 1186 taxa for Huntingdonshire. This is a relatively modest list given the geographic position of the County, particularly as Bedfordshire has a total of 1817 taxa listed, Cambridgeshire 1792 and Northamptonshire 1439.

There has been a significant increase in the number of taxa recorded for the County over the last few years and I thought it might be of interest to list these here. Full details of many of these records will be published in due course in *Watsonia* while the records for 2008 will also be published early next year in the Huntingdonshire Fauna and Flora Society (HFFS) Annual Report.

Velvetleaf (<i>Abutilon theophrasti</i>)	Great Marsh-bedstraw (<i>Galium palustre</i> ssp. <i>elongatum</i>)
Sugar Maple (<i>Acer saccharum</i>)	Round-leaved Crane's-bill (<i>Geranium rotundifolium</i>)
Silver Maple (<i>Acer saccharinum</i>)	Oak-fern (<i>Gymnocarpium dryopteris</i>)
Italian Alder (<i>Alnus cordata</i>)	Atlantic Ivy (<i>Hedera helix</i> ssp. <i>hibernica</i>)
Grey Alder (<i>Alnus incana</i>)	Jerusalem Artichoke (<i>Helianthus tuberosus</i>)
Red Alder (<i>Alnus rubra</i>)	Tall tutsan (<i>Hypericum x inodorum</i>)
Purple Amaranth (<i>Amaranthus cruentus</i>)	Garden Yellow-archangel (<i>Lamium galeobdolon</i> ssp. <i>argentatum</i>)
Great Brome (<i>Anisantha diandra</i>)	Hybrid Larch (<i>Larix x marschlinii</i>)
Confused Michaelmas-daisy (<i>Aster novibelgii</i>)	Garden Lobelia (<i>Lobelia erinus</i>)
Hybrid birch (<i>Betula x aurata</i>)	Hybrid Rye-grass (<i>Lolium x boucheanum</i>)
Heath False-brome (<i>Brachypodium pinnatum</i> ss)	Wilson's Honeysuckle (<i>Lonicera nitida</i>)
Tor-grass (<i>Brachypodium rupestre</i>)	Heath Wood-rush (<i>Luzula multiflora</i> ssp. <i>congesta</i>)
Hedge bindweed (<i>Calystegia sepium</i> ssp. <i>roseata</i>)	Rose Campion (<i>Lychnis coronaria</i>)
Chalk Knapweed (<i>Centaurea debeauxii</i> ssp. <i>nemoralis</i>)	Tomato (<i>Lycopersicon esculentum</i>)
Chalk Knapweed (<i>Centaurea debeauxii</i> ssp. <i>thuilleri</i>)	Dotted Loosestrife (<i>Lysimachia punctata</i>)
Many-flowered Fleabane (<i>Conyza floribunda</i>)	Purple Crab-apple (<i>Malus x purpurea</i>)
Red-osier Dogwood (<i>Cornus sericea</i>)	Balm (<i>Melissa officinalis</i>)
Pampas-grass (<i>Cortaderia selloana</i>)	Bushy Mint (<i>Mentha x gracilis</i>)
Himalayan Cotoneaster (<i>Cotoneaster simonsii</i>)	Tall Mint (<i>Mentha x smithiana</i>)
A Hybrid Marsh-orchid (<i>Dactylorhiza x grandis</i>)	Purple Moor-grass (<i>Molinia caerulea</i> ssp. <i>arundinacea</i>)
Tufted Hair-grass (<i>Deschampsia cespitosa</i> ssp. <i>parviflora</i>)	Parrot's-feather (<i>Myriophyllum aquaticum</i>)
Wavy Hair-grass (<i>Deschampsia flexuosa</i>)	Love-in-the-mist (<i>Nigella damascena</i>)
Sweet William (<i>Dianthus barbatus</i>)	Royal-fern (<i>Osmunda regalis</i>)
Carthusian Pink (<i>Dianthus carthusianorum</i>)	Curved Hard-grass (<i>Parapholis incurva</i>)
Narrow-leaved Ash (<i>Fraxinus angustifolia</i> ssp. <i>oxycarpa</i>)	Virginia-creeper (<i>Parthenocissus quinquefolia</i>)
	Hairy Mock-orange (<i>Philadelphus x virginalis</i>)
	Mouse-ear-hawkweed (<i>Pilosella officinarum</i> ssp. <i>micradenia</i>)

Buck's-horn Plantain (<i>Plantago coronopus</i>)	Hook-lobed Dandelion (<i>Taraxacum hamatum</i>)
Early Meadow-grass (<i>Poa infirma</i>)	Spur-lobed Dandelion (<i>Taraxacum pseudoretroflexum</i>)
Portugal Laurel (<i>Prunus lusitanica</i>)	Reflexed-bracted Dandelion (<i>Taraxacum valens</i>)
Lesser Celandine (<i>Ranunculus ficaria</i> ssp. <i>ficariiformis</i>)	Keeled-fruited Cornsalad (<i>Valerianella carinata</i>)
Sumach (<i>Rhus typhina</i>)	Hungarian Mullein (<i>Verbascum speciosum</i>)
Butterfly Stonecrop (<i>Sedum spectabile</i>)	Argentinian Vervain (<i>Verbena bonariensis</i>)
Swedish Whitebeam (<i>Sorbus intermedia</i>)	Common Vetch (<i>Vicia sativa</i> ssp. <i>segetalis</i>)
Lesser Sea-spurrey (<i>Spergularia marina</i>)	Mat-grass (<i>Vulpia unilateralis</i>)
Creeping Comfrey (<i>Symphytum grandiflorum</i>)	
Dark-green Dandelion (<i>Taraxacum bracteatum</i>)	



Verbena bonariensis at Paxton Pits

Many of the records listed above result from detailed investigations of specific sites. In particular, Maurice Massey's surveys of our fenland National Nature Reserves, Lynne Farrell's local botany group's explorations around Hemingford Grey and my own efforts over the past year at various sites. While it is tempting over the course of a year to try and visit as many sites as possible and to chase after well known rarities, there really is no substitute for adopting a 'local patch' and surveying it well over several seasons and indeed years. The fact that Maurice Massey is still finding new native plant species in our relatively well-studied NNRs is the perfect example of the benefits to be reaped from getting to know a site in detail and recording it well.

Site Lists

Following on from the above, I am considering experimenting with producing species lists for some of our well-botanised sites. I hope that such lists will be of wider interest and stimulate further recording, allowing our knowledge of these sites to be continually improved. Specifically, I hope that such lists will help in keeping records up-to-date, not just for rare species but also for the commoner flora. Indeed in many cases it is the records of the latter that are most out of date.

These lists will be posted on the webpage so keep an eye out for future updates.

Parsley Water-dropwort Resurrected

One of the most significant finds of the year was Maurice Massey's re-discovery of Parsley Water-dropwort at Woodwalton Fen NNR. This species was last recorded in 1846 and was long since presumed extinct in the County. The material collected by Maurice has also been important in prompting a re-assessment of supposed Narrow-leaved Water-dropwort (*O. silaifolia*) populations in the Soke of Peterborough. These populations have subsequently been found to be misidentifications, resulting in the resurrection of Parsley Water-dropwort in the Soke also. Care must be taken in the future when making identifications of these two species, particularly where the ecology and phenology of a population does not fit the typical range of Narrow-leaved Water-dropwort.



Pressed material of *Oenanthe lachenalii*

Novelties

This month's infraspecific novelties belong to Bristly Oxtongue. Most people are familiar with the scientific name for this species being *Picris echioides*. Unfortunately there are no varietal combinations available under this name and to use the variety names we need to switch to the taxonomic combination of *Helminthotheca echioides* which has been re-adopted by Sell and Murrell in the Flora of Great Britain and Ireland. While this change will fill many people with horror, it does reflect the historic situation first established in 1754 and it is now also supported by molecular phylogenetic evidence¹.

¹ Samuel *et al.* (2006) Molecular phylogenetics reveals *Leontodon* (Asteraceae, Lactuceae) to be

Three of the four Bristly Oxtongue varieties occur in VC31. Photographs of the basal leaves of each of these are provided below. Var. *echioides* is the common taxon and is found though the County including habitats that might support the case for native status. The leaves of this variety are broad and relatively floppy and the whole plant has a matt green finish. The differences of var. *pratensis* are difficult to put into words but when seen growing next to var. *echioides* it has a most distinctive jizz.

The best place I have found to observe these two taxa growing together is Fen Drayton Gravel Pits. Here, both of the varieties grow in abundance side by side and the differences are striking if, as already acknowledged, difficult to put into words. Var. *pratensis* appears to be a plant of early successional habitats such as disturbed ground around gravel pits and arable field margins. To my eye it has much narrower, stiffer, leaves and the whole plant has a darker glossier green colour.

Var. *incisa* is the scarcest of the three taxa in VC31. It has deeply incised basal leaves and again appears to be restricted to heavily disturbed sites.



Basal leaves of *Helminthotheca echioides*
var. *incisa* (two leaves on left side), var. *pratensis* (middle) and var. *echioides* (right)