

Warwickshire Flora Group

Newsletter No. 19 November 2020

Warwickshire Botany Under Lockdown

Along with the BSBI, the Wildflower Society and every Natural History Society that I know, the Flora Group has held no meetings since the beginning of the lockdown in March. Well that isn't exactly true. Although a few of the members who had initially shown interest dropped out, a group of five, Masha and her boyfriend, Gary and the Waltons spent three days wandering the saltmarshes, beaches and chalk grassland of Essex trying to get to grips with Sea-lavenders and Seablites and eating ice-cream on the first ever Flora Group weekend away.



Bradwell-on-Sea.



Epilobium brachycarpum, Colchester

We had help from Stephen Clarkson from the Wild Flower Society who gave us details of sites of some of the species special to Essex. We spent a fascinating afternoon botanizing in an industrial estate in Colchester where we saw rarities such as *Fallopia sachalinensis* Great Knotweed and a skinny, alien willowherb from America *Epilobium brachycarpum* Panicked Willowherb. Shoeburyness produced a rare knapweed, *Centaurea jacea*. A drive through a near-deserted Southend-on-Sea took us to Benfleet for *Lathyrus hirsutus* Hairy Vetchling and *Dianthus armeria* Deptford Pink. A full list of species seen is available from us if you plan to visit the area.

WILDLIFE TRUST RESERVES AUDIT

Once the "Rule of Six" was established a small group (John Roberts, Val Roberts, Graham Thompson and the Waltons) have been surveying Warwickshire Wildlife Trust reserves to see which plants have been lost or have arrived during the last few years.

A preliminary report has been written and a useful meeting held with Karl Curtis the Reserves Manager and Alexis Evans who have been incorporating our findings into the Trust's management plans. We managed to visit 49 reserves, but there are a few more left and these will form the framework for field trips, if there are any, in 2012.

BSBI Exhibition Meeting 2020

This year you will not need to travel to London to get a full day of all things botanical, as the 2020 BSBI Exhibition Meeting has been moved online. It is open to all, not just BSBI members and full details can be had at www.aem.bsbi.org. It will start at 10.30 a.m. on Saturday 21 November. There is a full programme of talks about orchids, phone apps., books, and many other subjects. The first talk about Plant Alert will be given by our own Flora Group member Katharina Dehnan-Schmutz. There will also be a discussion on the use of seed mixes and a virtual herbarium tour of the Natural History Museum. There is no need to register, unless you are a member and want to vote at the AGM, just follow the link above.

BSBI NEW YEAR PLANT HUNT 2021

At the moment the BSBI is not sure if there will be a BSBI New Year Plant Hunt this year. Once this decision has been made and if it goes ahead, full details will be available from the BSBI website, www.bsbi.org/new-year-plant-hunt. There is a simple app. that makes it very easy to send in records online or from your phone. There is no need to send records to us as they are automatically added to the BSBI database anyway. The current government's regulations mean that there will be no organised Warwickshire meeting this year, however this does not stop you from carrying out your own hunt. Happy hunting!

New and Interesting Plant Records.

The lockdown allowed a brief opportunity for John and Monika to examine the short turf of the Atherstone Golf Course before the golfers were allowed to resume. Examination of the closely mown ridges turned up a colony of the early flowering annual *Moenchia erecta* Upright Chickweed. The previous Warwickshire record was 121 years ago from the same site, then called The Outwoods, when the golf course had not been constructed. If we are still in lockdown in April 2021 please go and have a look for it at your local golf course and expect *Catapodium* grasses and small *Cerastiums* too.

Alex Mills kindly sent us some photos of *Cyrtomium falcatum* House Holly Fern and *Cyrtomium fortunei* s.l. Fortune's Holly Fern, checked by referee Fred Rumsey, which were seen growing inside drain covers in Stratford-upon-Avon. *C. falcatum* is new to the county. We spent an interesting morning looking for them, much to the amusement of some shoppers and a local vicar.

Maidenhead Road in Stratford produced the first county record of *Digitalis ferruginea* Rusty Foxglove, a handsome garden escape, the third county record of *Silene uniflora* Sea Campion in a pavement crack and a rare seedling of *Juglans regia* Common Walnut growing at the base of a street tree.

A willowherb hybrid *Epilobium x erroneum*, a cross between *E. montanum* Broad-leaved Willowherb and *E. hirsutum* Great Willowherb was spotted by Bastiaan Brak at Snitterfield Bushes Nature Reserve. When his excellent photos were sent to the referee Geoffrey Kitchener they were confirmed. This was probably the first county record. Details of the four records mentioned in Steven Falk's Warwickshire Wildflowers cannot be found on the BSBI database or at the WBRC. Bastiaan also discovered some *Althaea officinalis* Marsh Mallow near Whitnash, Leamington Spa expecting it to be a first county record. Unluckily for him, April Webb, who had been busy researching plants on allotments during the summer, had already found it at the Old Milverton Allotments just ten days earlier.

A visit to St. Mary's Allotments, Radford Road, Leamington Spa produced new county records for two species that had self-seeded well away from their original plots. These were *Amaranthus hypochondriacus* Prince's-feather and *Trigonella esculenta* Sickle-fruited Fenugreek. The botanical highlight of the allotments is the rare *Lemna gibba* Fat Duckweed that has made a home in many of the old baths that are used for water storage. We have no idea how it got there. These allotments were regularly visited by the previous County Recorder James Partridge so perhaps there was a human element in its introduction.

Any 2020 Warwickshire Wildlife Trust Records would be appreciated. Send them to John and Monika Walton. Our new email address is jomowalton@gmail.com