

Warwickshire Flora Group

Newsletter No. 21 March 2021

MAURICE ARNOLD

In February, botanist and all round naturalist Maurice Arnold died at the age of ninety-five.

Maurice, who lived in Tamworth, was an avid recorder with a good eye, adding many rare plant records to both the Warwickshire and Staffordshire Floras over a period of seven decades. His earliest database record is from 1944 of Henbane growing in South Street, Atherstone. He also played an important part in the development of Alvecote Pools NR as an SSSI, where he established one of the first nature trails in the country. He also helped establish a series of Local Nature Reserves in Tamworth.



WHITE BUTTERBUR – A VICTIM OF THE LOCKDOWN

For many years John and Val Roberts have been going to the little patch of woodland, originally the grounds of a convent, by the River Avon near Wolston to look for this rather spectacular alien – *Petasites albus* (White Butterbur). This March it was missing. The bank by the river where it had been seen for the last 25 years or more was covered in mud and the woodland paths had been greatly widened by the increased footfall of people taking their permitted “daily exercise”. The plants here have been flooded in the past and have come back again. *P. albus* is a native of the Alps and the Caucasus with a British distribution centred on the North-east of Scotland. Let us hope it hasn't gone for good as this is its only Warwickshire site.

FIELD MEETINGS 2021.

Unless the country loses its way on the COVID roadmap, we will be starting field meetings again after 17 May when we should be able to meet outside in groups of up to 30 people. Details will be sent out at the end of April. We will, however, be repeating last year's postponed trip to Clowes Wood which is a joint meeting with the BSBI. Details are below and you can book a place on that one now.

CLOWES WOOD Sunday 4 July. We will meet at 10 a.m. in the car park by the recreation ground and children's play area at SP11017391, which is on the Engine Pool side of Malthouse Lane, which passes between the two Earlswood Reservoirs. We will walk to the reserve from here. Note that this is not the official reserve car park in Wood Lane, at SP101743 which is very small. Walking boots or wellies are advised. To book, either e mail John Walton at johnwalton46@tiscali.co.uk, or phone 01827 712455.

BETTER QUALITY RECORDING OF RARE PLANTS

Whenever I look at the Rare Plant Register I am surprised at the number of records that have a poor grid reference. To refind a plant from a six figure grid reference means searching a plot 100 metres square, and it is not surprising that this is often not successful.

Can you help us this year to improve this situation by sending in eight or ten figure grid references for all those rare plants that you see, that are either Warwickshire Scarce, Warwickshire Rare or have a national status. Please do not give a centroid, i.e. if you are in say Ufton Fields NR, don't give the grid. ref. in the Reserves Book. You can do an eight figure grid ref. on a 1:25,000 OS map with care, or online at **Grab a Grid Reference Duo**. We use **GB Grid Ref Compass**, a free app. on our phone which seems to be accurate. The number of plants seen and a description or habitat sketch would also help.

NEW AND INTERESTING FINDS

- Di Napier should be congratulated on finding and identifying correctly the second county record of ***Rumex x dufftii***, a hybrid between *R. obtusifolius* (Broad-leaved Dock) and *R. sanguineus* (Wood Dock) in Wellesbourne. This was last seen in Warwickshire in 1957. Di also found nearby ***Galium x pomeranicum***, a hybrid between *G. album* (Hedge Bedstraw) and *G. verum* (Lady's Bedstraw) with cream flowers. Careful checking of involucral bracts also had Di reporting a plant of ***Erigeron (Conyza) bonariensis* (Argentine Fleabane)** from Moseley Avenue, Coventry. This is the rarest of the four *Conyza* Fleabanes and has all but died out in the north of the county.
- Wandering around Stratford-upon-Avon, Alex Mills found the second county record of both ***Nonea lutea* (Yellow Monkswort)** in Wetherby Way and ***Tristagma uniflorum* (Spring Starflower)**, a garden escape, growing in a pavement crack in New Street.
- John and Monika recently spent a couple of mornings walking the lanes near Filongley and discovered a wood with thousands of ***Narcissus pseudonarcissus subsp. pseudonarcissus* (Wild Daffodils)** that has never been noted before. A walk a few days ago around Nuneaton also turned up new sites for ***Erodium moschatum* (Musk Storksbill)** and ***Fumaria muralis subsp. boraei* (Common Ramping Fumitory)**.
- Tara Higgs who contacted us to ask about the Flora Group surveying some acid grassland at Castle Bromwich Hall, spoke to the gardener at Castle Bromwich Gardens who assured us that the county's only colony of ***Galeopsis speciosa* (Large-flowered Hemp-nettle)** has again managed to escape the enthusiastic weeding of their volunteers and was still thriving in 2019.
- James Timms saw the Extinct or Not article from the previous Newsletter that he found somewhere on social media and sent us his 2019 photos of ***Dactylorhiza maculata* (Heath Spotted Orchid)** from Shadowbrook Meadow which was reassuring. 2020 seems to have been a terrible year for orchids and many regular colonies of different species did not appear.

MORE FAKE NEWS

Every few months we receive a few thousand records to check from the Biological Records Centre, collected from planning reports. These are usually sent in without the recorder's name, just under the name of an ecology company. They may be from many years back and are of variable quality. The latest fictional mega-rarity reported from a Warwickshire housing estate is ***Luzula arcuata* Curved Wood-Rush** a rare arctic-alpine which is the botanical equivalent of a Ptarmigan walking down the road in the centre of Warwick! The Recorder obviously used Stace or Rose to get to this point but didn't read the bit about distribution at the end! The record was rejected from lack of evidence. Beware too of "Typhus latifolia" a spelling mistake that might be as dangerous as COVID!

MORE ONLINE BOTANY

Yesterday we spent the morning watching the BSBI Scottish Conference whose talks should soon be available on the BSBI YouTube channel. The main talk focused on the work of the Borders Forest Trust which bought an area of the Moffat Hills and fenced it about 20 years ago. They then removed the "woolly maggots" (the sheep) and other livestock. From a barren over-grazed hillside it has turned into a varied mixture of shrub, grassland and woodland and lots of rare plants have returned. We have also signed up to the BSBI Irish conference next week which is open to anybody. Another "must see" on the BSBI YouTube channel is Sandy Knapp's talk on Solanaceae. Sandy is one of the world experts on this family. On the same channel are three shorter talks on Protected Road Verges and their management in Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire.

Katie Beswick has also drawn our attention to a documentary film called Urbana Natura focusing on the biodiversity of the natural urban wilderness near the Berlin Wall. She assures me that if you go to the website they will send you a link to watch it, but we haven't had time to investigate that yet.