

ADDITIONS TO THE FLORA OF WARWICKSHIRE 2020 AND 2021

by John and Monika Walton

Unfortunately, one of the victims of the COVID pandemic has been The Birmingham Natural History Society which was founded in 1858. Every two years since 1950 it has published a journal (the Proceedings of the Birmingham Natural History Society) which has included an article outlining the Additions to the Flora of Warwickshire during the previous two years. This year will be the first time since 1950 that the Proceedings have not been published. This article will be made available by email to the members of the Warwickshire Flora Group and a copy will be accessible on the group's webpage www.bsbi.org.uk/warwickshire.html.

In 2020 the lockdown stopped most of the field meetings of the local natural history societies and the Flora Group, but this was not reflected in the number of new species seen during that period as many people who were not key workers spent more time in the countryside. When meeting outside in a small "bubble" was allowed again, we joined John and Val Roberts and Graham Thompson on a project to visit sixty-four of the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust reserves. We found many rarities and our baseline data for the new decade will be used by the Trust in future reserve management decisions. Lockdown was lifted just in time to allow a small group of five to enjoy the Flora Group's first weekend away to Essex in July 2020 and site surveys started again in May 2021, but no indoor workshops were held. There were joint meetings with conservation groups at Brandon Wood, Studley Common and at Castle Bromwich Gardens and Professor Ian Trueman took us on a short walk across the mires of Sutton Park. Ian's Flora of Sutton Park will be published soon. There was also a successful joint meeting with the BSBI at Clowes Wood Nature Reserve.

The twenty-five species mentioned below were either new to the county list or were re-discoveries of species that were thought to have been extinct. Most of these were casuals, garden escapes or planted introductions. Plant names have been taken from the New Flora of the British Isles, Fourth Edition by Clive Stace that was published in 2019.

A FERN NEW TO THE BRITISH ISLES

The identity of *Marsilea hirsuta* (Bristly Water-clover) has at last been confirmed.

You may have seen the report of this find in an earlier Flora Group Newsletter when the Friends of Baddesley Common, Baddesley Ensor asked a contractor to stock a newly dug wildlife pond with British native plants. Amongst the rather odd collection of species planted was this one, which was tentatively identified as *M. quadrifolia* Clover Fern. This is a highly endangered native of seasonal pools in the Mediterranean and can only be identified with certainty from the small sporocarp (the capsule that produces spores) that is produced in the dry season when pools have dried up and the fronds are not under water. In 2016 specimens and photos were sent to Fred Rumsey at the Natural History Museum but a definite identification was not reached.

In October 2021, I was pleased to receive an e mail from Fred saying "....following a quick visit made this summer I sent some material of the Baddesley Ensor plant to my friend Hanno Schaefer in Munich to identify using molecular methods..... He has just let me know it is *M. hirsuta* from Australia which is invasive in North America and in the Azores (where they had mistakenly called it *M. azorica*). You may wish to amend your notes/records".

Looking on the internet, *M. hirsuta* is widely available to buy for aquarium and terrarium use and although in Baddesley the plant was deliberately introduced, it has survived for seven years in the so called "wild" and is quite invasive. It is certainly a species to look out for in the future.



Marsilea hirsuta, Bristly Water-Clover, Baddesley Ensor.
Photograph by John Roberts.



Salvia hispanica, Chia, Wyndley Pool, Sutton Park.
Photograph by John S. Walton

SOME EXCITING REDISCOVERIES

It is always very satisfying to re-find a plant that has not been seen for many years. The last time ***Hieracium eboracense* (Northern Hawkweed)** was found in the county was in 1843 until the colony in Nuneaton Parish Church was discovered in July 2021. The BSBI referee Brian Burrow states that the plants are of the narrow-leaved form also seen in Yorkshire and the Lake District.

Hieracium species are very difficult to identify and there are few botanists that have the skill to name them, so this is probably the reason why they are often overlooked.

Ian Trueman drew our attention to a record of ***Salix repens* agg. (Creeping Willow)** mentioned in the Sheffield University Mires Group report for Natural England when they visited Sutton Park in 2013. This is the first native record for the county since the Computer Mapped Flora.

The closure of Atherstone Golf Course, allowed us to examine the closely mown grass by the bunkers where we found hundreds of small plants of ***Moenchia erecta* (Upright Chickweed)**. The previous county record was from the same spot, but from 121 years earlier.

On one of the Flora Group meetings at Brandon Marsh, which if you remember, was closed to members during the lockdown, we were surprised to find some ***Potamogeton obtusifolius* (Blunt-leaved Pondweed)**. Not new to the county, this record is however an important find as it had not been seen at the site for thirty-six years. It was still flourishing at Bracebridge Pool, Sutton Park in 2018 but the previous record before this was from Edgbaston Pool in 2005. There are few ponds left in the county that are healthy enough to support it, many having been choked by alien species or with high levels of eutrophication. A good description of this species would say it is a featureless, green ribbon identified by its width, the shape of the leaf tip and the pattern of its veins. You can see how it could be missed.

THANK YOU FACEBOOK!

Helen Gilbert posted a few photos of a non-flowering plant she could not identify on the Wild Flowers of Britain and Ireland Facebook page. Amongst the comments was one from Paul Stanley who identified it as ***Salvia hispanica* (Chia)** growing under a bench beside Wyndley Pool in Sutton Park. A few extra plants were spotted when we visited the site, probably introduced by a clumsy, salad-eating individual watching the ducks. We collected a specimen to check it, but identification proved difficult as the species is in none of the British plant books and is a native of Mexico. The wonderful internet came to our aid.

Chia seed has become one of the latest “superfoods”, the internet being full of webpages about its nutritional values and supposed health benefits, but to me, none of the recipes for it look at all appetizing.

FULL LIST OF NEW AND IMPORTANT RECORDS FOR 2020 and 2021

***Pilea microphylla*, Artillery-plant**, Winterbourne Botanic Gardens, SP052838, growing on old copper heating pipes inside old greenhouse, Paul Reade, James Partridge, Mike Poulton, 2008. This record was submitted following an article on Greenhouse Aliens in BSBI News that suggested such plants should be recorded formally.

***Salix repens* agg., Creeping Willow**, Near Rowtons Well, Sutton Park, SP0923596509, 2013, Sheffield University Mires Group, report for Natural England.
First record since the Computer Map Flora.

***Marsilea hirsuta*, Bristly Water-clover**, Baddesley Common Wildlife Pool, SP, 29 October 2015, John S. Walton, Monika V. Walton det. in October 2021 by Fred Rumsey and Hanno Schaefer.

***Pulmonaria rubra*, Red Lungwort**, Baxterley Common, SP28129686, 13 January 2020, John S. Walton, Monika V. Walton, garden escape naturalized in woodland.

***Scilla sardensis*, Lesser Glory-of-the Snow**, Leam Valley Nature Reserve, SP3369665268, 8 March 2020, Bastiaan Brak. Naturalized in woodland.

***Bergenia x schmidtii*, Schmitdt's Elephant-ears**, Woodshire Road, Exhall, SP34808403, 8 March 2020, John S. Walton, Monika V. Walton, a group of plants behind a metal fence next to the railway. The colony was probably started by a throw-out literally being lobbed over the fence.

***Eryngium variifolium*, Moroccan Eryngo**, Faulconbridge Way, Heathcote, Warwick, SP3109363278, 13 April 2020, Bastiaan Brak, det. John S. Walton, Monika V. Walton.
A garden escape that had spread to neighbouring lawns and pavement cracks.

***Moenchia erecta*, Upright Chickweed**, Atherstone Golf Course, The Outwoods, SP30719680, 26 April 2020, John S. Walton, Monika V. Walton, hundreds of plants on mowed, sandy ridges, det. Brian Laney and Peter Stroh. First record for 121 years.

***Nectaroscordum siculum*, Honey Garlic**, Newnham Lane, Brinklow, SP43707875, 15 May 2020, David Long. Garden escape.

***Cyrtomium falcatum*, House Holly-fern**, Meer Street, Stratford-upon-Avon, SP1996955027, 8 June 2020, Alex Mills, det. Fred Rumsey. Under street drain cover.

***Digitalis ferruginea*, Rusty Foxglove**, Maidenhead Road, Stratford-upon-Avon, SP203556, 3 July 2020, John S. Walton, Monika V. Walton, seedling in tree pit next to road.

***Trigonella esculenta*, Sickle-fruited Fenugreek**, St. Mary's Allotments, Radford Road, Leamington Spa, SP3365, 28 August 2020, John S. Walton, Monika V. Walton, John R. Roberts, Val Roberts, Graham Thompson, a seedling on cultivated ground.

***Amaranthus hypochondriacus*, Prince's-feather**, St. Mary's Allotments, Radford Road, Leamington Spa, SP3365, 28 August 2020, John S. Walton, Monika V. Walton, John R. Roberts, Val Roberts, Graham Thompson, a seedling on cultivated ground.

Epilobium x erroneum, Epilobium montanum x hirsutum, Hybrid willowherb, Snitterfield Bushes Nature Reserve, SP2003260456, 27 July 2020, Bastiaan Brak, det. Geoffrey Kitchener. Steven Falk's book Warwickshire's Wildflowers mentions four pre-1958 records but no information on these can be found on the BSBI or WBRC databases.

Rumex x dufftii, Rumex obtusifolius x sanguineus, Hybrid Dock, Kineton Fields, SP268570, 31 August 2020, Di Napier. First record since 1957.

Althaea officinalis, Marsh-mallow, Old Milverton Allotments, Leamington Spa, SP3021866607, 21 August 2020, April Webb. Found by a short hedge between plots. Plot owners said that it wasn't deliberately planted.

Solanum crispum "Glasnevin", Chilean Potato Tree, Coleshill, SP203885, 22 November 2020, John S. Walton, Monika V. Walton, Found by footpath at back of gardens, in the shelter of a wall. A substantial bush. A surviving garden throwout.

Cardamine occulta, Asian Bittercress Warwick Road, Stratford-upon-Avon, SP2241055197, 22 November 2020, Bastiaan Brak, det. Tim Rich, in pavement cracks.

Helleborus orientalis, Lenten-rose, Brueton Park, Solihull, on east side of the River Blythe, SP163785, 5 April 2021, John S. Walton, Monika V. Walton, one substantial clump.

Lunaria redivia, Perennial Honesty, Castle Bromwich Gardens, in wild area, SP141898, 25 June 2021, Warwickshire Flora Group.

Hieracium eboracense, Northern Hawkweed, Nuneaton Parish Church, SP36569161, 10 July 2021, John S. Walton, Monika V. Walton, det. Brian Burrow, about 20 plants growing on a memorial. Brian Burrow states that the plants are of the narrow-leaved form also seen in the Lake District and Yorkshire. This is the first record of this species since August 1843 when it was seen in Rugby by A. Bloxam.

Egeria densa, Large-flowered Waterweed, Lake View Park, Coventry, SP314796, 20 July 2021, Warwickshire Flora Group. Found in one of the pools that were created in 2018. This species is sold to be put in aquaria and it is likely to have been a throwout.

Potamogeton obtusifolius, Blunt-leaved Pondweed. Brandon Marsh Nature Reserve, SP38867569. 3 August 2021, Warwickshire Flora Group.

Salvia hispanica, Chia, Wyndley Pool, Sutton Park, SP11289580, 15 October 2021, Helen Gilbert, det. Paul Stanley (on Facebook) and John S. Walton and Monika V. Walton.

Nemesia denticulata, Toothed Nemesia, Winsford Avenue, Allesley, Coventry, 29 October 2021, Anna Dudley det. M. Berry, self-set seedling in pavement crack.

If you would like to find out more about the **Warwickshire Flora Group** and would like to help with plant surveying please contact us at jomowalton@gmail.com or phone us on 01827 712455. You can also visit our website at www.bsbi.org.uk/warwickshire.html