

HUNTINGDONSHIRE NEWSLETTER

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Recent Sightings

It has been a productive season so far. While many of the most interesting sightings must await the next HFFS Annual Report, there are plenty of others that can be shared.

Peggy Seamark has undertaken a detailed study of Mistletoe (*Viscum album*) at Victoria Terrace, Hemingford Road. Her informative report documents this species from eleven trees within the gardens and allotments of the Terrace. Host trees include pear, various apple cultivars and poplar. Other people may wish to undertake similar detailed studies of the species that interest them.

Little Paxton Gravel Pits has much to offer the botanist at the moment. One of the most striking features of this site is the abundance of white-flowered Common Centaury (*Centaureum erythraea*). Other species of interest include Wood Meadow-grass (*Poa nemoralis*), the under-recorded non-natives Red-osier Dogwood (*Cornus sericea*) and the bramble Himalayan Giant (*Rubus armeniacus*), Vervain (*Verbena officinalis*), Viper's-bugloss (*Echium vulgare*), Shasta Daisy (*Leucanthemum x superbum*), Round-leaved Fluellen (*Kickxia spuria*) and Thorn-apple (*Datura stramonium*).

Dog-roses have been a recent project of mine and I have tried to scrutinise every bush that I pass. While labour intensive it has reaped considerable dividends. In particular, it has proved very effective at finding Harsh Downy-rose (*Rosa tomentosa*) with useful updates from five hectads. It is nowhere common but it does seem to be



present in all the ancient woods searched so far. While the flowers of harsh downy-rose do not look much different from dog-rose (*Rosa canina*) once you accept this and start looking at the plant as a whole it is very distinctive. Recorders should look for any rose that has leaves that are glandular and hairy, often on the upper-side as well as the lower-side (beware, amongst others, the pubescent form of dog-rose which is non-glandular and only hairy below); a glandular hairy pedicel and calyx that is sticky to the touch and exudes a faint resinous scent when rubbed (the leaves are also scented but this is not as easily appreciated); and, a pedicel 2cm or greater in length.

Projects for July and August

Work on recording for the County Rare Plant Register is progressing well with many good records having already been made. More survey work is required and all contributions will be gratefully received. For more details of this project see the link on the webpage.

Contrary to popular opinion, late June to July is perhaps the best time of year to record most arable flora. They are in full bloom but have not yet been subjected to the disturbances associated with harvest. Records of the scarcer species will be of great value for the Rare Plant Register. Many of the plants listed for consideration in the RPR are occupants of nature reserves and other protected sites and are relatively well recorded and secure. However, this is not the case for all species, with scarce arable flora being an obvious case in point. To determine the current status and locations of these species will require, given the extent of arable farmland in the county, a fair degree of effort and local knowledge as well as a large amount of luck. Given this, the more eyes out looking for arable flora the better.

Another group of plants that come into their own at this time of year are those of wetland and freshwater habitats. Not all aquatic species are easy to identify so consideration should always be given to the need to collect vouchers of certain species for expert verification. However, not all species are difficult and wetland habitats contain many of our most attractive native species. Again, records of all species will be gratefully received.

Novelties

This section is dedicated to those, like me, who are interested in the variation present within species (subspecies, varieties and forms). I hope to have a relatively regular feature on various oddities and obscurities. This month I introduce a couple of trees.



Sycamore is a common and widespread species that everyone is familiar with. However, relatively little attention seems to have been paid to one of its main variants - f. *purpureum* (see photo). This taxon, with the undersides of its leaves a rich purple, is highly distinctive and is also widespread. While it is often planted along roadsides and in other amenity areas it also regenerates quite freely and could be encountered anywhere in the County.

Ash trees are another common landscape feature that occasionally merit closer scrutiny. In this case the two variants given would appear to be almost entirely planted.

An exceptionally narrow-leaved tree of common Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) was found at Little Paxton Gravel Pits. This appears to be ascribable to f. *acuminata* (below left) and perhaps originates from planted stock sourced from eastern Europe.

Very similar in appearance but distinguished by its hairy brown buds arranged in threes (rather than black buds arranged in pairs) is Narrow-leaved Ash (*Fraxinus angustifolia*). When seen from a distance the small foliage gives the tree a diffuse feathery appearance that is very distinctive. There are two subspecies known from Britain. Ssp. *oxycarpa* (below right) is the only one so far reported from Huntingdonshire and is distinguished by the presence of a line of hairs under the midrib of the leaflets. An avenue of this tree can be seen along the edge of the Nene Valley Railway in Ferry Meadows Country Park. It should be looked for in other amenity and roadside plantings.



Fraxinus excelsior f. *acuminata*



Fraxinus angustifolia ssp. *oxycarpa*