



# WILDLIFE THYRE 2014

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE NORTHAMPTONSHIRE FLORA GROUP

## A BIG THANK-YOU FOR YOU HELP

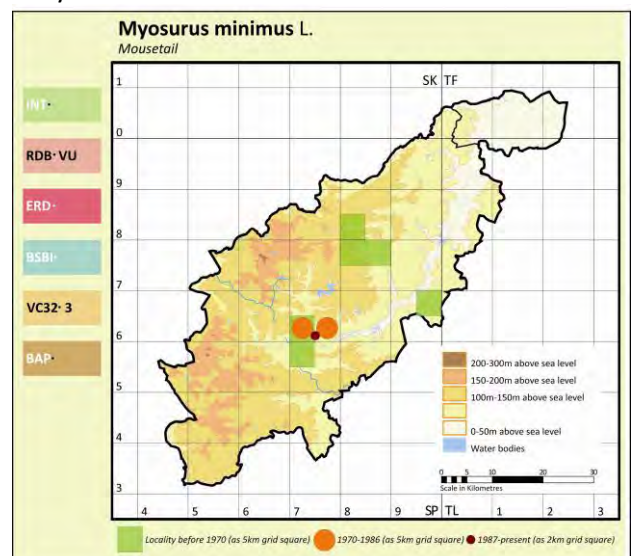
Last October I was invited to the AGM of the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire where I was presented with The Cliff and Joyce Christie Award for contributions to the study of natural history and/or conservation in Northamptonshire. The award consisted of books, presented by Baroness Young of Old Scone, the President of the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire. This unexpected honour, which was made all the more special because of my friendship with the late Cliff and Joyce Christie, was specifically for my work on the new Flora which would not have been possible without the great help provided by all of you who recorded the flora of the vice-county, checked the text and made many invaluable comments before publication, so a big thank you to everyone who made it possible.

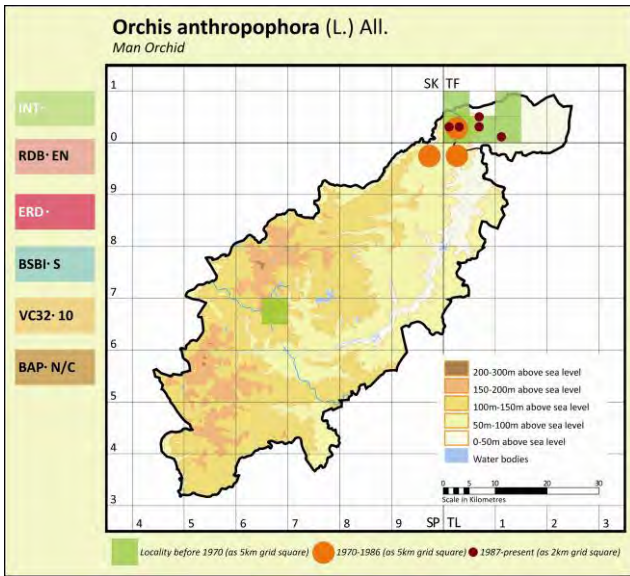


Receiving my award from Baroness Young at the Wildlife Trust AGM.

## WHAT NEXT?

I have spent the last few months updating the Rare Plant Register for vice-county 32. While this follows the format of the original edition, as well as updating records (and thank you again to all of you who keep me informed of new sightings, discoveries and changes), I have produced distribution maps for all the species apart from those that are obviously under-recorded, such as the Hawkweeds and Brambles. These differ from the maps in the new Flora as I have attempted to include all of the known records and it has been surprising how many species have been found in certain areas of the vice-county going right back to the earliest records. Currently I am awaiting the new English Red Data Book List to include that status in the key before finally assembling all the pages. The intention is that this will then be available to view on the BSBI web site. To show how the maps portray the distribution through the years with green squares showing distribution before 1970, orange dots distribution from 1970-1986 and small brown dots the distribution from 1987 – present) a couple of examples are included here, both showing how the particular species has retreated to its core area over the years:





## A GOOD NEWS STORY



Above: inset: the wall in 2013, covered in Ivy, main picture: the same wall after clearance. Below: Tower cross surviving on the wall at Gayton.



Tower Cross *Pseodoturrhis glabra* is only known at a single site in Northamptonshire. Furthermore, it is only known at one other site in the country, on the college walls of St John's College Cambridge. It was first discovered locally in 1985 growing on a brick boundary wall of Gayton churchyard. When it was first discovered the wall was clear of other vegetation but in the past 28 years a dense growth of Ivy *Hedera helix* has covered most of the wall. When Northamptonshire Flora Group member Brian Laney visited the site last summer he realised that

the Tower Cross was now in a very vulnerable situation in grave danger of being shaded out by the ivy, and after obtaining permission, spent a considerable time clearing the ivy so that sunlight can now reach the surface of the wall and the tower cross can survive and thrive.

## SOME UNUSUAL PLANT RECORDS

### Early Meadow-grass *Poa infirma*

Only discovered locally in 2010, and difficult at a glance to differentiate from Annual Meadow-grass *Poa annua*, this species appears to be slowly spreading along our main roads where salt is spread in the winter. It grows along the often bare strip of soil at the back of the kerbstone. It is now known from at least four sites, in Northampton, Moulton Towcester and Kettering and the spread of these suggests that it is almost certainly to be found in other places. It is early flowering and is worth looking for along the edge of main roads in March, April and May





*Poa infirma* growing in its kerbside habitat at the Towcester site

### Mousetail *Myosurus minimus*

The solitary brown dot on the Mousetail distribution map (see What Next? above) was for a colony of this species at the edge of the landscaping around St James retail park in Northampton. This was thought to be extinct, not having been found, although it was searched for, for over 30 years. Unfortunately this rare species was later destroyed by herbicides.



Left: Mousetail habitat and, right: flower spike

### Dense-flowered Fumitory *Fumaria densiflora*



Dense-flowered fumitory at Welton Road Allotments, Daventry

The number of sites for this rare fumitory continues to increase with a record this year from Welton Road Allotments, Daventry, only the seventh locality since it was first noted in the vice-county in 1988.

### Upright Chickweed *Moenchia erecta*

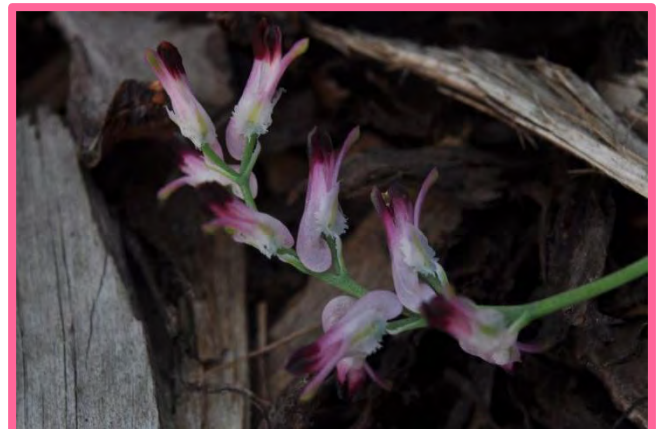
Surpassing the Mose-tail as a surprise discovery is this species which was first seen in 1877, and before that date only ever recorded twice, this species was re-found by Brian Laney at Fawsley in June of 2013.



Upright Chickweed growing on an anthill at Fawsley Park

### Common ramping-fumitory *Fumaria muralis* ssp. *boroei*

Another rare fumitory, also now known at seven sites with a new locality, in Corby, found in 2013. This continues the northern progression of this species away from its core area around Northampton.



*Fumaria muralis* ssp. *boroei*

### Subterranean Clover *Trifolium subterraneum*

Never before recorded in the vice-county, several plants were found growing on a bank in Admiral's Way, Daventry after a hedge was removed



*Subterranean Clover*

### MEMORIES Gill Gent

I grew up in the Nene valley during the Second World War and consequently I was able to see at first hand the rich flora of the valley meadows, largely un-spoilt for hundreds of years. In the spring there were many corners to explore where the golden yellow flowers of marsh marigolds glowed through the stalks of rushes; while slightly later some meadows were white with the flowers of meadow saxifrage. In June, just before the meadows were "laid for hay" the valley was a patchwork with many colours of blooming flowers including the red of common sorrel, the yellow of various buttercups and the pink of ragged-robin, all growing amongst the grey-green background of the meadow grasses.

Of course it was not just the valleys that were rich with flowers. Railway banks and road verges were happy hunting grounds, primroses and cowslips were common amongst the wide variety of wild flowers that could be seen there in season. Sometimes orchids were to be seen: the early-purple orchid followed by the common-spotted orchid and occasionally the bee orchid. A riot of

colour also filled the river banks and ditches along the edges of field and beside railway banks. Here in late summer commonly seen plants included purple loosestrife, arrowhead, water mint and flowering rush. Remnants of these can still be occasionally seen in the Nene valley but usually only in small areas and in widely separated colonies. The Nene valley nature reserve at Summer Leys at least give a small idea of the former natural landscape, although most of the valley (including Summer Leys) is much changed by a chain of lakes that are the visible signs of years of gravel extraction.

Arable fields full of weeds are another sight that has disappeared in the last seventy-five years, apart from an occasional field slashed with the red of common poppies. I well remember one field near Irchester where corn buttercups, now virtually extinct in Northamptonshire and the rare Venus's Looking-glass were both common. Fields full of corn marigolds and other arable weeds were also commonly seen. I well remember another field where the crop of barley, still green and silky, where hardheads, greater knapweed and field scabious were prolific.

Although I generally explored the area around Wellingborough, occasionally expeditions were made further afield. You could cycle for miles along country roads with no traffic to worry about except farm wagons. I remember cycling out to Billing to see a patch of pale blue flowers on the railway bank that I had seen when travelling on the train between Wellingborough and Northampton. It turned out to be Viper's Bugloss. Bike rides also took me to woodlands and spinneys, all of which were well coppiced at that time and consequently had a wonderful and rich ground flora. Here we could find blue and white sweet violets, bluebells, primroses, red campion, and greater stitchwort, many orchids including the the greater Butterfly Orchid which was often located by its scent and in a few secret places the strange flowers of herb paris. Flower identification was sometimes difficult. Unlike now there were only a limited number of books available and most of my early botanising was done with Edward Step's *Wayside and Woodland Blossoms*, first published in 1905. Although this book illustrated fewer than 200 species it was all I had until I could buy a copy of *British Flora* by Bentham and Hooker but these early years stimulated my interest and set me on the course of studying and recording the flora for more years than I now care to remember.

*Thanks to Brian Laney and Nigel Lingley for the photographs used here.*

## **BOTANICAL OUTINGS 2014**

**If you are coming to any of the meetings could you please let Rob Wilson know prior to the meeting so that if there are any changes to the venue or meeting point, I can make sure everyone is aware and has arrived before we move off.**

**Preston Capes area.**

**Sunday 20 April 2014**

**Meet at Everdon Stubbs Car Park, off the side road through the wood, SP603566, at 11.00**

Everdon Stubbs is a Woodland Trust reserve renowned for its display of Blubells, daffodils and Moschatel. Should time permit we will visit other places of interest in the area. A leaflet about Everdon Stubbs may be viewed on the Woodland Trust web site at

<http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/visiting-woods/wood/4378/everdon-stubbs/>

**Leader Brian Laney Bring a packed lunch.**

**Swaddywell Pit Nature Reserve**

**Sunday 15 June 2014**

**Meet at Swaddywell Pit Car Park off the Ufford to Marholm Road at TF115031 at 11.00**

Swaddywell pit is a former quarry, now a nature reserve maintained by the Langdyke Countryside Trust. This was the area of John Clare's Swordy Well and described by Charles Rothschild as one of the country's most important nature conservation sites, it was leased to the National Trust from 1915-1924, but was sold and quarrying resumed in 1924, after the death of Charles Rothschild the previous year. After many vicissitudes it has been restored as a nature reserve with a wide variety of plant species including the only site in the county for Saw-sedge. A leaflet about Swaddywell Pit can be downloaded from the Langdale Trust website at

<http://www.botolphsbarn.org.uk/langdyke/documents/Swaddywellleaflet.pdf>

**Leader: Brian Laney Bring a packed lunch.**

**Salcey Forest**

**Sunday 13 July 2014**

**Meet in the Salcey Forest Car park SP794517 at 11.00**

**NOTE THIS IS THE MAIN CAR PARK IN THE WOOD NOT BESIDE THE ROAD AND THAT THIS IS A PAY AND DISPLAY CAR PARK. At the time of writing the cost is £3.00 per day**

Salcey Forest is an area of ancient woodland with ancient trees and a diverse flora where the Forestry Commission is removing planted conifers to the benefit of the native wildlife.

Biodiversity at ground level is being encouraged by the thinning of the broad-leaved trees. There is also an easy access tree top way which gives access to the tree canopy. Information about Salcey Forest can be found on the Forestry Commission website at

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-8BKM8P>

**Leader Rob Wilson Bring a packed lunch**

**Swan Valley, Northampton**

**Sunday 10 August 2014**

**Provisional meeting place Cob Drive, Swan Valley, Northampton NN4 9BB, SP702583 at 11.00**

**These are fairly new roads so may not be on some maps, please ring Rob Wilson for further information. The postcode is for the Morrisons warehouse entrance at the far end of Cob Drive.**

This is a new industrial estate so it is important to check meeting arrangements just before the meeting as development at this site is ongoing. This area also gives access to lakes, the Grand Union Canal and River Nene tributaries, so a chance to record a wide variety of habitats which could produce some unexpected finds.

**Leader Rob Wilson Bring a packed lunch.**

**For more information please contact Rob Wilson (01536 711144)**

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