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Reports of local meetings

South-East Group

Brede High Wood (v.-c. 14), 2 October 2003: hornworts and a hornet

This was a joint meeting of the Southern and South-East Groups. Ironically after a very dry summer and early autumn, the day of the excursion was very wet and limited our list to just 96 species; had the weather been better goodness knows what else we might have found. Brede High Wood and adjacent parts of the Great Saunders Estate cover some six square kilometres, and provide a wide range of habitats on Wealden clays and sandstones. It is one of the few large wooded areas in East Sussex for which there appeared to be almost no bryological records. The day's exploration only embraced the area from south of the B2089 (public car park at TQ804196) down to the northern banks of the Powdermill reservoir

constructed in the 1930s and now owned by Southern Water, and further visits should be a priority. Since the field trip, several waymarked walks through the woods have been installed by Southern Water, making this a practical and attractive place for bryologists and others to visit.

Despite the rain, the woodland rides yielded all the usual suspects (*Fossombronina wondraczekii*, *Archidium alternifolium*, *Dicranella schreberiana*, *D. staphylina*, *Ditrichum cylindricum* and *Pseudephemerum nitidum*). In addition, it was particularly pleasing to see *Anthoceros busnotii* (a new vice-county record) and *Phaeoceros laevis*. Hornworts are increasingly uncommon in south-east England, and indeed Wakehurst Place is one of the few places where a sighting of *Phaeoceros* can be virtually guaranteed. The most notable epiphytes

were *Orthotrichum tenellum* and *Ulota bruchii* on *Acer campestre*, and *Dicranum montanum* on coppiced *Castanea* (we looked in vain for *D. flagellare*). Most spectacular on water-covered tree trunks were sheets of dehiscing capsules of *Frullania dilatata* and *Radula complanata*, presumably derived from sporophytes that had lain dormant through months of drought. Boulders in the sandstone cliff, whence spoil for the reservoir dam had been extracted 80 years previously, were covered in *Diplophyllum albicans* and *Scapania nemorea*, with *Pogonatum nanum* on the soil between. The woodland floor in the flat area below this cliff was dominated by an almost pure carpet of *Sphagnum palustre*, and literally dozens of young Wild Service-trees (*Sorbus torminalis*). *Fissidens celticus* was found on a bare, dry stream bank, with large quantities of *Plagiochila asplenioides* on adjacent boggy ground.

Like all bryologists after a dry summer, we approached the reservoir with considerable alacrity only to find acres of mud covered with fetid mats of New Zealand Pigmyweed (*Crassula helmsii*) as is increasingly the case in south-east England. This unwelcome alien was almost certainly the reason why not a single *Riccia* thallus was found. Mercifully, the *Crassula* does not seem to thrive in the vicinity of bankside trees and shrubs. Beneath these, there were literally square metres of *Aphanorhagma patens*, and, on steeper banks, small amounts of *Diselium nudum* with female gametophores and *Bryum klinggraeffii*.

The highlights of the day were *Diselium* (only the fourth locality in south-east England, and now virtually extinct at its former stronghold at Crowborough due to the construction of retail outlets over the former brickworks), *Orthotrichum tenellum*, the two hornworts and, at lunchtime, when briefly the rain ceased, a most memorable close inspection by a queen hornet.

Jeff Duckett (School of Biological Sciences, Queen Mary, University of London, Mile End Road, London, E1 4NS) & Patrick Roper.

Oaken Wood (v.-c. 16), 14 February 2004

It was a cool, overcast day with light rain when the four who attended this meeting (Sylvia Priestley, Roy Hurr, Malcolm Watling and myself) met up. However, by early afternoon the rain cleared, the sky lightened and there was even a glimmer of watery sunshine. We parked in a residential road nearby and walked into the wood, moving north-west over a rather flat scarp plateau on the greensand ridge. The soils here are deep loams and the woodland is well-managed sweet chestnut coppice with occasional oak standards. The sweet chestnut leaves form a dense carpet under the trees and the wood is well-used by horse riders and dog walkers, so many paths were rather muddy and not very bryologically interesting. The coppice stools were old and up to 4 feet across with *Lophocolea bidentata*, *Metzgeria furcata*, *Amblystegium serpens*, *Hypnum resupinatum*, *Mnium hornum* and *Tetraphis pellucida* almost ubiquitous, and reasonably frequent *Dicranum scoparium*, *D. tauricum* and *Leucobryum glaucum*. Much less frequent were *Aulacomnium androgynum*, *Campylopus introflexus* and *Pseudotaxiphyllum elegans*. In places, the path sides had bryophyte carpets dominated by *Atrichum undulatum*, *Eurhynchium praelongum*, *Mnium hornum*, and, where the track had been worn down to make low vertical sides, *Fissidens bryoides* and occasionally *Diplophyllum albicans*.

After lunch, we moved south-west through the area known as Seven Wents where *Rhododendron ponticum* is spreading – presumably introduced as a decorative feature earlier last century around this meeting point of seven trackways through the wood, it is clearly becoming a menace on this acid-neutral soil. As the woodland dropped down towards the road, the soil became sandier and we found ourselves on a seldom-used track with nice fruiting colonies of *Pleuroidium acuminatum*, patches of *Polytrichum juniperinum*, and carpets of *Thuidium tamariscinum*.

Once across the road we were in an area of disused workings that on the map appeared to

contain at least two old quarries and areas of disturbed hummocky ground, but the bramble growth became impenetrable as we approached these. It was clear we were now on ragstone. Ragstone is a grey calcareous sandstone and until the 20th century was widely used for building in the local area and even exported by boat for buildings in London. Its bryological specialty is *Didymodon sinuosus* which we failed to find. The vascular flora changed in this part of the wood; elder appeared along the trackway, and there were incursions of young birch, primroses and moschatel, all indicating more calcium in the soil. *Cirriphyllum piliferum* was fairly frequent on the floor of the wood and on

shaded tracks. The elder produced *Orthotrichum affine*. The vertical trackside banks had *Calyptogeia fissa*, *Plagiobhila asplenoides*, *Homalia trichomanoides* and *Plagiomnium undulatum*. Malcolm Watling, on going through material collected in this area once home, found *Fossombronina pusilla*.

Exposed trackways, pieces of concrete and bits of old carpet from the far too frequent fly-tipping in the wood added ruderal-type habitats, and helped boost numbers to give a total of 62 species for the day.

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New vice-county records and amendments to the *Census Catalogue*

All undated records are based on specimens collected in 2003; for specimens collected in earlier years the year of collection is given before the collector's name. Where the specimen bears a collector's number, this is given after the collector's name. All specimens are deposited in

BBSUK, except where otherwise indicated. Numbers and nomenclature follow Blockeel & Long (1998), *A Check-list and Census Catalogue of British and Irish Bryophytes*, with subsequent amendments where appropriate.

Hepaticae

T.H. Blackstock

Countryside Council for Wales, Plas Penrhos, Ffordd Penrhos, Bangor, Gwynedd, LL57 2LQ

- 7.3. *Kurzia trichoclados*. 76: on peaty side of ditch, heathery slopes, ca 290 m alt., near Lochgoin Reservoir, NS54, Long 31963.
- 9.2. *Bazzania tricrenata*. 75: with *Mylia taylorii* in block scree, ca 550 m alt., Maiden's Bed, Carrick Forest, NX49, Blockeel 32/694.

- 12.3. *Cephalozia catenulata*. 44: on sides of fallen oak branch (well decayed) in N-facing woodland, Nant Gelynen, Mallaen, SN74, Bosanquet & Motley.
- 13.1. *Nowellia curvifolia*. 26: on decaying larch log, in mixed larch, beech and Scots pine woodland, Thetford Warren, TL88, O'Leary. 32: rotten tree