

FLORA GROUP NEWSLETTER



SPRING 1996

Dear Flora Group Member

We hope you enjoyed the events held during 1995 and look forward to seeing you at some of the events arranged for 1996.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Sunday 28 April 1996 10.30am

Joint trip to New Forest

leader Clive Chatters

The BSBI are visiting Hampshire on 27 and 28 April. On Saturday 27 April Dr Francis Rose will lead a trip to Hayling Island (see item in "News & Views"). On Sunday 28 April Clive Chatters will lead a trip to the Hatchet/East End area of the New Forest; this will be a joint BSBI/Flora Group event. Meet at 10.30am at Hatchet Pond car park near Beaulieu, grid reference SU 370 018. The trip will last all day so bring a packed lunch or take advantage of the nearby pubs. There will be quite a lot of walking.

Saturday 11 May 1996 10.30am

Flora Group AGM and visit to North Solent NNR

Bob Lord, English Nature's Site Manager, has kindly invited Flora Group members to visit the North Solent National Nature Reserve. We aim to undertake plant recording within Spearbed Copse and Sims Wood, Neil Sanderson has offered to help with Lichen identification. The AGM will be held during the lunch break and people are welcome to stay on afterwards for further recording. Meet at 10.30am. If wet, park on roadside at grid reference SU 41 40 18; if dry, drive through gateway Marked "Private Beaulieu Estate" and park by thatched shed at SU 41 30 14. These woods are notorious for ticks so it is recommended that you wear long trousers tucked into socks. There are three vacancies on the Flora Group Committee. If

anybody would like to join the Committee please send nominations to Catherine Chatters, Flora Group Secretary, Ivy Cottage, Ashurst Bridge Road, Totton, Southampton, Hampshire, SO40 7EA, to arrive by Friday 10 May. If you would like to help arrange Flora Group events without actually becoming a Committee member, all offers of help would be appreciated.

Saturday 15 June 1996 11.30am

Newtown Meadows, IOW

Paul Davies, the National Trust Warden has agreed to lead a walk through the meadows and woods around New Town Harbour on the north coast of the Isle of Wight. The harbour, which lies between Yarmouth and Cowes, is one of the most unspoilt estuaries in Southern England and supports shingle communities, eel-grass beds and saltmarsh; it has recently been declared a National Nature Reserve. The aims of the day are to enjoy this unspoilt landscape and to look at the communities of plants that develop under a traditional hay meadow management regime. Meet at The Old Town Hall in Newtown, grid reference SZ 423 906. It would be helpful if those who intend to come could telephone Patrick Cloughley at the Wildlife Trust office (01703) 613636/613737 to let him know so that transport on the Island can be arranged. We would be particularly grateful to hear from members on the Island who may be prepared to offer lifts.

Saturday 20 July 1996 10.30am

Ashford Hill NNR

Mick Finnemore, the Site Manager at Ashford Hill National Nature Reserve has kindly offered to lead a walk round this diverse and fascinating site. Meet at 10.30am by the entrance to the Reserve. Cars can be parked in the car park of The Ship public house (grid reference SU 55 86 23). Lunch can be obtained from The Ship or bring sandwiches.

Wild Service Trees, New Forest

Sunday 15 October 1995

In October 1995 the Group met in Busketts Wood to look at the wild service trees. This ancient grazed woodland is one of the richest parts of the New Forest for lichens and woodland plants. Many service trees were seen including a giant open grown specimen of some 2.5m girth and slender high forest trees with small crowns tucked into a closed canopy of beech and oak. Trees were present in all age ranges from saplings to mature specimens. The trees were surveyed for age, size, epiphytic lichens and bryophytes and associated flowering plants. A full report is being written up and is available from Catherine Chatters on receipt of a large SAE.

Wilverley Bog

Sun 19 February 1995 and Sun 4 February 1996

In 1995 and 1996 the Flora Group carried out conservation work at Wilverley Bog coppicing Sallow-Alder scrub at the margin of the mire. The site is a former locality for *Eriophorum gracile*, recorded by Francis Rose in 1969. The conservation work here aimed to restore a whole habitat rather than just restore suitable conditions for *Eriophorum gracile*.

This habitat is described in Europe as "transition mires" and is listed in the Habitats Directive as a habitat in need of protection at a European level. This mire type is defined in the Habitats Directive as floating carpets formed by medium-sized or small sedges, associated with bog mosses or brown mosses typically found as part of large peat systems and have characteristics intermediate between acidic and base-rich mires. Species characteristic of this vegetation type found in the New Forest include: the vascular plants *Eriophorum gracile**, *Carex lasiocarpa*, *C. limosa**, *C. rostrata**, *Drosera logifolia*, *Hammarbya paludosa*, *Menyanthes trifoliata**, *Pedicularis palustris**, *Potentilla palustris**, *Rhynchospora alba** and the bryophytes *Sphagnum contortum**, *S. subsecundum*, *S. teres**, *Drepanocladus revolvens**, *Scorpidium scorpioides**, *Campylium stellatum**, *Aneura pungius**. The underlined species are rare or very rare in the

lowlands and the asterix indicates a species recorded from the site we worked on. This habitat is now virtually extinct in the lowlands outside of the New Forest. In the Forest it occurs where base rich water enters acidic valley mires, mostly as artesian springs below the mire, and is scattered across the South of the Forest as small strands. Fort Bog, where we also trimmed back the edge of expanding scrub in 1996 is another example. Oddly, although these are now the best transition mires in lowland England, they have not been listed as a habitat of the New Forest Special Area for Conservation (SAC).

At Wilverley there is a large spring within the mire. A second smaller spring rises in the mire close to the Sallow-Alder scrub along the Avon Water. Here the Sallow had clearly been expanding across the mire surface by a process of collapse and regrowth and only 2m width of open transition mire remained beyond the edge of the scrub. The next collapse would have destroyed the transition mire, as the shaded mire under the scrub lacked most of the species of interest.

The area of mire flushed with rich water has now been fully cleared of scrub and already interesting observations have been made on the recently opened up area. Shade tolerant species which have existed in a vegetative form such as *Menyanthes trifoliata*, *Valeriana dioica* and *Lysimachia vulgaris* flowered freely and the most shade tolerant rare species *Sphagnum teres* appeared in identifiable form from less obvious shaded plants. None of the other restricted species has spread into the newly opened up mire yet but a new colony of *Carex limosa* was found at the edge of the scrub, it was clearly already on the verge of extinction through renewed scrub encroachment! Browsing by ponies is keeping down the scrub regrowth so far and the opened up mire is already of great interest. It is to be hoped that the restricted species will expand into the restored habitat and perhaps *Eriophorum gracile* will reappear from buried seed. The site will continue to be monitored to observe future progress and to evaluate the conservation value of further clearance work.

NA Sanderson

Hampshire Flora

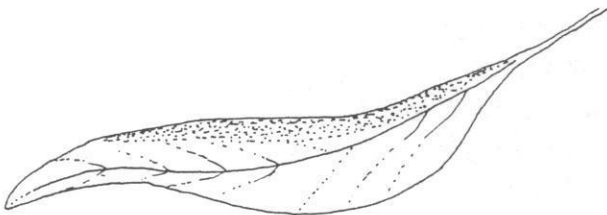
Most members will know by now that The Flora of Hampshire was published in February. We all offer our hearty congratulations to Lady Anne Brewis, Paul Bowman and Dr Francis Rose together with everyone else who worked on the project. If anyone missed the pre-publication offer, there is a chance to order the Flora at a 10% discount.

Atlas 2000 Project

Clive Chatters has been approached by David Pearman of BSBI who has asked whether the Flora Group could help BSBI recorders update the 10km square Atlas of Britain. This major project follows hot on the heels of the County Flora for Hampshire. If anyone would like to help by recording their local area on a 10km square card, please contact Clive at the Trust office. If anyone would like to coordinate work in their local area, working with the BSBI v.c. recorders do let us know. The BSBI are always very helpful to us and we would like to return the compliment. We hope in the next few weeks to see if it is possible to interrogate the data gathered by the Trust to assist this project. If the computer shows this is possible we will prepare an up to date checklist for each 10km square in Hampshire. Less information is held for the Island. If anyone is keen to work the Island, please let us know and we can put you in touch with the BSBI coordinators.

Atlas 2000 Field Meeting Newport, Isle of Wight

The BSBI have arranged an Atlas 2000 Field meeting on the Isle of Wight on Saturday 25 and Sunday 26 May 1996. The aim is to cover all 10km squares and the weekend will be led by D Green and M Sanford. For further details, send a SAE to D Green, Tower House, 297 Bloomfield Road, Bath, Avon, BA2 2NU.



BSBI Trip to Hayling Island Saturday 27 April 1996

Leader Dr Francis Rose

An examination of the rich spring ephemeral flora of the shingle beaches and sand dunes. Guidance will be offered on identifying flowering plants in their vegetative state. Meet in the main beach car park at the end of the A3023 (SZ 713 987) at 10.30 am. Pub lunch will be available. Booking is not required.



Trees

Dr Francis Rose has asked us all to keep our eyes open for elm and lime trees over the coming season.

There appears to be a number of mature elm trees, particularly in East Hampshire which have survived the ravages of Dutch Elm disease. These trees are both within woodlands and in hedges on field edges. If you know of any fine mature elms please do let us know, giving a grid reference or sketch map, together with measurement of the girth of the tree at chest height. If possible, a few specimen leaves would be helpful. The large leaved lime is now considered native along the foot of the South Downs and just creeps into Hampshire. It may be present in hedges or as individual trees in woodlands anywhere on the South Downs and possibly also in the Hampshire Hangers. It is not always easy to separate this species from hybrid lime or small leaved lime. If you know of a fine lime tree free from bosses on its trunk (typical of hybrids) and with leaves longer than small leaved lime, do please let us have details (ie the same details as requested above for elms) Please send records to Clive Chatters at the Trust office and he will pass them on to Dr Rose.

Fungus 100

All you ever wanted to know about Fungi - moulds, yeasts, mushrooms and toadstools

An event organised by The British Mycological Society at the Royal Horticultural Society, Vincent Square, London, SW1 from 26-28 September 1996. The outline programme includes 100 exhibits on a range of topics eg use of fungi as food, the science of their study, their influence on arts and crafts plus lectures, films, videos, and slides. Further details in future newsletter.

New Disease Threat to British Dogwood Trees

A serious disease that is now decimating native *Cornus* in U.S.A may be starting to spread in Britain. Dogwood anthracnose caused by a fungus *Discula destructiva* has been found in about six garden and nursery locations by plant pathologists at the Central Science Laboratory in the last two years. The ornamental species *C. florida* and *C. nuttallii* are particularly susceptible and in UK it seems likely that *C. kousa* and also *C. alba* and *C. sanguinea* may also be affected.

Symptoms: The disease begins as spots or blotches on the new leaves and occasionally flowers, followed by dieback which generally begins in the lower branches and moves up the shrub. Cankers may form on large branches and, with severe dieback, death may follow especially under cool, damp conditions which are thought to favour the disease.

To ascertain how widespread the disease has become and the amount of damage on different species, the Royal Horticultural Society Plant Pathology Department has joined forces with the Central Science Laboratories to monitor the disease and investigate it further. If you find any suspicious examples with obvious dieback in the countryside please send a sample, sealed in a clean, dry, plastic bag to RHS Garden, Wisley, Woking, Surrey GU23 6QB. Mark the envelope "Dogwood anthracnose".

Species Recovery Reports

Wood Calamint

The Trust recently had the opportunity to have an input into a proposed Woodland Grant Scheme for Rowridge Copse, the only site in Britain where Wood Calamint *Clinopodium menthifolium* grows. This woodland-edge plant was recently the subject of an English Nature-funded Species Recovery Project written up by Heather Winship. A site meeting with representatives of conservation organisations, the Forestry Authority, the land agent and game keeper for the site identified a major conflict between management for the plant and maintaining the value of the wood as a shoot.

Rowridge Copse was originally two strips of hillside woodland separated by a triangle of downland where the plant used to grow in some profusion. This open ground has since been invaded by Hazel scrub and the two woods joined together to become the current Rowridge Copse. Heather's report on the conservation of this plant suggested the partial recreation of this triangle of downland to encourage Wood Calamint. But the gamekeeper was concerned that he wouldn't be able to drive pheasants from one end of the wood to the other if there was intervening open ground: having left the cover of woodland they would start to fly but not in front of the guns! It was agreed that the best way to overcome this problem would be to target the creation of open ground more specifically to the areas where the Wood Calamint is known to have been while retaining areas of scrub and a belt of woodland as cover for the birds. Other areas of ground will be opened up and allowed to close on a rational basis.

Slender Cotton Grass

At the end of last year, Jonathan Cox's report to the Trust on this species gave cause for concern over its fortunes in the New Forest. He reported a 90% decline in the number of flowering plants recorded in 1994 at Fort Bog, and not a single flowering plant was seen at Widden Bottom in 1995. In spite of this bad news, Geoffrey Field and Elizabeth Young did find the plant at Widden Bottom in 1995. In contrast, the

sole colony in Surrey, at Peatmoor Pond, showed a 50% increase in the size of the population. This has been due to the management work recently undertaken by the Defence Land Service together with the Ash and Mytchett Conservation Group; they have also increased the area of suitable habitat available to the plant. Jonathan notes that this species will respond to habitat management even in a short space of time.

Indeed the Flora Group undertook just this kind of habitat management on Sunday 4th February 1996 at Wilverley Bog (see N Sanderson's report in "Reports & Events") and Fort Bog. At Fort Bog, the best site in the New Forest for the species, the area supporting the plant is surrounded on three sides by alder carr which, unless controlled, would invade the site and almost inevitably lead to the loss of the Cotton-grass. The work party cut back all alder regeneration in the formerly open bog and some of the larger trees within the carr were taken out. Though many of the trees were very small, most of them were between 20 and 30 years old: there may have been a change in the water level or grazing regimes two or three decades ago, allowing a sudden flash of new woody growth.

Hydrocotyle ranunculoides

(Floating Marsh Pennywort)

A plant not listed in the new Flora of Hampshire has recently become established in Surrey, and seems very likely to be added to Hampshire's flora in the near future.

Hydrocotyle ranunculoides is a native of North America, where the unfortunate English name of "Floating Marsh Pennywort" may account for erroneous labelling as Marsh Pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris* when offered for sale in Britain.

Water Pennywort or Floating Pennywort might be more appropriate names, for this is a species at home in shallow water habitats, whence it spreads out into deeper water in dense, floating mats. It will also grow on mud, though tends to be smaller there. It is much bigger, more vigorous and faster growing than our native pennywort; as such it makes a diminutive plant like *Crassula helmsii* seem quite insignificant really.

The first British record was from the River Chelmer, Essex, in 1990. By late 1992 it had colonised 12km. of the river. In 1991 it was found in a gravel pit pond at North Shoebury, also in Essex, where an attempt was made to remove it by dredging. It increased there considerably nonetheless. Since then, several other Essex sites have been found, and one in Hertfordshire.

Surrey came into the picture in 1994, when *H. ranunculoides* was found in a ditch at Addlestone and in Coxes Mill Pond, both near Weybridge, the latter linked to the Wey Navigation Canal. In June 1995 I discovered it in the Basingstoke Canal east of Brookwood. Last October, the spectacular spread along 2 km of the Wey Navigation was mapped by Barry Phillips and Giles Groom for the Surrey Wildlife Trust. A month later, when Barry gave me the full guided tour, we found it in the Thames.

The growth rate is at least on a par with *Crassula helmsii*. Growth continues into the autumn until November. If the plant is damaged, fragments of stem will float off to form secondary colonies. In size *H. ranunculoides* is comparable with *Caltha palustris*, but with an extremely dense growth, stout stems and copious roots. Once established, it is like no native plant, though small floating fragments might be taken for a *Ranunculus*. The leaf shape, held more or less upright on long petioles, and the small, inconspicuous flowers at the base, are similar to *H. vulgaris*.

Any waterbody colonised by this extremely invasive species will quickly face a serious management problem.

I am grateful to Giles Groom, Roger Payne, Barry Phillips and John Skinner for providing information used in this article. John Skinner confirmed the identity of the Basingstoke Canal material, and Barry Phillips provided an enlightening if somewhat depressing tour of the extent of colonisation in the Wey Navigation, while pointing out other, less troublesome, aliens nearby. *Conza sumatrensis* is well established around Weybridge, and has perhaps been overlooked in the urban areas of Hampshire.

Chris Hall

Checklist of Plants in North West Hampshire

Flora Group Member Mike Wildish has produced a checklist of plants found in the North West part of Hampshire. Copies can be obtained from Catherine Chatters on receipt of a large SAE.

Records from gardens and allotments

Following the article in the last newsletter on interesting plants in gardens and allotments a number of records have been received. These show that a surprising variety of native plants can appear in gardens, particularly if weeding or grass cutting is not carried out too rigorously. Chris Hall suggests that some of these may arise from seeds unintentionally introduced via the footwear or clothing of botanists visiting habitats where interesting and unusual wild plants grow.

Some of the more interesting records received are given below. The records are currently held by Mary Flatt and if anyone wants further information on these please contact her.

Bee orchid (*Ophrys apifera*) - on the lawn at the Old House, Wonston, near Winchester where the grass is never mown(AB).

Green-winged orchids (*Orchis morio*), spotted orchids and spotted x marsh orchid (*Dactylorhiza* spp) on lawn at Snailing Lane, Greatham (SU7629) (AB).

Autumn ladies tresses (*Spiranthes spiralis*) - on thin soil over chalk in garden at Hambledon, appeared summer 1995(RF).

Green-flowered helleborine (*Epipactis phyllanthos*) - in garden of the Hay Wain, Hollywater Road, Bordon (SU8034) (AB)

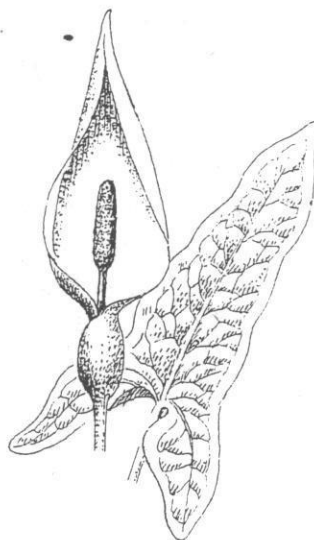
Italian lords-and-ladies (*Arum italicum* ssp. *neglectum*) - in Selbourne churchyard and in Vicarage garden (SU7433)(AB).

Allotments at Farnborough in July 1992 included bugloss (*Anchusa arvensis*), corn spurrey (*Spergula arvensis*), small nettle (*Urtica urens*), henbit deadnettle (*Lamium amplexicaule*), field pansy (*Viola arvensis*), annual dog's mercury (*Mercurialis annua*), lesser swine grass (*Coronopus didymus*), sticky stork's-bill (*Erodium cicutarium*), sun spurge (*Euphorbia helioscopia*), fool's parsley (*Aethusa cynapium*), gallant soldier (*Galinsoga parviflora*), green field-speedwell (*Veronica agrestis*), loose silky bent (*Apera spica-venti*) and lesser snapdragon (*Misopates orontium*). All these rarely occur as garden weeds in the Farnborough area. (CH)

Plants recorded by C.Hall in his garden, which was on former heathland (until the late 1940's), have included cuckoo flower (*Cardamine pratensis*) (now spread onto his neighbours drive), grass vetchling (*Lathyrus nissolia*), fleabane (*Pulicaria dysenterica*), bristle club-rush (*Isolepis setacea*) and water figwort (*Scrophularia auriculata*). The presence of several damp loving species is of interest since the soil is well drained and there are no marshy areas or ponds. Gorse seedlings also occur every year despite the lack of any mature bushes in the garden or in any nearby garden. Chris suggests that it is possible that they arise from 50 year old seeds which are brought to the surface by annual digging.

Many thanks to those who sent in records - Lady Anne Brewis (AB), Chris Hall (CH) and Roger Fracer (RF). Further records this year from gardens or allotments would be of interest. Please send them to Mary Flatt at Chalk Cottage, Soames Lane, Ropley, Alresford, Hampshire, SO24 0ER.

Mary Flatt



Conserving Wildlife in the UK: The Biodiversity Action Plan Steering Group Report

When the UK government signed the Biodiversity Convention at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 it pledged to, "develop national strategies for the conservation of biological diversity, or adapt existing strategies for this purpose." The Government followed this up with "Biodiversity: the UK Action Plan" which identified 49 steps for conserving wildlife in the UK but proposed little concrete action. One of those steps was to set up a steering group that would report back to government with targets and action plans for the conservation of our most threatened habitats and species. This report was published in December 1995 and was positively received by John Gummer, the Environment Secretary. But the report is not yet government policy: we expect the Cabinet's response to its proposals on 15 May 1996.

The report is a curate's egg. It does rather well considering that its remit was constrained to action plans for individual species and habitats, but as a result there are not enough rigorous recommendations on the broader issues flagged up in the text. For example the point is made that reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) will be the most potent mechanism for delivering biodiversity targets across the whole range of species and habitats. The report also acknowledges that there is a need to change the emphasis of government policy away from site based conservation with its heavy focus on SSSI's, towards the wider countryside and landscapes.

The report includes action plans for 116 species and proposes that plans be prepared for another 286 species within the next three years. There are also plans for 14 key habitats with proposed plans for another 24 habitats, again within the next three years. All these plans are costed and assume a considerable increase in government funding for conservation. For example, in 1997 the full implementation of all plans would cost just under £17,000,000, half of which cost would be expected to fall to the government.

The only species of vascular plant occurring in Hampshire for which a full action plan has been prepared is Early Gentian (*Gentianella angelica*). The plan acknowledges the work put into the conservation of this plant by the Trust with funding from the Species Recovery Programme, and indicates that seven candidate SACs have been selected for this species under EC Habitats Directive. Significantly, the action plan's objectives and targets include not only safeguarding all surviving populations, but where extinction has occurred recently, restoring 10 populations to former sites by the year 2004. This reflects an important theme in the action plans: they go beyond merely conserving the current resource to enhancing and increasing it. The plan goes on to propose action for achieving these objectives and identifies the lead government agencies for each. None of these actions is particularly demanding but looking at the whole document in a positive manner there are hundreds of these individual actions proposed, each requiring a government agency to take a lead.



The Habitat Action Plans include: Cereal Field Margins, Chalk Rivers, Lowland Heathland, Fen and Grazing Marshes. In the case of cereal field margins which support very rare arable weeds including several occurring in Hampshire (e.g. Pheasant's eye, Lamb's Succory - now extinct, Shepherds Needle and Red Hemp-Nettle), the target is to, "maintain, improve and restore by management the biodiversity of some 15,000 hectares of cereal field margins by 2010".

This is an encouragingly ambitious target but actually also includes grass-margins around arable fields for the benefit of birds such as Grey Partridge, Quail, and Corn Bunting. Again, the most important mechanism for achieving this aim will be reform of agricultural policy with payments to farmers being designed to encourage them to increase the biodiversity of their land rather than just to reduce their output of crops.

The action plan for lowland heathland is far less ambitious than we might have hoped for: one of its targets is to encourage the re-establishment by 2005 of 6,000 hectares of heathland". This could probably be achieved in the New Forest alone by the end of 1997! Indeed the report goes on to admit that this is a modest target, in view of the fact that it has been estimated that there are 67,000 hectares of recently modified heathland with the potential of restoration.



Though this report focuses on a limited number of species and habitats, thereby completely neglecting whole swathes of the UK's biodiversity, it does provide very firm costed targets for the government to achieve: as such it must be welcomed. Furthermore twice as many action plans are proposed for the future and to implement all of these, particularly those for habitats, will require some fairly broad policy changes. It is this kind of change that more than anything will secure a future for the biodiversity of the UK. The true test of the value of this report will be how fully government implements it across all departments. If the report becomes policy and the policy leads to action, we may yet take the first step in **increasing** biodiversity in this country.

Patrick Cloughley

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