

FLORA GROUP NEWSLETTER - SPRING 1992

NEWS ITEMS:

Centaurium tenuiflorum

Centaurium tenuiflorum on the Isle of Wight

One of the most exciting botanical records of 1991 in our area was the rediscovery of 'Slender Centaury' Centaurium tenuiflorum on the Isle of Wight. This very rare species, a candidate for the Bern Convention and Schedule 8, had been recorded in the past from the Isle of Wight but had not been seen for many years in its original locality by the Medina and a second possible locality has never been fully confirmed. Otherwise this species was only currently recorded from a few unstable clay sea cliffs in Dorset where only the white flowered form is known.

The rediscovery was made at a totally new locality to the previous Island records during a vegetation survey of a grazing marsh carried out by Neil Sanderson which was funded by the Wildlife Trust. A fascinating aspect of this find is that the plant was found in a completely different habitat to that of the Dorset sites. Rather than unstable clay cliffs a sizeable colony was found growing in undisturbed grazed saltmarsh. The species was confined to Juncus gerardi - Festuca rubra - Glaux maritima swards but grew near to the junction between this saltmarsh community and brackish inundation grassland. Although, this sort of unimproved grazed saltmarsh is much rarer than it was due to reclamation and neglect of grazing, the latter leading to the invasion of reed and a considerable loss of species diversity it is still more frequent around the Solent than anywhere else in the lowlands. It seems quite probable therefore that there are more sites for this species awaiting discovery locally. The best time to look is July when it will be fully in flower.

Unlike the Dorset plant those found on the Island are pink flowered. The species can be separated fairly easily from other Centaurium spp using the following points:-

a) First the possibility that any suspect plants are C.erythraea should be ruled out by checking that there is no basal rosette and that the flowers are on pedicels (i.e. each flower should be on 2mm stalks). If so the plant is either C. tenuiflorum or C.pulchellum. If there are basal rosettes and the flowers are sessile then it is just the ubiquitous C.erythrea.

b) C.tenuiflorum is a taller plant than C.pulchellum usually with 5-9 internodes as opposed to only 2 - 4 for the latter. The branching of C.tenuiflorum is also quite distinctive being strict producing a dense cyme (flowering head) as opposed to C.pulchellum's lax branching and loose cyme. A very good illustration of both species are given in Garrard and Streeters The Wild Flowers of the British Isles plate 59.

Large leaved lime - Many of you may have seen reports in the botanical press of the presence of large leaved lime as a native tree on the Sussex Downs. It is believed this species may be a relic of primary woodlands and thus of considerable interest in understanding the development of the landscape and vegetation of the South Downs. Until recently the closest Hampshire was able to get to sharing this excitement was a large lime on the county boundary, straddling an ancient boundary earthwork. This ancient tree is probably a hybrid lime and thus not entirely acceptable to lime purists. Following encouragement by Dr. Francis Rose a number of botanists have searched for the tree in South Hampshire. The honour of finding the first specimens has gone to Paul Bowman who has now found a number of trees in the Buriton area.

Andy Byfield - Andy has written to us with news of the numerous populations of 'rare cyclamen, icy opalescent blue crocus and bright golden fritilleries' he is enjoying finding in Turkey. He has also found a species of Fritillaria " - a dinky limey green single-belled number with very Erythronium like appearance abundant on a single serpentine mountain" that appears to be undescribed in the flora; a possible new species. We wish Andy well with his continued work with FFPS.

New Blood In our last Newsletter we asked for people to help organise the flora group and its activities. As can be seen from the summer programme we have some new names. We need more, especially to help organise events, address envelopes etc -Please let the Secretary know if you are interested in joining what is an interesting and very informal Committee.

Past Events. We have received a letter of thanks from the Forestry Commission for our work pollarding Holly in January of this year. The Holly that was cut has now been devoured by Forest animals. We will monitor the lichen populations to see how they recover. In the meantime approaches have been made to the F.C. to explore whether Holly cutting can be revived in the Forest with special emphasis on sites valuable in providing forage for Forest stock and providing benefit for conserving rare lower plant populations.

The clearance of the Red Tipped Cudweed bank was also undertaken in January 1992. We found the remains of some 8 - 10 plants that had set seed in the 1991 season. We hope to monitor the site to see how the Cudweed responds to management providing open ground in mid-winter.

The Heath Lobelia site was also subject to clearance works during this last winter. This is the second year running we have cleared birch and rank vegetation. Following the 1991 clearance the response was excellent. We hope this year will see an even better population. If anyone is eager on visiting the site to see the plants in bloom we could arrange a visit in late summer. If you are keen please contact Clive Chatters at the Trust Office. The site is on private land and we should seek the consent of the estate before visiting.

N.B. Some of the record sheets for the Hampshire Purslane Survey of 1991 have still not yet been returned. Please, if you can, return these so we can calculate the status of the plant.

Events for Summer 1992.

Fen Day Saturday 27th June 1992, 11.00 a.m. at Greywell Moor (SU 722 513). In keeping with the national concern for wetland wildlife we have arranged a visit to Fens in North East Hampshire concentrating on the Trust reserves of Greywell Moor (The Ted Wallace Memorial Reserve) and Mapledurwell. We are currently talking to owners of private fens to see if we can visit additional less well known sites. We are lucky to be guided around by Dr. Francis Rose whose expertise in both higher plants, lower plants and vegetation communities enjoys an international reputation. This should be a most enjoyable day with 'desirable' species found in abundance.

Harewood Forest. Sunday 16th August 1992, 10.30 a.m. at Upping Copse E3420 under the pylons (SU 376422). Leader Clive Chatters. Organiser John Moon. The Wherwell Estate have kindly agreed to us visiting this little known woodland lying to the South of Andover. The wood is a remarkable complex of ancient oak coppices interspersed with relic heath and down. Harewood Forest as a whole is the largest block of ancient wood in Hampshire outside the New Forest. The purpose of our visit is to enjoy the woodland and to see if we can relocate the populations of cut leaved Germander (Teuclium botrys) and Grund Pine (Ajuga chamaepitys) that have been previously described from the woodland edge. These two plants are just the highlights of what is an exceptionally rich 'headland' flora.

Fern Day. Identification training. Saturday 5th September 10.30 a.m. at Roydon Woods Reserve Tractor Shed (SU 305006) Leader Dave Winsland. This day will seek to introduce botanists to a variety of Ferns - including Royal Fern and the Hay scented Buckler Fern. The purpose of the day will be to help people learn to identify ferns with greater confidence. Beginners are welcome if they have a rudimentary botanical knowledge. If at all possible please let Dave Winsland know if you would like to attend. Messages should be left at the Trust office.

If you are keen to see conservation work undertaken on a species during the winter of 1992/93 please let us know. Any ideas or suggestions would also be most welcome.

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