

Warwickshire Flora Group

Newsletter No. 3 March 2012.

LATEST NEWS.

John Harris came across a *really prickly surprise* in Mancetter growing in the shallow soil along the edge of a railway bridge. It was Warwickshire's first species of cactus!

The cactus, four centimetres in diameter and named as a possible species of *Echinopsis*, looked healthy when we went to see it, having recently survived a fortnight of sub-zero temperatures and being covered in three inches of snow. The plant's native habitat is the South American Andes so this is perhaps not surprising. It will be interesting to see how long it survives. Why on earth is it growing on a railway bridge in Mancetter?

WFG INDOOR MEETING

We will be holding an Indoor Meeting on Sunday 25 March in the Barn, Brandon Marsh Nature Reserve, CV3 3GW.

Starting at 2 p.m. there will be short presentations by various speakers, a quiz, tea, coffee and biscuits.

There will also be an opportunity for members to give their own views. Join us either at 11.30 a.m. for a quick walk around the reserve, followed by a visit to the café (or sandwiches), or just come for the indoor session at 2 p.m.

FIELD MEETINGS 2012

The programme for this year has been designed to provide a baseline survey for some of the most important wildlife sites in the county. Believe it or not, although the WBRC and the Wildlife Trust receive many records of the orchids at Ufton Fields and Draycote Meadows every year, a full blown survey of all of the plants has not been carried out at either site for something like a dozen years.

We have also teamed up with two strong local conservation groups at Cawston near Rugby and at Whittleford Park, Nuneaton. The Whichford Wood meeting is a joint one with the Habitat Biodiversity Audit at Warwick Museum as part of a project to help protect the rare Barbastelle bat. A June visit to DM Kineton should be as productive as last year and we also have access to Bickenhill Plantation, an area of heathland in the centre of the NEC complex. Steven Falk, now working at the Wildlife Trust on the Princethorpe Woodlands Living Landscape Project, will guide us around Wappenbury Wood in May and Weston & Waverley Woods in the autumn.

You will receive the Spring and Summer Field Meetings list with this Newsletter and an Autumn list will be sent out in June. Like last year we have tried to vary the days of the week. Many thanks to the people who have offered to lead us around their local patches and to those who have helped us gain access to various sites.

FOR SOME LIGHT RELIEF, TEST YOUR BOTANICAL SKILLS ON THE ONLINE QUIZ AT <http://wbd.etibioinformatics.nl/bis/flora.php?menuentry=quiz> . IT CAN BE QUITE ADDICTIVE

RECORDING

We are really grateful to those botanists who spent time surveying areas of the county in 2011 and wrote up their records during the winter. We have received additional lists from John Harris and Mike Dixon mainly from the Nuneaton and Bedworth area, David Long from Rugby and Graham Thompson from Leamington and Warwick. These have been sent off to the BSBI database and the Museum in Warwick.

LOOK OUT FOR.....

Early March is the perfect time to go searching for **EARLY MEADOW GRASS (*Poa infirma*)**. Brian Laney found the first county record for this species at the southbound Warwick Services on the M40. As this is an open site, please go and find it, and of course celebrate with a cup of tea and cake when you have. It is an annual and needs monitoring to see if it is still there.

Brian Laney writes: Early Meadow Grass it is a light green species in colour. The seed drops off it very easily of which often leaves the flower spikes completely bare and some of the flower heads are vertical in shape. Warning! There is Annual Meadow Grass (*Poa annua*) with the *P. infirma* in most of the populations found. (*P. infirma* has smaller individual flowers).

Check the gravel edges of the shrub borders in the area where the cars park. Best areas are:

- At base of standard ash in shrub border SP 34035 59755.
- On kerb edge below Lonicera type hedge SP 34085 57947 and at SP 34089 57963.
- Close to the entrance to service station building SP34081 57990.

A more impressive and architectural plant worth seeing at this time of year is White Butterbur (*Petasites albus*). There is a colony of this handsome introduced species beside the River Avon in the woods behind the Wolston Leisure Centre, Manor Estate, Wolston. Take the footpath through the woods and keep going until you reach the river at about SP40387565.

BSBI Threatened Plant Project 2012

As mentioned in the last newsletter the species list for 2012 is

<i>Aceras anthropophorum</i>	Man Orchid (Ufton Fields NR & Bishop's Hill, 2007)
<i>Anacamptis morio</i>	Green-winged Orchid (Draycote Meadows and 11 other sites)
<i>Persicaria minor</i>	Small Water-pepper (last seen Sutton Park 1959)
<i>Ranunculus arvensis</i>	Corn Buttercup (19 sites all in South Warks)
<i>Vicia parviflora</i>	Slender Tare (3 sites near Walton)

The BSBI has chosen nine priority sites of the 37 sites above for us to visit and survey during the year. We will be surveying both Ufton Fields and Draycote Meadows in the field meetings programme, but if you feel confident about recognizing Corn Buttercup or Slender Tare, we would welcome your help to cover the others. Survey forms and information on how to fill them in will be available at the indoor meeting on 25 March. It isn't that complicated.

If you are not already on our e mail list, or if you would like any more information about the Warwickshire Flora Group or would like to discuss things botanical, please e mail us on johnwalton46@tiscali.co.uk or ring us on 01827 712455. You do not have to be a member of the BSBI or anything else to join in our activities.

John and Monika Walton (BSBI Plant Recorders for Warwickshire)