

HUNTINGDONSHIRE NEWSLETTER

Autumn 2009

David Broughton

End of Date Class 4

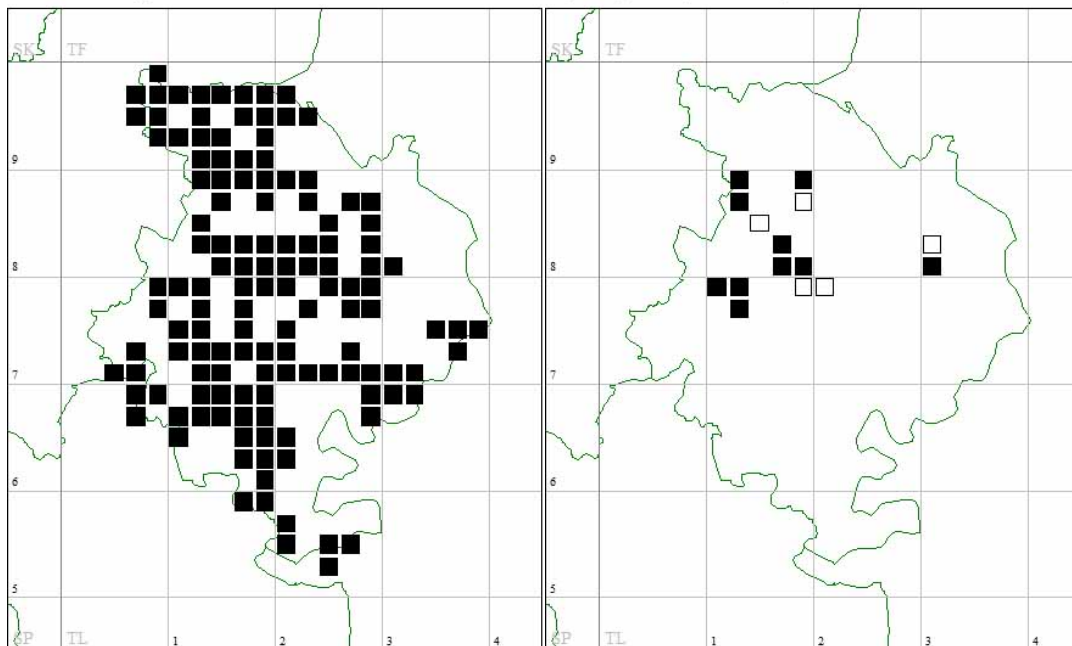
With autumn upon us and Date Class 4 rapidly drawing to a close it is a good opportunity to take stock and review progress so far.

My personal view is that we can be very proud of what has been achieved in such a relatively short timeframe and I would take this opportunity to thank everyone who has submitted records, or plans to submit records, this year. The County database (excluding records for the Soke (VC32)) now stands at an impressive 99,426 records of which 20,550 (21% of all records) have been made over the last two years. The challenge now is to keep the momentum going as we begin a new date class. It should be easier this time round, we have a full decade to work with and only need to aim to get representative coverage of one and a bit hectads per year to resurvey the county at the hectad level.

At the tetrad level the data is relatively patchy but still something to be proud of. The records of the ubiquitous Common Nettle (*Urtica dioica*) give us an indication of coverage at the tetrad level (see map), although this is of course an easily identified species that is apparent all year round. It also pleasing to find that some of our scarcer species have been almost completely resurveyed this decade, an example being Small Teasel (*Dipsacus pilosus*) (see map, black dots are this decade, white dots are older records).

Urtica dioica subsp. *dioica*

Dipsacus pilosus (Small Teasel)



Missing in Action

The following species have not been recorded recently. Some are probably now critically threatened within the county while others (Night-flowering Catchfly? Narrow-fruited Cornsalad?) might already be extinct. Future records of any of these species would be very welcome, please also consider whether these records might need validation or a voucher (specimen or photo). While I welcome records at any time of year, the submission of records at the end of the year often prevents interesting records from being followed up.

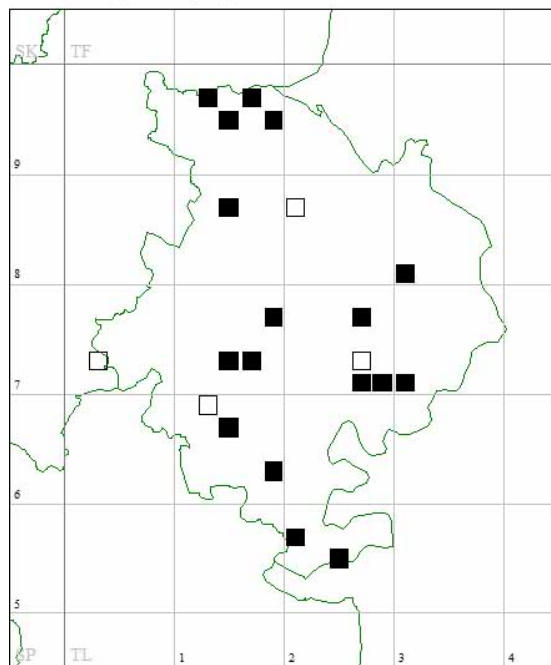
Corn Chamomile (*Anthemis arvensis*)
 Lesser Water-plantain (*Baldellia ranunculoides*)
 Nodding Bur-marigold (*Bidens cernua*)
 Hard-fern (*Blechnum spicant*)
 Field Mouse-ear (*Cerastium arvense*)
 Basil Thyme (*Clinopodium acinos*)
 Autumn Gentian (*Gentianella amarella*)
 Fragrant Orchid (*Gymnadenia conopsea* ssp. *conopsea*)
 Crested hair-grass (*Koeleria macrantha*)
 Venus's-looking-glass (*Legousia hybrida*)
 Field Gromwell (*Lithospermum arvense*)
 Yellow Pimpernel (*Lysimachia nemorum*)
 River Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe fluviatilis*)

Spiked Star-of-Bethlehem (*Ornithogalum pyrenaicum*)
 Knapweed Broomrape (*Orobanche elatior*)
 Corn Buttercup (*Ranunculus arvensis*)
 Ivy-leaved Crowfoot (*Ranunculus hederaceus*)
 Hairy Buttercup (*Ranunculus sardous*)
 Small Scabious (*Scabiosa columbaria*)
 Night-flowering Catchfly (*Silene noctiflora*)
 Corn Spurrey (*Spergula arvensis*)
 Field Woundwort (*Stachys arvensis*)
 Hare's-foot Clover (*Trifolium arvense*)
 Marsh Valerian (*Valeriana dioica*)
 Narrow-fruited Cornsalad (*Valerianella dentata*)

Our Changing Flora

Historically, Red Campion (*Silene dioica*) was a rare species in the county. However, it now seems to be on the increase and can be found at various widely scattered locations (see map). Many of the new colonies probably derive from sowings of wildflower seed. There is a huge colony along the Ellington Brook at Ellington where it looks native but Brian Davis informs me that this species first appeared along the nearby A14 when seed was sown on the verge. At Denton

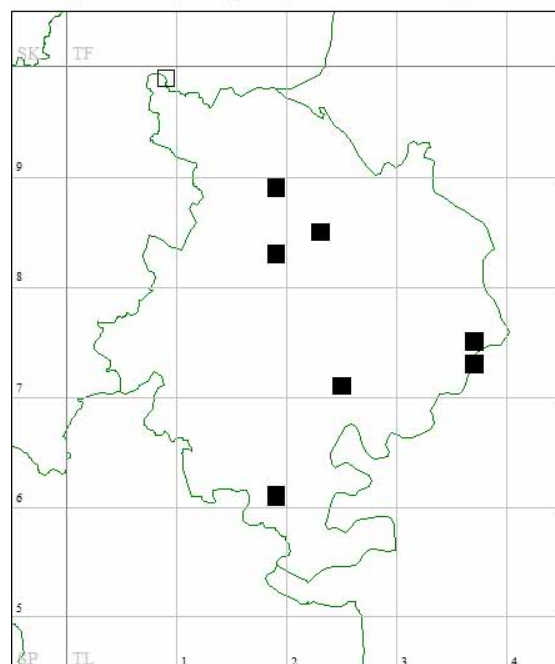
Silene dioica (Red Campion)



there is a thriving colony that clearly radiates out from a garden where this species is grown.

Great Marsh-bedstraw (*Galium palustre* ssp. *elongatum*) was first recorded for the county from Woodwalton Fen in 1966 and

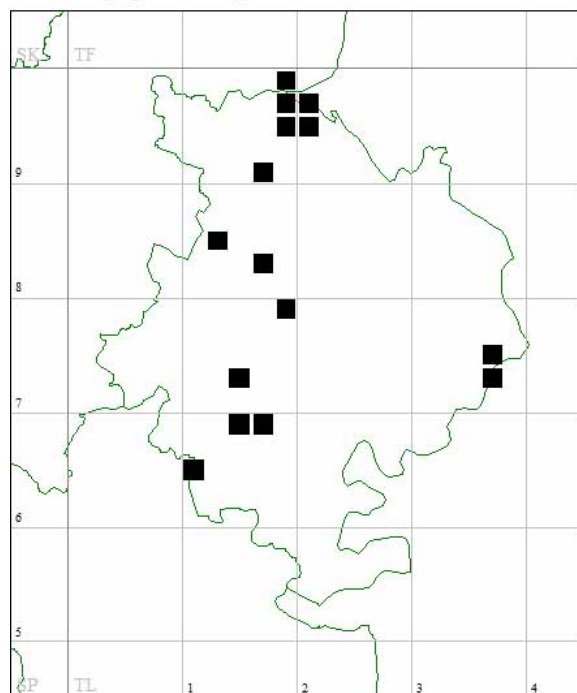
Galium palustre subsp. *elongatum* (Great Marsh-bedstraw)



then at Stibbington in 1971. These were the only records until I found it at Holme Fen in 2007 and I have since found it in several other places across the county. It is undoubtedly under-recorded and should be looked for along the margins of rivers, dikes and drains. It is normally found with its feet in water and when it is doing well it can reach an enormous size.

The final plant, Southern Dogwood (*Cornus australis*), is a new addition to our Flora having originated from the countries around the Black Sea. It is probably widely mistaken for our native Dogwood (*Cornus sanguinea*).

Cornaceae (Dogwood family)



It can be found planted along roads, in suburban areas, in new farm plantations and as infill in farm hedgerows. It, along with Asian Dogwood (*Cornus koenigii*) and the non-native Spindle (*Euonymus europaeus* f. *intermedius*), seems to be particularly characteristic of Environmental Stewardship plantings, which is not exactly a ringing endorsement for this scheme. Over coming years it will undoubtedly start to regenerate, it is already colonising the ancient woodlands of Peterborough, and our local planning authorities and other organisations need to start being more rigorous and demanding when they purchase native trees and shrubs for planting schemes.

Field Meetings

The programme of field meetings arranged by the Huntingdonshire Fauna and Flora Society provided a good opportunity to botanise a range of sites, including two 'ancient' woodlands with no public access.

Upton Wood – 19th April

We had high hopes for this Wood but unfortunately the heart of the wood had been heavily modified for forestry, with only the margins retaining fragments of the original ancient woodland.

The margins of the wood rewarded us with plentiful Wild Service-tree (*Sorbus torminalis*) and we were able to compare and contrast various violets, including Hairy Violet (*Viola hirta*), Early Dog-violet (*Viola reichenbachiana*) and Common Dog-violet (*Viola riviniana*). The former of which surprised us with its uncommon white-flowered incarnation.

The heart of the woodland was relatively mundane and typified by a dense carpet of Dog's-mercury (*Mercurialis perennis*) but we found an occasional Twayblade (*Neottia ovata*) and I was pleased to re-find the ancient woodland subspecies of Tufted Hairgrass (*Deschampsia caespitosa* ssp. *parviflora*) at the site where it was first recorded for the county by Hubbard.

The clearing around the pond provided us with an incongruous planting of Laurustinus (*Viburnum tinus*) and variegated Weigelia (*Weigela florida*).

Cow Lane Pits, Godmanchester – 12th July 2009

This site is a complex of flooded gravel workings with associated semi-improved grassland and broad-leaved shrub and tree plantings. The recent origin of much of the habitats present meant that we had to work quite hard, but even so we managed to record 143 species and some interesting botanical finds were made.

One of the most striking features of this site was the abundance of New Zealand Pigmyweed (*Crassula helmsii*) by one of the pits. It formed a dense smothering blanket over a large area, to the virtual exclusion of other flora. However, we did find a stand of Flowering-rush (*Butomus umbellatus*) emerging through this blanket (see photo) and on the fringes we found Tufted Forget-me-not (*Myosotis laxa*) and Skullcap (*Scutellaria galericulata*). Near the car park there was a small colony of Red Campion.



The Cook's Stream rewarded us with a good range of aquatic plant species including Greater Duckweed (*Spirodela polyrhiza*), Water-fern (*Azolla filiculoides*), Arrowhead (*Sagittaria sagittifolia*), Common Club-rush (*Schoenoplectus lacustris*), Yellow Water-lily (*Nuphar lutea*), White Water-lily (*Nymphaea alba*) and Shining Pondweed (*Potamogeton lucens*).

Other good finds included Grey Club-rush (*Schoenoplectus tabernaemontanii*), a hybrid dog-rose (*Rosa x dumalis*), Asian Dogwood and Blue Fleabane (*Erigeron acer*).

Salome Wood – 13th September

This wood proved to be extremely heavy going as we had to negotiate a dense under-storey of brambles (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.). Unfortunately it was too late in the year to collect specimens for expert determination but we saw at least two morphologically distinct taxa as well as Elm-leaved Bramble (*Rubus ulmifolius*) and Dewberry (*Rubus caesius*).

Like Upton Wood, this site proved to be much modified by forestry and we again had to work quite hard to reach our end total of 101 species. The Wood was notable for its extremely large and widely distributed colony of Small Teasel. We were also rewarded with one established plant of Deadly Nightshade (*Atropa belladonna*) and several bushes of the distinctively scented Harsh Downy-rose (*Rosa tomentosa*).

It was not the best time of year for recording woodland ground flora but we found Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*), Bugle (*Ajuga reptans*), Creeping-Jenny (*Lysimachia nummularia*), Wood Brome (*Bromopsis ramosa*), Wood Sedge (*Carex sylvatica*) and Enchanter's Nightshade (*Circaea lutetiana*).

Two small ponds provided us with Broad-leaved Pondweed (*Potamogeton natans*), Branched Bur-reed (*Sparganium erectum*) and unfortunately New Zealand Pigmy-weed. The surrounding clearing provided many plants of Common Centaury (*Centaurea erythraea*) as well as Perforate St John's-wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) and Canadian Fleabane (*Conyza canadensis* var. *canadensis*).

Tiring of battling through the brambles we took respite by walking along the arable margin adjacent to the Wood where we were able to examine both species of *Fluellen* (*Kickxia* spp.).

Novelties

Cirsium arvense var. *horridum* is a striking form of Creeping Thistle and if seen in a vegetative state without the flowers could easily cause confusion. The leaves are



extremely convolute with, as can be seen from the photo, vicious spines. Sell & Murrell consider this variety to be largely coastal in distribution but I recently found a small in an arable field near Salome Wood.

Galium aparine ssp. *agreste* is a form of Cleavers that appears in arable fields in the autumn, flowering and fruiting at a time of year when the ubiquitous ssp. *aparine* has died back for the winter.

It forms neat cushions of densely interwoven short stems with short internodes (see photo). The leaves also seem to be distinctive, being shorter than those of ssp. *aparine*, and the fruit are also smaller. The first county record was made from an arable field near Salome Wood and it should be looked for elsewhere.

