

# HUNTINGDONSHIRE NEWSLETTER

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### Recent Sightings

Jonathan Shanklin has recently been undertaking a botanical audit of the RSPB reserve at Fen Drayton Pits. While most of this site is in VC29 part of it falls within VC31. Jonathan's efforts have provided valuable updates for a tetrad with few recent records. In the process he has made a fair few new tetrad records along with records of interesting species such as Common Cudweed (*Filago vulgaris*), Greater Duckweed (*Spirodela polyrhiza*), Narrow-leaved Water-plantain (*Alisma lanceolatum*) and Treacle-mustard (*Erysimum cheiranthoides*).

I have recently been carrying out similarly detailed square-bashing in Monks Wood. This site despite its acknowledged botanical interest appears, based on data in the Map Scheme, to be relatively poorly recorded, with no records available for some of the most notable species since the bulk of recording for the County Flora was undertaken in the 1970's. In many cases, even recent records for common species were lacking and this conclusion was supported by a report published by English Nature (as was) in 2005.

It proved a relatively simple task to update records for most of the flora present. A highlight of this Wood is the abundance of Fragrant Agrimony (*Agrimonia procera*), and this must be the best place in VC31 to see this species. Other highlights included Wild Pear (*Pyrus pyraster*), Trailing Tormentil (*Potentilla anglica*), Water-purslane (*Lythrum portula*), Violet Helleborine (*Epipactis purpurata*), Short-styled Field-rose (*Rosa stylosa*), Lesser Pondweed (*Potamogeton pusillus*), Oval Sedge (*Carex leporina*) and a most exceptional occurrence, given the distance from any significant watercourse, of Skullcap (*Scutellaria galericulata*).

### Projects for September and October

As the season winds down it is all too easy to forget about recording for another year. However, there are still opportunities to make good finds at this time of year. For example, it was this time last year, when vegetation had started to die down, that Royal Fern (*Osmunda regalis*) was discovered new to the County. Similarly, this time of the year is optimal for hunting for Trailing Tormentil as the fruits have formed allowing it to be adequately distinguished from its hybrid relatives.

Many interesting aliens also continue to pop-up late into the Autumn, including such species as Gallant Soldier (*Galinsoga parviflora*), Treacle Mustard and, for those who are brave enough to tackle the challenging taxonomy (vouchers please!), a diverse suite of Fleabane (*Conyza*) taxa.

Finally, for anyone with plant records to submit I would love to receive them. I am busy compiling lists of VC firsts for Watsonia and my first Botanical Notes section for the HFFS Annual Report. If you don't send them in, you can't get the credit you may deserve!

### Novelties

This month I provide details of a few more unusual tree taxa present within the County.



Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) is a commonly planted tree species. While most people are familiar with Copper Beech (f. *purpurea* and its cultivars) this is not the only variant to be found. In late April this year I encountered a small stand of semi-mature beech trees in Littless Wood, Grafham Water. These trees had exceptionally large leaves (13.5cm long by 8.5cm wide) and are ascribable to f. *latifolia*. In the photo (left) a leaf is shown next to a typical leaf of f. *sylvatica* (leaf no more than 10cm long). Oriental beech (*Fagus orientalis*) has similarly large leaves but this is thought to be only rarely planted, certainly we have no records for VC31, and the leaves lack the widely spaced minute teeth along the margins.

The other species I want to introduce is Red Alder (*Alnus rubra*). This is another species with very large leaves (to 15cm long), much larger than the broadly similar and better known Grey Alder (*Alnus incana*). It can be easily distinguished by the revolute margins to the underside of the leaf (see adjacent photo).



Red Alder, a new VC record, is locally frequent in broad-leaved woodland plantings around the shores of Grafham Water. Here, it occurs with other inappropriate species, such as Swedish Whitebeam (*Sorbus intermedia*), Norway Maple (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) and Silver Maple (*Acer saccharinum*) (see photo).



*Acer saccharinum*



*Alnus rubra*