



HERTS FLORA GROUP

Newsletter
No. 25: April 2015



Welcome to my 25th annual Newsletter. It seems a long time ago that I started these, when we were in the early stages of the Hertfordshire Flora Survey.

I am pleased to say that, over the last few months, quite a few new people have asked to be added to this circulation, so I am hoping this might see a re-invigoration of plant recording in the County. With much going on nationally, it would be great if Hertfordshire could get more involved than maybe it has over the last few years.

The BSBI now has a new Scientific Officer and England Co-ordinator, based near Cambridge, Peter Stroh, and I was pleased to have his company on a memorable day out at Therfield Heath last summer, when we filled in one of the 'blank' tetrads (see below).

It also has a much upgraded website, with a wealth of information on it that, I must admit, I haven't really had as much time to explore as I ought. See <http://www.bsbi.org.uk/>. However, for some reason, it does not list the Herts Flora Group under 'Local Groups', so that is something else to get sorted!

For those of you who are 'new' to this circulation, the Herts Flora Group is really a 'virtual group', in that there is no separate subscription, no formal society, and it accepts interested participants from anywhere – in fact anyone who has an interest in studying Hertfordshire's wild flowers. However, **I do urge everyone who participates to join up with and help to support either (preferably both) the Hertfordshire Natural History Society and/or the Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland.**

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New England 'Red List' of Vascular Plants

Some of you may already be aware that there was a media fanfare of sorts last year when the new *Vascular plant red list for England* was published. This tome derived from a lot of number-crunching by the BSBI and Natural England, to identify which plants are faring badly and which are supposedly 'OK'. These exercises now follow the criteria for defining 'status' set down by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, which has developed a set of statuses: Critically Endangered, Endangered, Vulnerable, Near Threatened and 'Low Concern', based on the rate and statistically-verified amount of decrease of species. Available at: <http://www.bsbi.org.uk/england.html>

What has been included has caused some eyebrows to be raised, but, in the main, should not be any surprise to field botanists, because we all know what is happening to our natural environment. So, for those less in the know, here are some of the 'surprise' additions to the England-level 'Near Threatened' and some 'Vulnerable' categories:

<i>Briza media</i> (Quaking-grass)	<i>Calluna vulgaris</i> (Heather)
<i>Carlina vulgaris</i> (Carlina Thistle)	<i>Cichorium intybus</i> (Chicory)
<i>Erica cinerea</i> (Bell Heather)	<i>Erica tetralix</i> (Cross-leaved Heath)
<i>Erysimum cheiranthoides</i> (Treacle-mustard)	<i>Euphrasia nemorosa</i> (Common Eyebright)
<i>Fragaria vesca</i> (Wild Strawberry)	<i>Helianthemum nummularium</i> (Common Rockrose)

<i>Hottonia palustris</i> (Water-violet)	<i>Knautia arvensis</i> (Field Scabious)
<i>Mentha arvensis</i> (Field Mint)	<i>Ononis spinosa</i> (Spiny Rest-harrow)
<i>Oxalis acetosella</i> (Wood-sorrel)	<i>Plantago media</i> (Hoary Plantain)
<i>Potentilla erecta</i> (Upright Tormentil)	<i>Ranunculus flammula</i> (Lesser Spearwort)
<i>Sanicula europaea</i> (Sanicle)	<i>Silene flos-cuculi</i> (Ragged Robin)
<i>Succisa pratensis</i> (Devil's-bit Scabious)	<i>Veronica officinalis</i> (Heath Speedwell)

For those who might want to know, I have revised and added to the Hertfordshire Red Data List that was originally included in the *Flora of Hertfordshire*. This now not only includes all these 'new' threatened plants on a national basis, but also has a few errors and omissions corrected. I can supply this 'Red List' as a PDF to anyone who might want to use it. A copy has already gone to the Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust.

My only quibble, I think, is that, while we have Field Scabious included, we have no recognition of already quite-strongly decreased plants like Creeping Tormentil (*Potentilla anglica*), because the original decline was such a long time ago that it has not been picked up by the new analysis.

BSBI National Atlas 2020 recording progress

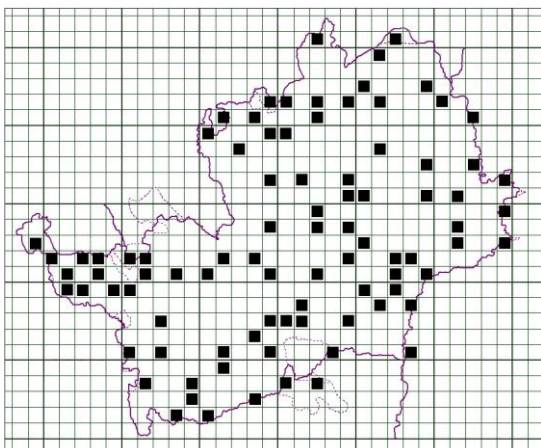
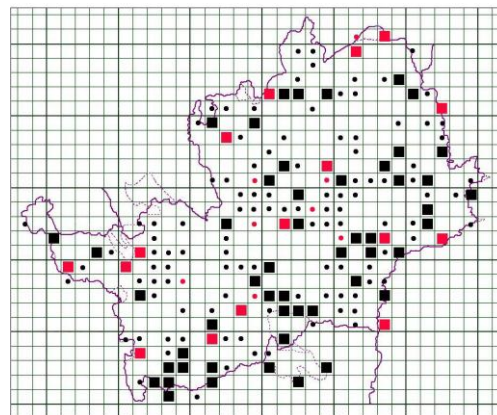
So, how have we done over the last twelve months getting up to speed with re-recording the Hertfordshire flora for BSBI's revised national Atlas?

To be honest, not fantastically. I still need some extra help to ensure that we don't end up with Hertfordshire seeming to be rather poorly recorded, **so if any of you can offer to take on a few tetrads in under-recorded areas, then I would be grateful.**

We did manage quite a few days survey last season, with the results depicted below in Map 1.

Map 1. Atlas 2020 survey coverage so far.

The red squares show what was achieved last year (mostly my own surveys). There are also a few more wildlife site surveys added in (as small red dots).



Map 2. 'Desired' full-tetrad recording coverage in Herts.

This is the map I showed last year, with the 'desired' coverage for full tetrad re-surveys.

As you will see from these maps, there are an awful lot of unvisited areas, especially in the west of the County!

The areas I (and one or two others) managed to record are the squares shown in red on the first map, and even these only really represent single days' recording, so more will be needed in these areas as well.

I have not added in all the single-site surveys carried out under the Wildlife Trust's Wildlife Sites Survey, because, good though these are, they don't do the level of recording we need for all habitats to be adequately examined.

Principal areas (tetrads) that need someone to go and survey			
Royston town area	TL34/K	Harmer Green area	TL21/N
Oughton Head Common area	TL13/Q	Panshanger	TL21/W
Blagrove Common, Sandon area	TL33/G	Bramfield Woods complex	TL21/Y
Hitch Wood area	TL12/W	Waterford Gravel Pits/'Heath' area	TL31/C
Purwell area, Hitchin	TL22/E	Sawbridgeworth area	TL41/X
Frogmore Pit, Aston area	TL22/V	Berkhamsted town area	SP90/Z
Moor Hall, Ardeley area	TL32/I	Bovingdon/Flaunden	TL00/A
Bishop's Stortford town area	TL42/V	Chipperfield Common area	TL00/K
Astrove area, Tring	SP81/X	Tythenhanger Pits area	TL10/X
Tring Park area	SP91/F	Shenley area	TL10/V
Aldbury Nowers area	SP91/L	Fir & Pond Woods/Hook Wood area	TL20/Q
Hudnall Common area	TL01/B	Northaw Great Wood area	TL20/X
Redbournbury area	TL11/A	Bayford village area	TL30/E
Harpenden/Rothamsted	TL11/G	Danemead/Hoddesdon Park Wood area	TL30/P
Nomansland Common/Heartwood (north)	TL11/R	Hoddesdon/Broxbourne town areas	TL30/T
Symondshyde area	TL11/V	Hilfield Park Reservoir/Aldenham area	TQ19/S
Blackbridge tip area, Wheathampstead	TL11/X	Rowley Green area	TQ29/D
Prior's Wood, Kimpton etc.	TL11/Y	Hadley Wood area	TQ29/N

Above is a bald list of many of the areas we still need up-to-date records from, with many really good sites! So, plenty to interest us; and don't think, because we have been to some of these places fairly recently we actually did thorough recording at the time – we didn't! Also, don't forget the scruffy bits of ground round the prime, juicy flora sites – these will hold all the weeds, aliens and general stuff you will miss otherwise.

If anyone has survey cards filled in but not yet sent to me, please let me have these. I do have a backlog of data to be entered into *Recorder*, but hope to get on with this in the next year.

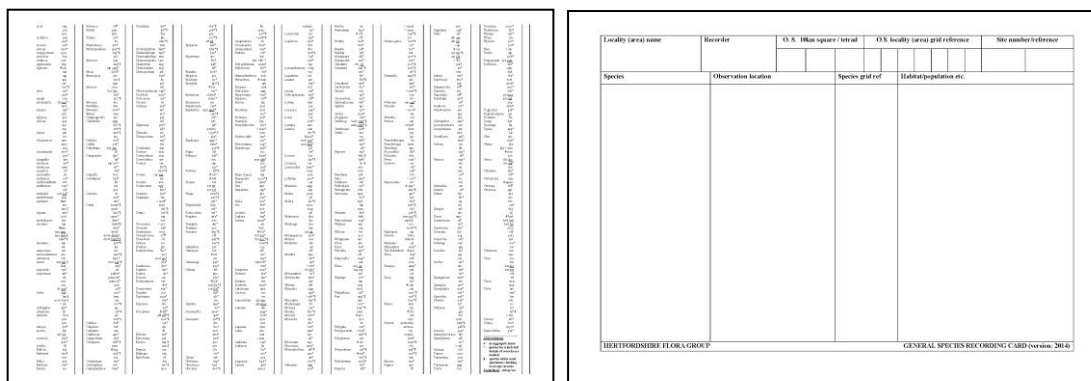
Herts Flora Online Recording

This is beginning to take off, at last! For those that have not yet tried it out properly the link remains: <http://flora.hnhs.org/> As I said last year, it also has the facility to download a spreadsheet template, into which you can type a list of records for a locality or day's recording. **But please make sure you use the scientific names in Stace's 3rd edition *New flora of the British Isles***, or you might get some errors sent back by the system!

If you want to get set up, all you need do is send me an email with your suggested user name (which can be your real name or not) and a password, which has to have a mixture of upper and lower case letters, at least one numeral, and at least one symbol character, such as a full stop or question mark (this is because the system resides on the Centre for Ecology & Hydrology's national servers, which need good protection). Let me know if you forget your password. I keep a record.

Periodically I do get to check out incoming records, and will 'sign them off', or maybe send you an email asking for extra information if necessary. Bear with me on this, though – it all takes time!

Experience with the new flora recording card



Having thought I had corrected all the errors and omissions last year, with the new card, I found I had still left some out (!) and made a few other mistakes, so I have re-revised the card, and made this available to anyone who wants it as an emailable PDF. It has yet to get on the Flora Group website (<http://www.hnhs.org/flora/>), but will do so shortly. I will also replace the printed cards I had produced last year, and if anyone wants hard copy cards, let me know. Otherwise print off your own as necessary.

To remind you: using the new recording card

At the bottom right-hand corner of the species list, you will find a box with some brief notes defining symbols used in the list. **These are to alert people to take care when recording a species!**

- **#:** indicates a name is an 'aggregate' (or '*sensu lato*'). In other words it encompasses two or more actual species or subspecies, which may also be on the card. **If what you are recording is not the aggregate, use the correct species tag instead.**
- *****: is used to highlight less common species, or those for which I would like more detailed information about where they were found (e.g. a 6- or 8-figure grid reference, notes on habitat etc.). These details should be entered on the back of the card, as well as striking through the name on the front.
- **\$:** is used to show species that need people to carefully check out (or get checked) a specimen to confirm a record, often because these can be tricky to identify. In general, **if you think you have one of these, I might ask you to send me a voucher specimen (or at the very least a good photo), to prove it, unless you already are experienced at identifying it.** Even then, in some cases, collecting and sending in a specimen is a good idea, which I can make into a permanent voucher for the County Herbarium at North Herts Museums in Hitchin, as long as collecting it won't damage the population.
- I have also **underlined** name abbreviations that represent **subspecies**. In most cases, there may be two different subspecies for a species, as well as a general species abbreviation (e.g. *Vicia sativa*). Take care which you use.

There is a blank column on the right hand side of species abbreviations. This is to record tags or notes when you haven't otherwise put notes on the other side of the card (e.g. 'P' for 'planted').

It is essential that at least a tetrad reference is given, preferably a minimum of a 1km square if you are not doing 'tetrad-bashing'. If you use the card to record a site, you can give a centroid grid reference for small sites, but for large ones, be more specific. **Please also use these cards for recording preferably on one day only, or at the most, a single year on any one card.** The aim is to be as precise about the 'what', where, when, and who' of a record as possible.

Plant highlights from 2014

As usual, I have compiled a few tasty morsels from last year's fieldwork, just to show that it really is still worth hunting for plants in Hertfordshire.

Oreopteris limbosperma (**Lemon-scented Fern**). This was re-found, in small quantity, at High Scrubs, Tring (90/J), 24/6/2014 T.J./Paula Shipway. It has not been seen here for a long time, and was thought possibly to be extinct even at its last site in the County, Bishop's Wood near Rickmansworth.

Thalictrum flavum (**Meadow-rue**). A good colony of this was found in the dried up remains of the former ornamental watercourse below Wall Hall, Aldenham (19/J), 8/6/2014 Flora Group. This is a good record of what has become a very restricted plant in the County, formerly in old wet meadows.

Ceratocarpus claviculata (**Climbing Corydalis**). Found in an area at Prior's Wood, Kimpton (11/Y), 27/3/2014 Andrew Harris, who showed it to us on a field meeting on 12th April. It might have been introduced with the planted conifers in the 1980s, but is the only known established site in the County.

Sagina nodosa (**Knotted Pearlwort**). A very few, rather spindly specimens of this were found on wet mud in cattle-poached riverside marsh at Gaddesden Meadows (01/F), 19/7/2014 T.J./Flora Group. It was last seen in these meadows over 100 years ago!! Thought to have been extinct in the County, a very welcome re-find.

Viola canina (**Heath Dog-violet**). This was re-found in flower at the heathy corner of Knebworth Park, by Wintergreen Wood (22/A), 7/6/2014 Flora Group.

Polygala serpyllifolia (**Heath Milkwort**). This was found in the south pit at Mardley Heath (21/P), 5/6/2014 Chris James. It was last seen at Mardley Heath in the early part of the 19th century!! I told her to keep on cutting down the trees!

Rosa sherardii (**Sherrard's Downy-rose**). **This has to be the find of the decade!** Paula Shipway and I found a single bush, in good shape, in the hedge of Brown's Lane, Hastoe (90/J), 24/6/2014. It was in fine flower, and also with good developed fruits, so the identity was very clear. The only former Herts records of this were from old herbarium specimens relatively recently identified, collected west of Hitchin in the mid-19th century. John Dony and others never saw it in the County. It is mainly a north-western species, and so perhaps it is retreating from the drier south-east. This would make sense, as where it was found is about as high in the Chilterns in the County as you can get.



Rosa sherardii at Brown's Lane, Hastoe. Paula Shipway photos

Armeria maritima (**Thrift**). This appeared by the side of the A505 at Royston (34/Q), May 2014 Ian Carle. It adds to the saltmarsh plants along this extraordinary section of road, and is new to the County.

Thesium humifusum (**Bastard Toadflax**). Not a new record for the site, but a completely new locality – this was found on the east side of the road at Therfield Heath, near the car park (34/F), 2/8/2014 *Paula Shipway* (det. T.J.). This is also a ‘new’ 10km square record! Its known colony, of course, is at Church Hill.

Verbascum chaixii (**Nettle-leaved Mullein**). A couple of fine plants of this were found in scrubby ground near Hardmead Lock, Ware (31/R), 4/10/2014 *T.J./Flora Group*. This rare, introduced species has only one former record from the County – seen “near Ware”, in 1919! Could this be the same place?! It is the second rare mullein to be re-found in this general area in recent years, showing perhaps how persistent they can be.

Torilis arvensis (**Spreading Hedge-parsley**). This nationally rare cornfield weed was found again in small quantity in the field by the R. Colne at Napsbury (10/R), 13/9/2014 *T.J./Flora Group*. It was also reported at another site in the County via iRecord, which I am following up.

Cotula coronopifolia (**Buttonweed**). Having first been found at Rye Meads recently, this has now invaded Hardmead Lake at Amwell Quarry (31/R), 4/10/2014 *T.J./Flora Group*, adding to the alien flora that is unfortunately beginning to dominate this site.

Tephroses integrifolia (**Field Fleawort**). The appearance of hundreds (if not thousands) of plants on Church Hill at Therfield Heath (33/J), and the discovery of some even near the car park by Therfield Road (34/F), 15/5/2014 *TJ/Pete Stroh* was unprecedented, because I had thought it might have been extinct when I wrote the *Flora*! However, I still failed to find it at Telegraph Hill, Lilley, so it seems to have gone from there.



Tephroses integrifolia, Therfield Heath



Dactylorhiza praetermissa var. *junialis* near Langley

Dactylorhiza praetermissa var. *junialis* (**Leopard Marsh-orchid**). This rather rare form of the Southern Marsh-orchid was confirmed from a narrow strip of rough pasture adjoining Burleighcroft Wood, Langley (22/B), 7/6/2014 *T.J./British Naturalists Association: Herts Branch*. The only other known site for it in the County is Sawbridgeworth Marsh. It had previously been mis-identified as the hybrid orchid *D. x grandis*.

Eriophorum angustifolium (**Common Cottongrass**). At least 14 flowering stems were counted at the known (last) site in the County at Moor Hall Meadow, Ardeley (32/I), 17/6/2014 *T.J.* This is by far the largest number of plants ever seen here, despite all the damage to this site a few years ago.

Setaria adhaerens (**Adherent Bristle-grass**). Certainly ‘adherent’, this pernicious grass weed was found growing by a road at Baldock (23/M), 15/10/2014 *T.J.* This is a new County record, and included here to remind folk that many of these alien weeds turn up in such places, especially at the back end of the year, so don’t stop looking late into the autumn!

Herts Flora Group meetings 2015

Once more this year, I have focused on the needs of the BSBI 2020 Atlas field recording, and so many of these are in 'priority' tetrads, as outlined earlier. One of the meetings is again joint with the Herts BNA; another with the Cambridgeshire Flora Group, at their request; and one is slotted in from the BSBI national programme. All meetings are intended to be all-day events, so please bring lunch and plenty to drink, as well as insect repellents, sun-hats, sun-cream etc. (and rain gear!). As always, be prepared to come with identification books, hand lenses, collecting equipment etc., and to be stationary for lengths of time! In case you need to know: participants are covered by the general insurance of the Hertfordshire Natural History Society. No dogs are to be brought on meetings, and any children under 16 have to be with a responsible adult.

Saturday 18th April Long Deans Nature Reserve area, near Hemel Hempstead (tetrads TL00/X, S)
Leader: Paula Shipway. Meet in the car park down the drive off Bedmond Road (TL086059), 10.00 a.m. Long Deans Meadow is reasonable chalk grassland, and the adjoining wood is partly ancient beech. Much of the rest is secondary habitat. This is a joint visit with Herts BNA, and so will not be an intensive plant recording visit.

Saturday 23rd May Panshanger area (tetrad TL21/W). Leader: Trevor James. Meet at Birch Green (TL292117), 10.00 a.m. We will walk in to the tetrad from the south side along the footpath, and then explore the open areas that have been turned into a country park, with former wet grassland, as well as dry heathy grassland, gravel pit areas and woodland. The Wildlife Trust has done some survey work here, but more is needed for this important site, last visited by the Group in 1989, before all the gravel was dug!

Sunday, 21st June Ashwell (north-east) (tetrad TL24/Q). Leaders: Jonathan Shanklin & Trevor James. Meet at Ashwell War Memorial (TL27253992), 11.00 a.m. The aim of this meeting is to carry out tetrad recording along the County boundary with Cambs. We will start by taking a look at the village cemetery (in Herts), then head north and east along footpaths and bridleways to the under-recorded part of tetrad TL24/Q in Cambs. (v.c.29). We will return via Ruddery Spring and, if time permits, visit Ruddery Pit (in Cambs.) and Ashwell village and its churchyard. **Joint with Cambridgeshire Flora Group.**

Saturday 4th July Northaw Great Wood (tetrad TL20/X). Leader: Trevor James. Meet at the car park (TL282040), 10.00 a.m. A re-visit to this well-known, but not recently properly recorded site, to find/re-find some of the heath relicts and other species, as well as examining some adjoining areas in the tetrad.

Saturday 1st August Symondshyde area (tetrad TL11/V). Leader: Trevor James. Meet at Coleman Green (avoiding the pub car park) (TL189124), 10.00 a.m. You may have to park up the lane where you can and walk to the pub. We will walk south into the tetrad and visit Symondshyde Wood and adjoining areas, including the recent gravel pits, if we can access them. (Note: the roads around Symondshyde Wood itself are prone to theft from cars).

Sunday 6th September BSBI field meeting – Urban Botanising in Welwyn Garden City. Leader: Prof. Mick Crawley (Imperial College). Mick asked me if I minded him poaching on our territory, and I said – keep it up! The aim is to botanise for urban 'weeds' etc. in TL21 WGC area. I know we have plenty in this town to find (it was 'done' very well for the *Flora* by Ann Boucher).

Saturday 12th September Waterford 'Heath' area (tetrad TL31/C). Leader: Trevor James. Meet at the car park in Vicarage Lane (TL316149), 10.00 a.m. We will re-record the flora of the former gravel pits, keeping an eye out for late season aliens in particular.

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