

Botanical Discoveries No.4 (2002)

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In late May, we held the first of two courses on grasses, sedges and rushes with Arthur Copping. A couple of species new to my list were noted on Smea Loke - namely hairy sedge *Carex hirta* and spreading meadow-grass *Poa humilis*.

Later in the year, David reported a plant by the path beside Crake's dyke, near the river. This turned out to be greater lettuce *Lactuca virosa*, which seems to be spreading throughout the county, as does its close relative the prickly lettuce *Lactuca serriola*. The two are best distinguished when in seed, as the achenes (fruits) of the greater lettuce are a purplish black colour whereas those of the prickly lettuce are dull brown.

Towards the end of August, I spotted for the first time at Wheatfen a few thalli of greater duckweed *Spirodela polyrhiza* in the dyke between Crake's Marsh and Thack Marsh. We have five species of duckweed at Wheatfen, including least duckweed *Lemna minuta*, which is a recent introduction from America. The relative abundance of the different species seems to vary from year to year.

I sometimes wonder what goes on behind the wood shed! Last year I mentioned the discovery of bulbous rush there and this year several small plants of hard fern *Blechnum spicant* have appeared. This attractive fern is rather scarce in Norfolk, only occurring in some two-dozen or so localities. It is far more frequent in the north and west of Britain. Did spores arrive as strays on the wind or did they travel here from Wales on Martin Ellis's Wellington boots, finding a suitable place in which to germinate while he was chopping wood for the fire?

How are some of the plants that I have mentioned in previous reports getting on? This year there were five spikes of the broad-leaved helleborine *Epipactis helleborine* on the edge of the wood and several managed to flower and set seed. The bulbous rush *Juncus bulbosus* is still doing well at both locations in the wood - but no new colonies have been found... yet. The slender rush *Juncus tenuis* was well and truly crushed and mangled during the dredging of Sluice Dyke but several young plants were found further along the path - so the process has probably helped to spread the species.

The little sedge in the clearing at the south of Surlingham Wood turned out to be common yellow-sedge *Carex viridula* subspecies *oedocarpa* and a few new clumps have been found in the vicinity. The fibrous tussock-sedge *Carex appropinquata* is doing fine on Thack Marsh although it's hard work finding it as the surrounding vegetation is now very lush.

Another colony of green figwort *Scrophularia umbrosa* was found in 2001 on the edge of Home Marsh and the original colonies beside Crake's Marsh are still thriving. I was interested to note that Ted mentioned it growing on the banks of the river at Surlingham in 1964 where he gave it the vernacular name 'western figwort'. The fool's water-cress *Apium nodiflorum* has spread like wildfire in Boundary Dyke, Alder Carr Dyke and the dyke between Crake's Marsh and Thack Marsh. It has also cropped up in several other dykes. In 2001, there was still a small patch of frog-bit *Hydrocharis morsus-ranae* in Middle Marsh Dyke. This summer several large patches were seen, and I suspect it will soon appear elsewhere on the reserve.

No report of botanical discoveries would be complete without mentioning some obscure little moss - and this year is no exception. I was pleased to find a few plants of the green-tufted stubble-moss *Weissia controversa* on the soil around the upturned roots of a fallen tree in Wood Carr. The only other report of this moss at Wheatfen was in 1934 when it was identified by Reverend Rhodes, but then it is very small and easily overlooked...