**Cambridgeshire Bryophyte Group**

**18 November 2017 Ely**

Present: Mark Hill, Nick Jardine, Bill Mansfield (am), Chris Preston, Jeff Scott, Jon Shanklin.

The Ely excursion was our contribution to the current project of Ely Wildspace to document the biodiversity of their city. In the morning we visited Roswell Pits, where Bill Mansfield kindly showed us round. We started on the wooded northern slope of the large pit, where the epiphytes were good, with much *Cryphaea heteromalla* plus *Ulota bruchii*, *Frullania dilatata*, *Metzgeria violacea*, *Radula complanata* and, much the best record, *M. consanguinea*, found by Jonathan growing with *M. violacea* on a pathside willow. Nick found a nice clump of *Fissidens viridulus* with maturing capsules, and Mark spotted one less mature capsule of *F. incurvus* on a taller seta. An exposed cliff face, perhaps cleared to show the geology, was disappointingly dry and bryophyte-free, and a few stems of *Aloina* on the moist clay at its foot lacked any sign of fruit.

We then went to the smaller western pit, closed to the public, where we had lunch in the sun before looking for bryophytes on the slope leading down to the north side. This is only partially colonised by flowering plants, with some areas kept open along a vehicle track and in rabbit-grazed areas. We found fewer bryophyte colonists than we might have expected, but *Microbryum davallianum* grew on the track, Jeff found a nice clump of *Aneura pinguis* and Mark later confirmed the identity of *Brachythecium mildeanum*, which was present as frequent short lengths of stem amongst the acrocarpous mosses. As Chris was idly admiring the afternoon sun shining through the short fruiting reed stems which had colonised the clay slope he noticed that one of the stems was different – this proved to be an alien grass which none of us could recognise.

Comparison of our records of 42 species with the 36 recorded here on the only other visit by the group, on 25 November 2001, suggests that the conditions then were more open. Amongst the species we saw then but failed to log this time were *Bryum argenteum*, *B. dichotomum* (a remarkable omission from our list), *B. gemmiferum*, *Funaria hygrometrica*, *Pseudocrossidium hornschuchianum* and *Riccardia chamaedryfolia*. We should not have been surprised to see *Brachythecium mildeanum*, found here by Robin Stevenson in 1981, an early record from the county. Many of the epiphytes, including *Cryphaea*, *Metzgeria voiolacea*, *Ulota crispa* s.l. and *Zygodon conoideus*, were already present when Chris made a solo visit in 2003.

The aim for the afternoon was to visit tetrad TL58F on the west side of Ely, from which only *Marchantia polymorpha* has been recorded. After negotiating our way past the crowded car parks of the city centre and the massed shoppers we parked within striking distance of St Mary’s Church. This has a churchyard with all the headstones moved to the edge, never a good sign (Pevsner’s guide says politely of this church that ‘the inside has more of interest than the outside’). However, Mark nicely demonstrated the maxim that to find *Pseudocrossidium revolutum* you should look on the oldest stonework by spotting it on the scanty remains of a medieval baptistry. We then went into the streets. These added quite a few species, including some saxicolous mosses, to the rather scanty list from the churchyard and a few street tree epiphytes, including *Syntrichia virescens*. A strong metal fence kept curious bryologists out of the allotments here, but *Ceratodon purpureus* was flourishing in the polluted soil below. In all we found a very creditable 41 species in TL58F (26 in the churchyard, 34 in the streets).

Chris Preston, 19 November 2017