

Recording

Bryophyte report December 2023

John Norton

This is the first report for the winter 2023/24 bryophyte recording season and includes brief write-ups of two field meetings that took place in October and November and a recording visit to the Isle of Wight in December 2023. I will include the roundup of new county and vice-county records and more photos in the next report. Please note that I have now moved the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Bryophytes website to its own domain: hantswightbryology.net and have added a new page which has downloadable pdfs of these *Flora News* reports.

Recent meetings

A joint meeting of the Southern and Wessex groups was held at Janesmoor Plain, south of Fritham in the New Forest on the inaugural National Moss Day on 21 October 2023, organised and led by Andrew Branson. Fifteen eager people attended. I have posted his report of the meeting on the meetings page of the website which includes links to a downloadable spreadsheet of records and a species list. The total list for the day was a very respectful 104 taxa.

In the morning we looked at the area where a main runway of a former WWII airfield had been removed (SU244133), where there are mixtures of calcareous and acidic turf, patches of bare ground and a tarmac road. An impressive list of calcicoles was found, including *Aloina ambigua*, *Campylium chrysophyllum*, *C. protensum*, *Ctenidium molluscum*, *Dicranella varia* (and/or *D. howei*), *Fissidens dubius*, *Homalothecium lutescens*, *Microbryum davallianum*, *Trichostomum brachydontium* and *T. crispulum*. A confusing small moss with fine leaves turned out to be *Campylopus subulatus*, the second recent record since being originally found in the New Forest by Jean Paton in the 1950s. This was surpassed by two unexpected vice-county firsts, *Plagiomnium cuspidatum*, found by Robert Sharp and *Didymodon icmadophilus* (a recent 'split' from *D. acutus*), identified later by Sharon Pilkington.

In the afternoon we moved on to look at some boggy flushes associated with the head of a small stream to the south of North Bentley Inclosure (SU241129). These also proved to be species rich and interesting, with a large patch of the liverwort *Blasia pusilla* found by Sharon (5th VC record following a different patch found by Andrew during his recce), bog liverworts including *Calypogeia sphagnicola*, and in a base rich flush some *Campylium stellatum*, *Scorpidium cossonii* and *Sarmentypnum exannulatum*. In a small area of willow scrub both *Ulota crispula* and *U. intermedia* (the recent splits from *U. crispula*) were recorded, bringing the total taxa new to the hectad (SU21) to seven. Unfortunately rain had stopped play by mid-afternoon.

Jonathan Sleath organised and led a meeting to the Surrey Wildlife Trust's Barossa nature reserve at Wishmoor Bottom on the Hampshire/Surrey border on 25 November 2023. The meeting took place entirely within the Surrey portion of the reserve so I will not include a full write-up here, but Jonathan has written a short summary which is on the meetings page of the website. Bryologising in the boggy areas was made difficult due to freezing conditions, but the participants did manage to record nine *Sphagnum* species, including *S. medium* (formerly *S. magellanicum*) which was only the second recent record for Surrey.

Isle of Wight recording

Just before Christmas I met up with George Greiff to do some recording on the Isle of Wight for a few days (our first trip of more than a day since 2019). We revisited some sites in the east of the Island and explored some new ones, including the Wildlife Trust's farm estates at Little Duxmore and Nunwell. The latter proved to be a little disappointing as currently the arable areas with highest potential for bryophytes have been allowed to grass over (while the Trust considers what will be the best management for the future). On the first morning, before meeting up with George, I looked at a campsite within the Lower Hyde Holiday Park at Shanklin to look for *Riccia crystallina*, which I found fairly easily, and is new to the vice-county. We found more later at Nodes Point Holiday Park at the eastern end of the Island. We visited the site of *Crossidium squamiferum* at Culver Cliff (the second British and Isle of Wight locality for this Mediterranean species – see *Flora News* 64, p.28).

In fading light we found a few small patches growing on crumbly, dry calcareous soil with *Aloina* spp. There is quite a bit of similar habitat here in at least a 50m × 50m area below the cliff face, so a further visit is still needed to carry out a more detailed survey. We also found *Tortula atrovirens* here, a ‘debracketer’ (species not recorded since 1970) – the only other VC10 record was in 1930. Unfortunately, it appeared that the large colony of the nationally rare *Acaulon triquetrum* that we previously recorded here around a rabbit warren at the top of the cliff, had disappeared, having slipped off over the edge.

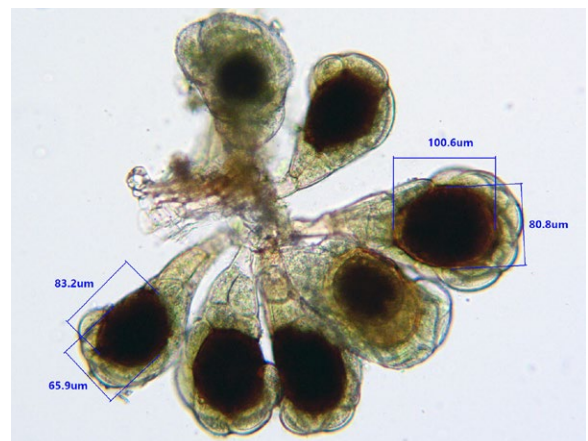
We also visited some interesting chalk quarries during the trip and whilst checking out one of these next to Rowlands Lane, George spotted the minute shoots of *Ephemerum recurvifolium*, another debracketer, last recorded in 1926.

Another species on our radar which was still needed for VC10 was *Bryum gemmilucens*. We had parked up at the end of Commonwood Lane (SZ636867) at Hillway (between Brading and Bembridge) to look at an adjacent holiday park, but decided to investigate the road itself, as it had a good covering of tarmac-loving mosses along the edges. In addition to all the usual species we did manage to find some *B. gemmilucens*, including plants with their distinctive bud like shoots with clusters of orange tubers in the leaf axils – or so I thought until I checked the specimens under the microscope after I returned home. It turned out that most of them were something different, with what appeared to be stipitate (stalked) ovoid gemmae rather than bulbils in the leaf axils. After unsuccessfully trying to key this out I eventually noticed a photograph of the same plant in David Holyoak’s *European Bryaceae* under the account for *Bryum dichotomum* (a ubiquitous and abundant species). This form with orange gemmae is very unusual, having been originally found by David in East Cornwall and subsequently in West Cornwall. It has otherwise only been recorded from a locality in the Netherlands (and possibly from Scilly). Following its discovery in 2007 David published a paper in 2009 reporting it as *B. apiculatum*, a tropical and subtropical species not previously recorded from Europe; however, molecular sequencing later showed it to fall under *B. bicolor* in the *B. dichotomum* species complex (but further investigation may be needed). I have passed a specimen on to Jonathan Sleath to attempt to grow *in vitro*. Later the same day we did find more *B. gemmilucens* at Nodes Point Holiday Park, near St Helens, a specimen of which was accepted as a suitable VC10 voucher.

All in all it was a very successful visit, but a lot more recording needs to be carried out on the Island to fill geographical gaps in coverage and look at under-recorded commonplace habitats, including arable farmland and woodland.



Crossidium squamiferum growing on calcareous soil, Culver Cliff, Isle of Wight, with *Aloina* spp. Note the very obvious long, coarse white hair-points (the leaves are hardly visible in this photo). John Norton



Specimen of unusual form of *Bryum dichotomum* with clusters of orange gemmae in the leaf axils, Commonwood Lane, Isle of Wight. John Norton