Pleurocarps workshop:

Preston Montford

9–11 November 2012

Twelve members of the BBS (plus two partners) gathered at Preston Montford to exchange information and learn techniques for examining pleurocarp mosses. The workshop was organised by **Martin Godfrey.**

▷Happy pleurocarp fans with specimens. M. Godfrey

▷Right top: Jeanette Hall - a study in concentration. M. Godfrey

▷Right middle: Jonathan Mitchley - "This section cutting isn't bad after all". M. Godfrey

▷Right bottom: Sue Knight gets to grips with the latest in microscope technology. M. Godfrey

Twelve members, and two spouses, arrived at the Field Centre on the afternoon of the 11th for what was to be the first BBS beginners/improvers workshop for some time. I was very pleased to welcome Silvia Poponessi, and her husband Fabio, who had come from Italy to attend. After dinner there was an introductory talk on the pleurocarps as a group, taking in evolution, general taxonomy and structural features important in identification. Participants were then showed a few specimens to illustrate some features which, in my experience, beginners in particular can find problematic. We studied a complanate species, since many pleurocarps have a "flattened" growth form; observed exactly how "leaves strongly curved and turned downwards or to one side" actually looks like in practice; and took a good look at *Rhytidiadelphus triquetrus* as I find that couplet 328 in the field key of the *Field Guide* can be rather confusing for beginners.

Saturday morning found us in woodland at Benthall Edge in Ironbridge Gorge where we had the opportunity to study a good cross-section of pleurocarp types including several different growth forms of that bane for beginners *Kindbergia praelonga*. Plentiful *Eurynchium striatum* nicely illustrated plicate leaves and provided a good comparison to help the students "fix" *Brachythecium rutabulum* in their minds. On many of the trees *Hypnum* was fruiting. Enough capsules still had their lids to illustrate how what many of us at one time might have been happy to call *H. andoi* on growth form alone, had in fact the longer beaked capsule lid of *H. cupressiforme.* A final interesting species for the morning was *Hookeria lucens* which is quite common at some spots at this site. The afternoon saw us back in the lab where, after familiarisation with the centre's microscopes and slide making techniques, everyone set to study what they had collected in the morning. I was particularly keen that the participants should practice dissecting under the binocular microscope - very fiddly if you have never done it before - so as to be able to make the best possible preparations. This is important for the pleurocarp mosses where the often fragile and fugitive alar cells can be a highly diagnostic character. We had an introduction to sectioning too, concentrating on stems and the

presence or otherwise of a hyalodermis.

The evening was spent on a little "research project" where the participants were asked to study in depth, but not identify, an unknown species and then give an opinion as to what sort of moss it might be. Ten came up with a *Hypnum* as the answer and two thought perhaps it might be that. I then asked them to key out what was *Calliergonella lindbergii*. After the predictable groans they all then did a similar in-depth study of *C. cuspidata* to compare the two at microscopic level, rounding off with a discussion on the features at issue.

Finally on Sunday we visited the Carding Mill valley on the Long Mynd where heathland and flush species could be studied. There was a nice array of pleurocarps typical of their habitats here plus one of those pesky "branched acrocarps" for comparison; furthermore the students were able to see all of the common *Rhytidiadelphus* species together. Apart from a short diversion to demonstrate persistent protonema in *Pogonatum*, which a number were unfamiliar with, we also all fell for the temptation of some really nice leafy liverworts to make a bit of a break. A fine colony of *Climacium* on the way back down the valley gave an excellent illustration of the dendroid habit. The afternoon was spent back at the lab studying the collections from the morning until trains and car journeys called everyone away.

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