



BBS extra Spring Meeting 2023: Worcestershire, 21–23 April

Philippa Thompson describes an excellent weekend meeting in the Midlands

△ Figure 1. On the towpath of the Worcester Canal.
Philippa Thompson

The Worcestershire meeting was designed to provide experience of a national meeting for those who could not make the week-long meeting in the Lake District. Ann Hill, Regional recorder for Worcestershire (vc 37), kindly agreed to run it, with support from her husband, Graham, and from Mark Lawley, Regional recorder for neighbouring Shropshire (vc 40). Mark helped to identify good localities 20 years ago for the last national Worcestershire meeting run by Tessa Carrick.

Sam Amy, Cesca Beamish, Jeff Duckett, Billy Dykes, Claire Halpin, Uta Hamzaoui, Ann Hill, Graham Hill, Rita Holmes, Leonora Hunt, Mark Lawley, Sam Macvie, Des Marshall, Peter Martin, Alex Mills, Luca Miserere, Sharon

Pilkington, Alan Rayner, Marion Rayner, Sue Swales, Philippa Thompson and Rosemary Winnall were the attendees.

Friday afternoon

The meeting started on Friday afternoon in the centre of Worcester. Like many urban areas, it had very few records. Worcester cathedral and some of the surrounding historic buildings were looked at and the group then worked down towards the banks of the Severn and along the towpath of the canal (Fig. 1). For those less experienced, it was a marvellous opportunity to get to grips with *Syntrichias* and *Didymodons* in the company of people who knew what they were doing. Fifteen



◀ Top Figure 2. *Didymodon vinealis* on a wall. Philippa Thompson

Middle Figure 3. *Campylophyllopsis calcarea*. Philippa Thompson

Bottom Figure 4. *Myrinia pulvinata* above, with *Leskea polycarpa* and *Syntrichia latifolia* below. Claire Halpin

people met in the city centre, and after some stress caused by the competing parking demands from Worcestershire cricket, *Syntrichia laevipila*, *S. montana* and *S. virescens* were recorded before even leaving the car park. A highlight of the afternoon was a much-photographed brick wall plastered with spectacular cushions of *Didymodon vinealis* (Fig. 2). A heavy rain shower fortuitously struck as the group were safely sheltered under a line of trees with exceptionally thick foliage and everyone spent the time seeking out *Gyroweisia tenuis* on the adjacent masonry. An examination of the banks of the canal brought the total list of species up to 47 for the afternoon. It was a thoroughly enjoyable survey of urban ‘grots’, if a slightly unusual site for a national meeting.

Afterwards, 13 people congregated at Lower Smite Farm, the headquarters of the Worcester Wildlife Trust (WWT), where the BBS had been given access to the Stables to use as a microscope space during the weekend. Graham gave a short presentation about Worcestershire and the sites that would be visited – one of the few limestone areas in the county on the Saturday, and on the Sunday a visit to the more acidic oak woodland of the Wyre Forest. Reinforced by tea and cake, people then got their microscopes out and the day’s spoils were duly examined.

Saturday woodlands and riverbanks

On Saturday morning the group split into two. Six people elected to explore the banks of the Severn and the Teme with Graham Hill and Jeff Duckett. The rest of the group headed off for Crews Hill and Blackhouse Wood, a WWT

reserve of semi-natural ancient woodland with small-leaved and large-leaved limes, hornbeams and oaks. The highlight of the morning for the woodland group was the discovery of *Campylophyllopsis calcarea* on a limey bank (Fig. 3). Envious emotions were roused just before lunch by the news that the riverside group had found *Myrinia pulvinata*, a new record for vc 37 (Fig. 4). However, a *Dicranella* from the wood was subsequently confirmed as *D. howei*, another new vc record. A large patch of very luxuriant coppery coloured, puzzling *Didymodon* in the woodland, duly admired and collected, disappointingly turned out to be a slightly idiosyncratic *D. fallax*. Following the intrepid Sharon Pilkington and Mark Lawley, the afternoon was spent scrambling up and down steep banks in a series of limey quarries. The day finished with a list of 64 species, including another new vc record – *Lewinskya striata*, found growing on ash. Back at Smite Farm, Billy and Alex impressively disappeared to fit in a few more hours of bryologising up on the Malvern Hills before it got dark, while the rest of us lesser mortals tucked into tea and cake. A small group was left at the end of the evening peering down their microscopes.

Sunday in the Wyre Forest

Sunday was spent in the Wyre Forest, meeting at Uncllys Farm by invitation of John and Linda Iles. Aply led by Rosemary Winnall, who gave a short introduction to the biodiversity of the Wyre, the group strung out along the Bell Brook and were happily occupied for the whole morning looking at *Heterocladium*, *Hygroamblystegium* and several *Fissidens* and examining various liverworts (Fig. 5). *Leucobryum* was collected and *Palustriella commutata* was recorded in a flush. *Calypogeia muelleriana* was recorded, a slightly unusual record for Worcestershire. The day finished with a visit to an anthill meadow which produced a few



△ Figure 5. Bryologising along the Bell Brook. Philippa Thompson

more species including *Pleurodium acuminatum* and *P. subulatum*. As they arrived at the meadow, phones started going off in response to a trial national emergency call out. It was at that point that the first spots of rain started to fall. The pace of recording had fallen off and the rain pulled a natural curtain over proceedings. The day finished with a list of exactly 100 species. It was time for everyone to make their way back to the cars and to set off for home.

We recorded 178 species during the weekend with three new vc records. Thanks to Jeff Duckett, Mark Lawley, Peter Martin and Sharon Pilkington, the bryophyte experts, to Rosemary Winnall who answered an awful lot of questions about the Wyre Forest and, most importantly, to Ann and Graham Hill for running such an excellent event.

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