BBS Spring meeting 2024: Lincoln, 9–15 March

Mags Crittenden and **Steven Heathcote** report on an enjoyable meeting in eastern England

The Spring Meeting of 2024 took place at the end of a wet winter in eastern England, but bryological spirits were high as the Society assembled around the base at the Whisby Education Centre on the outskirts of Lincoln. As the week passed along the weather proved co-operative, although not without the odd shower, the company was excellent and the sites proved more than sufficient to entertain bryologists of all levels. The following 38 people attended the meeting for at least one day: Victoria Benstead-Hume, Tom Blockeel, Andrew Branson, Chris Carter, Rachel Carter, Mags Crittenden, Jeremy Fraser, Anne Fowler, Emma Fowler, Daisy Fretwell, John Grahame, Sue Grahame, Sarah Grinstead, Claire Halpin, Roy Harding, Steven Heathcote, Ellen Jones, Liz Kungu, Daniel Lines, Peter Martin, Andy McLay, Hugh Middleton, Cath Mowat, David Newman, Sharon Pilkington, Chris Preston, A. Primavera, Alan Rayner, Marion Rayner, Karen Rogers, Lucia Ruffino, Jeff Scott, Clare Shaw, Jonathan Sleath, Mike Smith, Philippa Thompson, Dave Wood, Mark Woods. The programme was devised to cover a range of habitats, and was spread over North Lincolnshire (vc 54), South Lincolnshire (vc 53), Nottinghamshire (vc 56) and South-west Yorkshire (vc 63).

△ Figure 1. Lincoln Cathedral from South Common, 10 March. *Steven Heathcote*

In the accounts below, new vice-county records and debrackets are shown with an asterisk.

Saturday 9 March: Whisby Nature Park (vc 53)

Those arriving earlier began the meeting recording at the week's HQ, Whisby Nature Park. The park is a large area of restored quarries, where sand and gravel have been extracted. The resulting vegetation includes a range of acid grassland, heath, scrub and wetlands. The site was visited by the BBS in the 2010 spring meeting. A total of 31 species were recorded from the tracks and woodland areas, including *Didymodon nicholsonii* which has only a few Lincolnshire sites, although it is probably under-recorded in the county.

Sunday 10 March

The focus on Sunday was visiting sites around Lincoln itself (Fig. 1), giving participants a chance to see the varied habitats around the city.

Doddington Hall (vc 53)

Doddington Hall Estate is in the third year of its ambitious 100-year project to rewild its intensively farmed arable fields, heavily grazed grassland and woodland. Initially, they have allowed areas to revegetate naturally while at the same time adding ponds and other wetlands. The large party of participants that went to Doddington on a rather wet Sunday divided into three groups to try to cover as many different habitats as possible in this very large estate. Isobel Wright of Wilder Doddington gave us background to the development of the Estate and suggested areas that may be fruitful. There were no records as such from the Estate, so this was an opportunity, if nothing else, to fill some gaps in coverage and to provide a baseline survey. Forty species were found in most areas/monads with Old Hag Wood yielding a very nice mix of ground flora and epiphytes typical of ancient woodland. Of note, a small amount of *Neckera pumila** was found here. Thanks go to Doddington Estate for our welcome and access.

Greetwell Hollow and Quarry (vc 54)

The old quarry at Greetwell is the result of extraction of ironstone and limestone, and it is believed to have provided much of the limestone for Lincoln's famous cathedral. The group started recording in the Wildlife Trust's Greetwell Hollow Nature Reserve, where the vegetation is well-established grassland and scrub. Small stones on banks under the scrub provided the first record of the week for *Seligeria calycina*, a species characteristic of the chalk Wolds and not often found on the oolitic limestone. Stones in the grassland also hosted *Campylophyllopsis calcarea**, which had only a few older records in the vice-county, *Microbryum davallianum* var. *conicum** and *Tortula lindbergii*. The group moved on to the more open quarry areas and noted *Bryum gemmiferum, Dicranella howei** and *Tortula acaulon* var. *pilifera** amongst a range of calcicoles colonising the open ground. An impressive 75 records were generated over the two monads covered despite persistent rain.

South Common (vc 53)

A small group headed out onto South Common, an area of open green space on the hill south of the gap in the limestone cut by the River Witham. The Common has a long history of use and modification, and is currently a horse-grazed parkland with ponds and wooded areas. Around 40 common species were recorded, mostly those of enriched or disturbed habitat, but there were some nice epiphytes present, including *Syntrichia papillosa*, and a few acid grassland species such as *Polytrichum juniperinum* in more free-draining areas of the Common.

Gibraltar Point (vc 54)

It is some distance to travel from Lincoln to the

coast, but a determined group of bryologists made the journey to Gibraltar Point, a Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust Nature Reserve comprised of sand dunes and saltmarsh, with a long sandy spit extending out into the Wash. The site provided a good range of bryophytes, including *Drepanocladus polygamus*, in the coastal habitats and on the scrub developing around the site. The cafe on site provided a welcome refuge from the rain.

Monday 11 March

The Monday field sites were organised to include a range of Lincolnshire's woodlands. Most famous are the extensive tracts of semi-natural limewoods around Wragby, and two of these were explored in detail.

Chambers Farm Woods (vc 54)

Chambers Farm Woods is the largest contiguous wooded area of the Lincolnshire Limewoods, although this includes much plantation. Two separate parties were formed and set off to record different areas of the woodland. The woods do not typically have abundant bryophytes, but careful searching is usually rewarded with a long list of species. Epiphytes declined badly in Lincolnshire through the late 20th century, so their reappearance in the early 21st century was notable. This recovery carries on, and a wide range of epiphytes were noted including *Radula complanata, Dicranum tauricum* and *Plenogemma phyllantha.* Two epiphyte species with few Lincolnshire records were noted with surprising frequency, both here and elsewhere through the week: *Hypnum andoi* and *Lewinskya striata*. Another uncommon epiphyte, *Dicranum montanum*, was found to be widespread at one of its few known Lincolnshire sites.

Cocklode and Great West Wood (vc 54)

Another group visited two more of the Lincolnshire Limewoods. They found a similar range of species in each wood, again recording good populations of *Dicranum montanum* and *D. tauricum* along with other recovering epiphytes such as *Pulvigera lyellii*. The small acrocarp *Pohlia wahlenbergii* var. *wahlenbergii* was noted on a track, a species with few previous records but now being recorded for woodland tracks across the county. Most excitingly, the first recent vice-county record of *Didymodon icmadophilus** was made on a forestry track in Great West Wood. Some *Dicranella varia sens. str.** was noted for the first time this week in vc 54.

Corringham Scroggs (vc 54)

A group of seven bryologists headed to Corringham Scroggs and Wharton Wood, a large area of private woodland to the east of Gainsborough. There were no previous records for the woodland, which proved to have a good diversity of microhabitats, with a range of epiphytes, deadwood, soil-dwelling and wetland species noted. The final count for the woodland was 52 species, which included some species that are uncommon in the vice-county, such as *Pohlia melanodon*, found in a couple of places on a main ride, and *Dicranum tauricum* on a large oak. Exploration of an adjacent stubble field with abundant bryophytes produced a large volume of *Bryum rubens*, but amongst it was some of the less common *B. subapiculatum*.

Tuesday 12 March

The focus of the Tuesday site visits were areas of wet heath, a much diminished habitat in Lincolnshire through drainage, but one supporting some of the best bryological sites in the county.

Twigmoor Warren and Woods (vc 54)

Twigmoor Warren is a coversands site with a

△ Figure 2. Admiring *Rhodobryum roseum*, Twigmoor, 12 March. *Chris Preston*

△ Figure 3. *Rhodobryum roseum*, Twigmoor, 12 March. *Steven Heathcote*

diverse area of wet heath located at the base of the limestone slope. The open heathland is an SSSI and is private land grazed by cattle. The group started recording in this habitat, with wet heath providing six species of *Sphagnum*, the most notable being *S. inundatum*. The dry heath also had a diverse range of species with *Rhodobryum roseum* present on ant hills (Figs 2, 3) and *Bryum bornholmense** on peaty soil by animal tracks. At the southern end of the heath where *Salix* has colonised the wet heath, the epiphyte *Pylaisia polyantha** was found (Fig. 4). Twigmoor Wood occupies the slopes to the west of the open heath and is an extensive conifer plantation with a few large ponds. After lunch the group moved on to these woods, where little of the open heathland flora remains. Some flushed areas supported *Sphagnum,* but the most interesting find was a small patch of *Sanionia uncinata* on an elder tree (Fig. 5), only the fourth Lincolnshire record.

▽ Figure 4. *Pylaisia polyantha* on the lower side of a branch, Twigmoor, 12 March. *Sharon Pilkington*

▽ Figure 5. The small patch of *Sanionia uncinata*, Twigmoor, 12 March. *Steven Heathcote*

△ Figure 6. Laughton Woods, 12 March. *Mags Crittenden*

△ Figure 7. Recording *Leucobryum glaucum*, Laughton Woods, 12 March. *Philippa Thompson*

Scotton Common Plantation (vc 54)

A group gathered at Scotton Common Plantation, a large area of Forestry Commission woodland planted onto coversands heath in the 1950s. A few remnants of the original heath can still be found. The group started at Tutoes Wood and worked their way through the main area of Laughton Woods (Fig. 6). Species uncommon in Lincolnshire that were found around the plantation included *Polytrichum longisetum* and *Rhytidiadelphus loreus*. Some heathland ponds have survived the plantation, and here *Sphagnum* remains. The woods also support *Leucobryum* and following the recent re-assessment of the genus (Ottley *et al*., 2023) the group were able to confirm the presence of *Leucobryum glaucum sens. str.** (Fig. 7)

Moor Farm and Kirkby Moor (vc 54)

A small group made an exploration of two Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust sites near Woodhall Spa. Kirkby Moor is an expanse of dry heath and acid grassland and populations of *Ptilidium ciliare* were found amongst the heather. Moor Farm is similar but also supports areas of wet heath in which *Sphagnum palustre* and *S. squarrosum* were recorded.

Wednesday 13 March

The Wednesday sites were selected to showcase the various calcareous habitats around Lincolnshire, including the best oolitic limestone site in the county at the Grimsthorpe Estate, and a selection of small but bryophyte-rich chalk quarries in the Lincolnshire Wolds and the National Trust's Gunby Hall at the southern end of the Wolds.

Grimsthorpe Estate (vc 53) [by Sharon Pilkington]

Our party of six was met by Jim Handley who explained where we were allowed to go to avoid shooters on the estate. Starting at a small, disused limestone quarry (Elsea Pit), we quickly refound *Abietinella abietina* and *Entodon concinnus*, both known from this site (Fig. 8), and then fanned out across the flanks of the quarry. *Tortula lindbergii* was a nice find, but our hopes of a rich seam of small pottiaceous mosses were dashed thanks to bad turf erosion caused by deer poaching. Jonathan Sleath still succeeded in

△ Figure 8. *Abietinella abietina* with a little *Entodon cocinnus*, Elsea Pit, 13 March. *Chris Preston*

finding *Bryum torquescens** and Sharon collected *Thuidium assimile**. In different times we would have stopped to explore the ornamental lake we passed on our return to the castle, but, like much of the countryside that week, it was awash with water and didn't look very promising.

We were then let loose in the gardens of the castle itself. The most interesting part of this was a walled orchard and nursery beds, where Chris Preston spotted *Syntrichia virescens* on an espalier tree. Other species of interest included *Gyroweisia tenuis* (shady wall), *Orthotrichum stramineum* (orchard tree) and an impressive amount of fruiting *Tortula protobryoides* on paths (Figs 9, 10). An interesting-looking pleurocarp growing with potted plants in the nursery turned out to be *Leptodictyum riparium*. *Dicranella varia sens. str.** was also noted for vc 53 for the first

▽ Figure 9. Searching paths in the walled garden, Grimsthorpe, 13 March. *Chris Preston*

▽ Figure 10. *Tortula protobryoides*, Grimsthorpe, 13 March. *Sharon Pilkington*

△ Figure 11. *Didymodon icmadophilus*, Grimsthorpe, 13 March. *Sharon Pilkington*

time this week.

Finally, we squelched across the lawns to The Oaks, a mature plantation woodland on heavy clay. Although *Fissidens exilis* was seen, the woodland itself was bryologically unremarkable. As is often the case, it was the track running through it that supported interesting mosses, including more *T. protobryoides*, *Dicranella howei* and *Didymodon icmadophilus** (Fig. 11).

Red Hill, Fir Hill and Welton le Wold Quarries (vc 54) [by Clare Shaw]

A group of five visited the chalk quarries around Louth. We started with Red Hills reserve, probably the biggest of the three sites. It consisted of a complex of excavated areas which were mainly overgrown with grass, but with some areas of exposed chalky soil, particularly on steep banks. We were pleased to see *Dicranella howei* on the banks at the entrance to the site. On bare earth we soon spotted the tiny red capsules of *Microbryum rectum*, which turned out to be ubiquitous across the site. In a couple of places we also found *M. curvicollum*, with its curved seta and capsules diving into the ground. It also has slightly narrower leaves than *M. rectum*, though the difference did not seem as dramatically marked as in Smith's (2004) illustrations. Mixed in with these was the much bigger *Tortula protobryoides*, with lovely chestnut brown capsules. On one of the steeper banks we found some *Seligeria calycina*, then a slightly smaller, different looking *Seligeria* that we thought might be *S. calcarea*. We looked in vain for the *Entodon concinnus* that had previously been recorded here, then crossed the road to have lunch and a quick explore of the limestone grassland. This was a flattish, well-grazed pasture which didn't have a lot of bryological interest, though it did seem to have a fairly species-rich vascular plant flora.

We headed off to the second site, Fir Hill, a tiny reserve which was quite overgrown with brambles. Most of the bare ground was composed of large stones, so there wasn't a lot of good bryophyte habitat. However, we soon realised that most of the loose stones had *Seligeria calycina* growing on them, sometimes in some profusion. We recorded about 20 species here and decided to move on to the third site, at Welton le Wold. Some of the slopes here had a growth of saplings, but there was a similar range of calcicoles to the other sites.

Gunby Hall (vc 54)

Gunby Hall is a 17th-century house and estate set at the southern end of the Wolds which is now owned by the National Trust. The group of bryologists started in the walled gardens and worked their way around the property before heading out into the parkland and down to a fishing lake. The walled gardens provided records for uncommon species including *Bryum radiculosum* and *Didymodon nicholsonii*, with a range of epiphytes on the various fruit trees and ornamental shrubs. A few epiphytes were present

on trees in the parkland, with *Syntrichia papillosa* being common. At the end of the day, the group headed to Candlesby Quarry, an old quarry in the chalk on the edge of the estate. Here *Seligeria calycina* was found on stones under the scrub (Fig. 12) along with *Mnium stellare*.

Boothby Wildlands (vc 53)

Boothby Wildlands is an exciting rewilding project on an arable farm on the limestone in South Lincolnshire. The project is in the early stages and the habitats surveyed were correspondingly occupied by typical arable species, with a few typical woodland species in small copses. The group moved through the wildling project habitats and into Ingoldsby Wood, which is an SSSI, here adding to the species list with a good range of additional epiphytes and woodland soil species.

Thursday 14th March:

We were fortunate enough to devote Thursday to recording in Nottinghamshire, vc 56. The county is low-lying and landlocked. It is sheltered from easterly winds and rain by the uplands of Derbyshire and Staffordshire, meaning that it is rather dry in general. It is possibly best known for Robin Hood and Sherwood Forest. However, it contains a wide range of quite distinctive landscapes determined by a combination of underlying geology, superficial deposits and post-industrialisation. From west to east the underlying geology broadly includes the Coal Measures (with many revegetated pit heaps), a Magnesian Limestone ridge (with old and new limestone quarries), sandstone and clays.

Misson Carr Nature Reserve

In 2001, Misson Carr SSSI Nature Reserve, a redundant military bombing range, was purchased by the Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust (NWT) from the Ministry of Defence. Philippa Thompson and Karen Rogers donned their wellies to explore this extremely wet woodland with Daniel Lines, Peatland Restoration Officer with NWT. The Carr overlies Mercia Mudstone and has the county's largest remaining fragment of a fenland system that once covered much of the local landscape. Although a survey had been carried out in 2017, Philippa and Karen extended the recording area and increased the number of recorded species by 14. Thanks to NWT for their help in accessing this reserve.

△ Figure 12. *Seligeria calycina*, Gunby Hall, 13 March. *Clare Shaw*

Wellow Park

Wellow Park is shown on maps from the late 18th century and together with Jordan Castle Farm is part of an ancient deer park. This large site of over 130 ha comprises the largest remaining example of ash-wych elm woodland in Nottinghamshire. Lucia Ruffino and Mags Crittenden entered the woodland from the south with permission from Mr Sydney Carr, the owner of Jordan Castle Farm. There were only 16 previous records for this woodland so there was plenty of potential for new records. The 58

new records included the very unusual *Hypnum cupressiforme* var. *heseleri**, found as an epiphyte on an old ash tree in the centre of the woodland. This variety was added to the British flora by Blockeel & Stevenson (2006) and has hitherto been found only in Norfolk and Cambridgeshire.

Sherwood Forest and Budby South Forest

Sherwood Forest is an extensive area of old pasture-woodland and heathland on the dry nutrient-poor soils of the Sherwood Sandstone. The reserve comprises the ancient forests of Birklands and Budby South. The name Birklands comes from the Viking phrase 'birch land' and the forest is thought to be over 1000 years old. Once part of the more than 4,000 ha Royal Forest of Sherwood, the woodland is dominated by sessile and pedunculate oak and other native trees. The reserve contains more than 1000 ancient oaks, most of which are known to be more than 500 years old. Andy McLay, Victoria Benstead-Hume and Clare Shaw, accompanied by a member of the RSPB staff, as well as Daisy Fretwell from the Creswell Crags Trust, set out from the Visitor Centre to fill in gaps in recording in this extensive area. Of particular interest was a relatively small patch of wet heathland where *Polytrichum strictum** (Fig. 13) was found. In total, 62 species were found over two monads, including three species of *Sphagnum* which were successfully refound in the same patch of wet heath as the *P. strictum*. Large areas of the heathland were owned by the MOD and used both during the First and Second World Wars to train soldiers. Part of the area was used as a munitions dump which has now been cleaned of all possible explosive material. Of interest is the large area of sand that has been exposed and is now dominated by *Bryum dichotomum* and *Pleuridium acuminatum*. It will be of interest to see what appears next!

△ Figure 13. *Polytrichum strictum*, Sherwood Forest, 14 March. *Victoria Benstead-Hume*

Annesley Woodhouse Quarries and Butler Wood

A very large party of eminent bryologists decided to record an example of Nottinghamshire's post-industrial landscape, Annesley Woodhouse Quarries. This is in the valley of the Cuttail Brook on the Carboniferous Coal Measures and the Permian Magnesian Limestone escarpment and contains an extensive and diverse range of habitats, including both unimproved dry calcareous grassland and marshy grassland. The north of the site is dominated by a low-lying bowl-shaped depression known locally as Bentinck Void, a former opencast coal quarry. Butler Wood is notified as neutral grassland but much is overgrown and was a quarry for Magnesian Limestone. It was hoped that the diversity of this site would yield a large number of records and in fact it did, with 100 new records including six vice-county records, namely *Frullania tamarisci**, *Bryum intermedium**, *Dicranella varia sens. str.**, *Loeskeobryum brevirostre** (Fig. 14), *Weissia*

△ Figure 14. *Loeskeobryum brevirostre*, Annesley Woodhouse, 14 March. *Chris Preston*

brachycarpa var. *brachycarpa** and *W. rutilans**. The County Recorders for the BSBI, Mark Woods and Dave Wood, were excellent guides to the wonders of 'pit muck' and the biodiversity of these post-industrial locations.

Friday 15 March

The final day of the meeting focussed on Magnesian Limestone sites just over the border into Yorkshire (vc 63), where numerous rare and notable species are present. Confirming the continuing presence of these was the target for the day.

Anston Stones Wood

A group of six bryologists visited Anston Stones Wood. This rich botanical site lies on the Magnesian Limestone belt, and is a deep-sided wooded valley in which the underlying limestone is exposed as low crags and boulders. Although the attraction of the site is compromised by a polluted stream, a railway running through it and a busy road alongside, it retains much of its botanical interest. The route taken was through the woodland from the eastern end to an area of open grassland near Anston village at the western end. Scarce calcicolous bryophytes on boulders on the north-facing slope included *Metzgeria pubescens*, *Gymnostomum calcareum*, *Plasteurhynchium striatulum, Taxiphyllum wissgrillii, Tortula marginata* and *Zygodon stirtonii*, along with commoner species such as *Fissidens dubius*, *Mnium stellare* and *Neckera crispa*. One of the notable features of the site is a crag covered with *Cololejeunea rossettiana* and *Marchesinia mackaii*, with mats of *Conardia compacta* on soil at its base (Figs 15, 16), as well as a curious and consistently small form of *Conocephalum conicum sens. lat*.

One of the main objectives of the visit was to search for *Anomodon longifolius*, found here in 1986 and seen by the BBS in 1991. The precise location of the original record is no longer known and recent searches have been unsuccessful. This also proved to be the case on this occasion, in spite of prolonged scrutiny. The loss of elm and consequent growth of brambles and other vegetation may have altered the ecology of the bouldery ground, which is the likely location of the original record, and the continued presence of *A. longifolius* appears doubtful. Several patches of *A. viticulosus* were, however, present. The grassland at the western end of the wood has long been ungrazed and is now coarse and dense, with very few of the characteristic bryophytes of thin, open turf. A small amount of *Encalypta vulgaris* was found on a boulder, and a little *Trichostomum brachydontium*. A small patch of *Campylium chrysophyllum* and *Mesoptychia collaris* were noted on a shaded path-side bank.

Sprotborough Gorge

One group headed into Sprotborough Gorge, where the River Don cuts through the

△ Figures 15, 16. *Conardia compacta*, Anston Stones Wood, 15 March. *Sharon Pilkington*

Magnesian Limestone, forming a steep-sided wooded valley. The group set off westwards along the south bank, visiting the known locations for the Critically Endangered *Tortula cernua* on the few remaining areas of lime kiln waste. The *Tortula cernua* proved easy to find and was fruiting abundantly at its known locations at the Levitt Hagg cliff site and the White Elephant Lime Kiln. The shady woodland on the riverbanks proved interesting with abundant calcicoles, including *Mesoptychia turbinata, Microeurhynchium pumilum, Rhynchostegium murale* and *Taxiphyllum wissgrillii* (Fig. 17).

The group crossed the River Don at the spectacular Conisborough Viaduct and returned along the north bank, finishing with a hot drink and cake at the Boat Inn in Sprotborough to round off a fantastic week.

Figure 17. Bryologists at Levitt Hagg Wood, 15 March. *Steven Heathcote*

Summary

Overall the week was a great success with a wealth of records added across four vice-counties and a wide range of habitats. We made 2073 records of 236 taxa, adding a vast amount of data for the vice-counties. There were 17 new vice-county records, along with five debrackets. Numerous populations of local or national conservation importance were revisited including *Abietinella abietina* on the Grimsthorpe Estate, *Conardia compacta* at Anston Stones Wood and *Tortula cernua* in the Sprotborough Gorge. Despite some wet days, the participants retained a high level of enthusiasm throughout and the meeting was well received by all.

Reference

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