

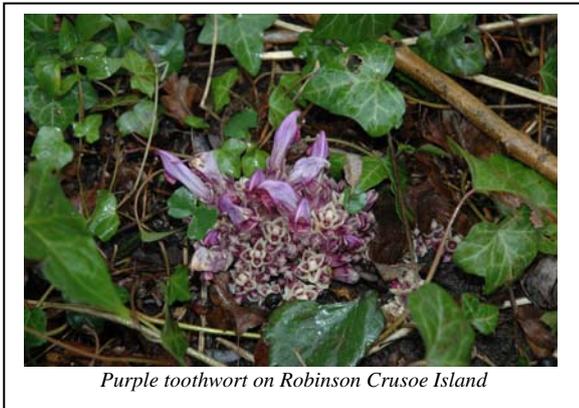
# Coe Fen

## A report on the CNHS Survey project for 2005

The Cambridge Natural History Society moved on to look at Coe Fen, Sheep's Green, Lammas Land and the Paradise Local Nature Reserve (TL 446573) following the conclusion of its survey of the Coton footpath and tetrad TL45j in 2003 – 2004 [Nature in Cambridgeshire 46 and also this issue]. This report gives some of the highlights from the monthly visits to the area.

Coe Fen covers approximately 5.5ha in a long curved oblong oriented north-south. It is an area of common land, cattle-grazed mediaeval flood meadow, adjacent to the River Cam. It is comprised largely of rough grazing, ditches and scattered trees. The lower reach of the Vicar's Brook CityWS runs past the south end. Across the Cam lies Sheep's Green CityWS and Paradise CityWS. Little St Mary's CityWS lies close to the north end of the site. Fen Causeway crosses the site roughly halfway down.

An eastern extension of Coe Fen consists of Vicar's Brook from Stone Bridge downstream to its junction with the River Cam, together with the cattle-grazed common land to the northeast known as New Bit and Coe Fen Straits. To the east of New Bit lies Hobson's Conduit CityWS and Cambridge Botanic Gardens CityWS. The final stretch of the brook forms the southern boundary of Coe Fen County Wildlife Site. Above the brook's southern banks are private gardens.



Purple toothwort on Robinson Crusoe Island

Sheep's Green is an irregular oblong (approximately 7.0ha) of poor semi-improved cattle-grazed flood meadow, with scattered trees. It is oriented roughly north-south and is bordered to east and west by mill streams of the River Cam. It is crossed halfway up by Fen Causeway. A triangle at its southern end is fenced off and intensively managed as a picnic area, and lies outside the site. Robinson Crusoe Island lies to the east of Sheep's Green, separated from it by a minor river channel, and mostly to the north of Fen Causeway.

Paradise consists of approximately 1.2 ha of varied and well-structured wet woodland adjacent to the River Cam. There is an area of swamp and fen vegetation. Directly across the river lies the Perse Girls' School Reedbed CityWS. To the northeast

lie Sheep's Green and Coe Fen CityWSs. Southwest past Paradise Island lies Skaters' Meadow CityWS. It turned out to be the most diverse region of the entire area of the survey with 223 out of the 421 confirmed vascular plants that we recorded.

Lammas Land covers approximately 5 ha and is managed urban grassland with planted exotics, and includes a children's play area, paddling pool and tennis courts. Despite or because of this, it was the second most diverse area, with 166 vascular plants.

We carried out a preliminary visit in October 2004, primarily to decide on how to sub-divide the area, and then moved onto monthly excursions during 2005 to sample the flora and some of the fauna throughout the year. Jonathan Shanklin also carried out numerous additional visits, either to check on areas that it wasn't possible to include on the programmed excursion, or to check on the presence or absence of species seen in the majority of the sub-divided areas. Charles Turner was the main leader for the excursions, but we had a few other experts along from time to time, whose help was much appreciated. Regular participants in the surveys included Kate de Courcy, Lucy Evans, Monica Frisch, Steve Hartley, Simon Mentha, Christine Newell, David Seilly, Jonathan Shanklin, Henry Tribe, Charles Turner and "George".



Caterpillar of the **Mullein moth** *Shargacucullia verbasci* in Paradise, where it feeds on Water figwort *Scrophularia auriculata*

The year started well, with the addition of a new fungus for VC29, *Coprinus romagnesianus*, which was identified by John Holden. One of the unusual species of the area, **Purple toothwort** *Lathraea clandestina* was just beginning to

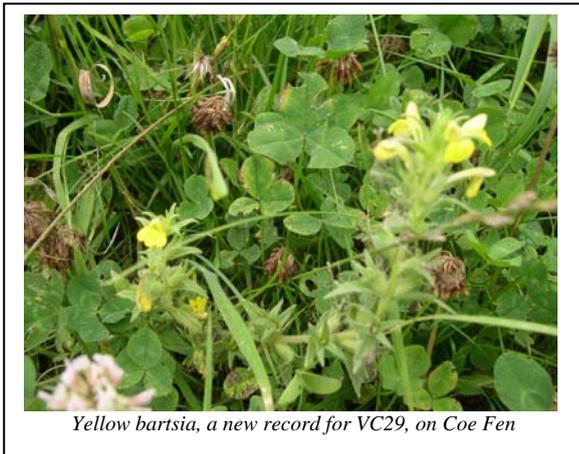
emerge and we mapped which willows it was parasitizing. February gave us almost Antarctic conditions with frequent snow showers, and we took our first walk around Paradise, adding some 20 species that didn't appear on the reserve list, although several were quite common plants. We also visited Robinson Crusoe Island and found the **Summer snowflake** *Leucojum aestivum*, first noted here in 1977, in flower.



Summer snowflake on Robinson Crusoe Island

In March we walked along Coe Fen, noting the rare casual, **Pink shepherd's purse** *Capsella rubella*, near the footpath and frogspawn in one of the ditches. Crossing over to Sheep's Green, we found **Wall-rue** *Asplenium ruta-muraria* and **Maidenhair spleenwort** *Asplenium trichomanes* on the wall by the mill race. The start of our April trip was a little delayed due to a meeting of the Cambridge canoe club, which filled most of the parking spaces in the Lammas Land car park. With the coming of spring wildlife was becoming more abundant and we added 50 new identifications to our species list. These included the **Orange ladybird** *Halyzia sedecimguttata* and both subspecies of **Lesser celandine** *Ranunculus ficaria*.

With the longer hours of daylight we moved to evening walks in May. Grasses and sedges were becoming more prominent and after a warming drink at the Mill, we watched **soprano pipistrelle** *Pipistrellus pipistrellus* and **Daubenton's bat** *Myotis daubentoni* flitting across the lower river. June should have seen us becoming experts at grass identification, but unfortunately the Council, who manage the area, cut most of the meadows the day before our excursion.



Yellow bartsia, a new record for VC29, on Coe Fen

Our July excursion was on the river by punt, which allowed access to a few otherwise inaccessible parts of the area. We found several water weeds, but those present weren't expert enough to be sure of certain identification. We did agree that we found galls of the **sawfly** *Pontania* on **willow**. In August we attempted to find **Flowering rush** *Butomus umbellatus*, last seen in 1983, but were unsuccessful. We were also unable to refind **Yellow bartsia** *Parentucellia viscosa*, which Jonathan Shanklin had earlier discovered on slightly disturbed ground on the part of Coe Fen by Fen Causeway. This turned out to be a new record for VC29, as reported elsewhere by Nick Millar. As dusk fell, biting insects emerged, and the next day Jonathan had several tennis ball sized swellings.

By September, fungi were beginning to be more prominent, and finds included **Yellow fieldcap** *Bolbitius vitellinus*, **Hare's foot inkcap** *Coprinus lagopus* and **Oak maze-gill** *Daedalia quercina*. We also found a few invertebrates including **Dark bush cricket** *Pholidoptera griseoptera* and **Dock bug** *Coreus marginatus*. The October walk continued the fungal theme and saw the largest attendance of the year, with many participants for the advertised foray around Paradise. Interesting finds included **Earth star** *Geastrum triplex*, **Common eyelash** *Scutellinia scutellata* and **Blackening waxcap** *Hygrocybe conica*. We also found the slime mould **Flowers of tan** *Fuligo septica*. Philip Pugh identified some snails that we found in Paradise as **Slippery moss snail** *Cochlicopa lubrica*, **Cellar snail** *Oxychilus cellarius* and **Dropanaud's glass snail** *Oxychilus dropanaudi*.

Charles Turner and Jonathan Shanklin were both on visits abroad on the November date, so Mark Hill, from CEH Monks Wood, kindly lead a tour looking for bryophytes. Nothing exceptional was found, but the hard standing opposite the canoe club produced **Sand feather-moss** *Brachythecium mildeanum* (new for the 5-km square) and **Kneiff's hook-moss** *Drepanocladus aduncus* (new for Coe Fen). The car park had **Water screw-moss** *Syntrichia latifolia*, which has not been recorded from the Coe Fen area - according to BRC



Inspecting the Sulphur polypore or Chicken of the Woods *Laetiporus sulphureus* on willow during the May outing.

database - since 1960.

There was no official walk in December, but Jonathan Shanklin concluded the year with a check on some common species that we hadn't found in some of the sub-areas. He did find some of them, and also made a final addition to the species list, finding the **Harlequin ladybird** *Harmonia axyridis* on a **Buddleia** *Buddleia davidii* at the far end of Paradise.

In addition to those already mentioned, there are a few species listed in Part 1 of Gigi Crompton's Cambridgeshire flora at <http://mnlg.com/gc>, in the JNCC Red Data List of Vascular Plants or that are otherwise notable. **Musk Beetle** *Aromia moschata* larval tunnels are apparent in a number of willows where the wood of the trunks is exposed, although we did not see the beetle. There is a single plant of **Rare lords & ladies** *Arum italicum* growing in Paradise, however this is probably a garden outcast. A small clump of **Whorl grass** *Catabrosa aquatica* grows in the sluice stream in Sheep's Green. The **Butterbur** *Petasites hybridus*, which has been growing in Paradise since at least 1660 when it was recorded by Ray, is thriving.

This year the CNHS is studying the Grantchester meadows, and it is planned to follow this with Ditton meadows in 2007 and Coldham's Common in 2008. Dates for the monthly surveys in 2006, and flora lists for many of the wildlife sites near Cambridge are on the Society web page at <http://www.cnhs.org.uk>

Jonathan Shanklin  
Steve Hartley  
2006 January