

# Coldham's Common

## A report on the CNHS Survey project for 2007

*The Cambridge Natural History Society project for 2007 involved surveying the flora of Coldham's Common, Barnwell Lake and the Barnwell Local Nature Reserves. We logged around 470 species or sub-species, which exceeds the total for last year's survey of Grantchester Meadows, and also recorded some other phyla. There were six set areas for logging the species and individual record sheets are available for each: Barnwell East, Barnwell West, Barnwell Lake, Coldhams Brook and the Common north and south of the railway.*

Over the past few years the Cambridge Natural History Society (CNHS) has selected a different area of the city each year and made regular survey visits to it over the course of the year. Primarily these surveys have concentrated on the vascular plants, however other phyla have been recorded on a sporadic basis. This year's survey covered sites in and around Coldham's Common. Parts of the area are City Wildlife Sites (CityWSs), and are surveyed by the Wildlife Trust from time to time, primarily for indicator species. These surveys are usually carried out over one or two days every seven years by one or two people and do not provide a comprehensive list of what grows on the site. Information from these surveys was incorporated into our list of species to look for, although we didn't find them all. The following site descriptions are taken, with some alterations, from the Wildlife Trust's 2005 survey reports.

**Barnwell East** is a site of approximately 2.5ha and lies adjacent to Cambridge Airport, and close to Barnwell West LNR CityWS and Coldham's Common CityWS. It consists of a mosaic of grassland with scattered scrub, small dense blocks of scrub, and planted tree belts. Paths are maintained by mowing and cutting. Much of the grassland is tall (around 1m) and dominated by False Oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius*. Parts of the grassland have a lower (20-30cm) and finer sward, and here indicator species, particularly of calcareous grassland, are more obvious, including locally frequent Common Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculata* and Ploughman's Spikenard *Inula conyzae*, and occasional Hawkweed Oxtongue *Picris hieracioides*. Bee Orchids *Ophrys apifera* occur sporadically in the scrub/grassland edge, a handful of Common Spotted Orchids *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* occur in the grassland and in 2005 two Southern Marsh-orchids *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* were recorded for the first time by Ellis Selway. In places Michaelmas-daisy *Aster novae-belgii*, Canadian goldenrod *Solidago canadensis* and Rosebay Willowherb *Chamerion angustifolium* have invaded the grassland and are abundant. Control of these problem species by cutting or hand-pulling in the summer has slowly reduced their abundance. In general the grassland appears to have increased in diversity since the Wildlife Trust's 1998 survey. Sections of the dense scrub, which consists mostly of Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, have been cut down annually for several years. This has greatly increased the structure. The taller tree and scrub belts on the perimeter effectively shelter the site from wind across Coldham's Common or the airport. A platform with ramp has been installed at the pond. Plants such as Great Reedmace *Typha latifolia* and White Water-lily *Nymphaea alba* are becoming locally abundant. Submerged and floating plants include Rigid Hornwort *Ceratophyllum demersum* and Curled Pondweed *Potamogeton crispus*. Several dragonflies and damselflies were flying at the time of the 2005 survey. Spawn from Common Frogs *Rana temporaria* has been observed in the pond for several years. This site qualifies as a CityWS for calcareous grassland, and is close to qualifying for neutral grassland; additionally it qualifies for habitat mosaics.

**Barnwell West** is a site of approximately 3.1ha lying alongside part of Coldham's Brook CityWS, opposite Coldham's Common CityWS, and close to Barnwell East LNR CityWS. The site comprises a mosaic of dense scrub, less dense areas and clearings. Occasional trees such as Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and Walnut *Juglans regia* have been planted throughout. Beneath the scrub and trees the ground flora consists mostly of Common Nettle *Urtica dioica* and Ground-ivy *Glechoma hederacea*. The northern block is dominated by mature Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*. A single large clearing at the north end has a tall ruderal community with a wet influence. On the banks of the East Main Drain below the footbridge, ferns are frequent including Hart's-tongue *Phyllitis scolopendrium*, Male-fern *Dryopteris filix-mas* and Soft Shield-fern *Polystichum setiferum*. The southern block has a more diverse structure. A path has been cut and surfaced along the western boundary with Coldham's Brook, and there are several clearings, all dominated by one or more tall ruderal species. For example, the flora in the largest clearing, at the northern end, consists almost

entirely of 3m high Hemlock *Conium maculatum* with an understorey of smaller species. Low scrub is invading others. The site qualifies as a CityWS for scrub.

**Coldham's Brook** is a stretch of chalk stream, a continuation of Cherry Hinton Brook CityWS, which flows beside Coldham's Common CityWS and also for part of its length beside Barnwell West LNR CityWS. The channel is usually 2-3m wide, and the banks usually steep (45° or more). A short length runs across the verge of Barnwell Road. It is the first appearance of the stream from the culvert which swallows it just north of Coldham's Common. The water is clear and shallow and is unshaded, and there is frequent wetland vegetation, especially Greater Pond-sedge *Carex riparia* and Water-cress *Rorippa nasturtium aquaticum* agg. The bottom is gravely with curled pondweed *Potamogeton crispus* and opposite-leaved pondweed *Groenlandia densa*.

Three sections run alongside Barnwell West. The first, about 110m long, TL47715816 to TL47745825 has banks about 2m high and 4m wide. Both banks are steep and have mostly rank vegetation such as Common Nettle *Urtica dioica*, with large patches of Bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg., especially on the western bank. Marginal vegetation is occasional and mostly patches of Greater Pond-sedge; channel vegetation is abundant, particularly a water-starwort *Callitriche* sp. and Water-cress. The water is clear but the bottom silty. The next 200m, TL47745825 to TL47805845 is shaded by the dense scrub along its western bank, composed of Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and Bramble. The eastern bank is dominated by rank tall herb vegetation, especially Creeping Thistle *Cirsium arvense* and Common Nettle. Wetbank species, principally Water Figwort *Scrophularia auriculata* and Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, are less common. Channel vegetation is occasional to locally frequent, principally a filamentous alga and a water-starwort. The water is 30cm deep and clear but the bottom is silty. This section had a Water Vole *Arvicola terrestris* population, but they have not been recorded here for the last three years. The final 250m, TL47805845 to TL47795871 has lower banks. The southern half is heavily shaded by Hawthorn and Bramble from both sides and has no channel vegetation. The northern half is more open and only lightly shaded, with frequent marginal growth, especially Common Reed *Phragmites australis* and Reed Sweet-grass *Glyceria maxima*, and channel growth, principally Water-cress, Pink water-speedwell *Veronica catenata* and a water-starwort; but the brook's water leaks away completely in this stretch so that at the northern end the bed of the brook is dry earth.

Turning west, the next 500m, TL47795871 to TL47355896 is heavily shaded by frequent shrubs and trees along or near to the southwest bank, including a line of mature Weeping Willow *Salix x sepulcralis* which grow every 30m along this section. This section has almost no water; at its wettest the bed is wet mud with a little standing water in only two places. The banks have similar rank vegetation to previous sections. Remarkably, channel vegetation is frequent and even abundant where there is wet mud or water, principally Fool's Water-cress *Apium nodiflorum*, Lesser Water-parsnip *Berula erecta*, Water-cress, and unfortunately New Zealand Pigmyweed *Crassula helmsii*. This section is marred by rubbish-dumping, especially by the car park at the Abbey Pool, and by occasional herbicide spraying by neighbouring householders. Passing behind the Pool and playground for 150m, TL47355896 to TL47215907, the Brook is heavily shaded by dense Bramble and Hawthorn on both banks, which also restricted access. Approximately half of this section was surveyed, revealing almost no channel vegetation, except for abundant New Zealand Pigmyweed at the start of the section. The water is less than 15cm deep, stagnant with much leaf litter and silt. In places the bed is dry.

The final 45m section before the Brook turns north, TL47215907 to TL47185908 has low banks dominated by Bramble which closes over the Brook along most of this section; Great Willowherb *Epilobium hirsutum* is also frequent. In the rare openings the channel vegetation is abundant, principally Reed Sweet-grass and New Zealand Pigmyweed. The water is 15 cm deep with very little flow. At the downstream end there is vertical wooden piling on the southwestern bank which continues into the next section. This runs north for about 360m, TL47185908 to TL47255940 and has densely scattered trees and scrub, including Bramble and Sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*, with tall wetbank vegetation along its eastern bank. The western bank is heavily poached and grazed by cattle from Coldham's Common, and has thinly scattered shrubs. This section has the most diverse and abundant channel vegetation of the whole brook, including one or more water-crowfoots *Ranunculus* spp., Water-plantain *Alisma plantago-aquatica*, a water-starwort, Fool's Water-cress and Lesser Water-parsnip, as well as Reed Sweet-grass and Greater Pond-sedge. The water is virtually stagnant but is reasonably clear, and varies in depth from puddled mud to 30cm. Slubbing has lowered the brook bed to such an extent that it is considerably lower than the culvert inlet which takes it to the East Main

Drain, so that even when the water is reasonably deep, it cannot flow. This section is marred by rubbish, especially alongside the Abbey Stadium, where there is also high vertical wood and net piling which restricts marginal vegetation.

Old records for this site include the Endangered stonewort *Tolypella intricata*. The Nationally Scarce stonewort *Tolypella glomerata* and the common stonewort *Chara vulgaris* were recorded prior to the last survey. The Brook qualifies as a City WS because it is a chalk stream. It no longer qualifies for supporting breeding populations of Water Voles.

**Coldham's Common** itself is a large site covering approximately 39ha, with extensive areas of grassland varying in quality from improved to highly diverse, and blocks of scrub and young plantation. Parts of the grassland are cattle-grazed and semi-improved, with indicator species generally at low frequency. Though the site is largely flat, in places hollows and ridges from old coprolite workings add microclimates and there is also a large chalk mound which was once a rifle butt. The rest of the grassland is mostly used as sports pitches, with rank and scrubby edges, although these hold one area of high diversity. Coldham's Brook CityWS runs along the northern and western boundaries, and the CityWSs of Barnwell West LNR and Barnwell East LNR, Barnwell Junction Pond and Barnwell Meadows are nearby.

**Coldham's South** Approximately 8 ha of the site lies to the southwest of the railway line. This area consists of moderately diverse neutral grassland, with some blocks of scrub around its edges. The grassland suffers from Creeping Thistle *Cirsium arvense* and topping to control this has left a heavy thatch in places. At the time of the WT survey the area had been grazed for some weeks, and the sward height was around 30cm, although the Creeping Thistle was 50cm. Grassland indicator species are generally local, although Meadow Barley *Hordeum secalinum* is frequent throughout. Hairy Sedge *Carex hirta* is abundant and Cuckooflower *Cardamine pratensis* is frequent in a wetter area close to the entrance on Coldham's Lane. Spiny Restharrow *Ononis spinosa* is frequent and Common Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* occurs towards the southeast end. Glaucous Sedge *Carex flacca* occurs within the northern curve of the railway, on a walkers' path which is also rabbit-grazed to below 5cm. Around the southeast end there are several enclosed areas of scrub and plantation in which the most frequent species are Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and Bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg. The irregular line of scrub along the southwestern boundary with residential gardens is now very thin, and suffers from occasional rubbish dumping.

The railway line has areas of dense scrub and rank grassland on its banks. A brief survey from one of the footbridges found frequent Hawthorn, Bramble and False Oat-grass. The rest of the site, to the northeast of the railway, is considered as five areas in the WT survey, although in the CNHS survey they were taken together as **Coldham's north**.



The northwestern area, of approximately 8ha, extends south from the entrance on Newmarket Road, by the Abbey stadium, and around to the entrance by the Abbey Pool. It consists mostly of semi-improved neutral grassland, at times cattle-grazed, and enclosed areas of tall scrub and plantation. Average sward height was 15-30cm, with some areas shorter. Meadow Barley is frequent throughout the grassland; Spiny Restharrow, Lady's Bedstraw and Yellow Oat-grass *Trisetum flavescens* are locally frequent, especially in the south-eastern end. Much of the northern end has a lower quality sward, with the appearance of recovering after disturbance; Musk Thistle *Carduus nutans* is frequent. The strip beside Coldham's Brook CityWS is annually covered in slubbings and has frequent Common Nettle *Urtica dioica* and Creeping Thistle. Hawthorn and Bramble are the most common species in the enclosed areas. The western boundary is formed by a wet ditch, with a channel about 2m wide, joined halfway along by

the East Main Drain which crosses the area. The ditches have steep banks and are mostly shaded by scrub, but towards the northern end there is less shade and the ditch here supports some submerged and emergent vegetation, especially Common Water-crowfoot *Ranunculus aquatilis*.

To the southeast of the northwestern area lies approximately 13.7ha of sports pitches, which are frequently mown to 2-3cm and have only common lawn species. A low bank which runs southwest from the northeast side, dividing two levelled areas, has a few plants of Common Bird's-foot-trefoil.

To the southwest of the sports pitches is a mixed area of approximately 2.1ha, consisting of rank grassland, finer grassland, scrub and plantation. In the grassland there are anthills. The finer grassland, known as "the triangle", which is interspersed with and well sheltered by dense scrub, is of high quality; it is being managed by cutting back the scrub a little at a time. Spiny Restharrow and Upright Brome *Bromopsis erecta* are abundant, and Hoary Plantain *Plantago media* and Lady's Bedstraw are locally frequent. The ranker parts are as diverse but mostly lack indicator species; False Oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius* is abundant and Tall Melilot *Melilotus altissimus* is locally abundant, with Upright Brome being frequent, but in places Bramble and Large Bindweed *Calystegia silvatica* nearly dominate. The scrub and plantation have a variety of trees and shrubs with some exotics; Hawthorn, Ash and Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* are the most frequent.

To the northeast of the sports pitches is an area of approximately 2.3ha, consisting largely of tall (1m) ruderal vegetation and including a BMX cycling track. The East Main Drain flows through this area. There are occasional trees and small areas of scrub, with denser scrub beside Coldham's Brook on the north-east boundary. The East Main Drain has dense scrub in places on its banks and almost no submerged, emergent or marginal vegetation other than locally abundant Common Reed *Phragmites australis*; nevertheless a Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* was seen fishing. At the southeast end, the ruderal vegetation gives way to rank grassland; here there are anthills, Upright Brome, Yellow Oat-grass and Wild Onion *Alium vineale*.

The southeastern end of the site, covering approximately 9.2ha, is sometimes cattle-grazed, and contains the chalk bank of the old rifle butts. There are belts of dense scrub along the northern and eastern boundaries, consisting mostly of Hawthorn and Bramble, and there are occasional planted trees. The southern end is bordered by a 4-5m overgrown hedge of moderate diversity. The main part of the grassland is mostly neutral to calcareous and moderately diverse. Indicator species include Spiny Restharrow, Upright Brome and Dwarf Thistle *Cirsium acaule*. The average sward height was around 15cm, after a recent topping. The dry ditch on the northwest side is a little more diverse. The rifle butts are surrounded by dense scrub, used as a track for scramble bikes. On the bank are areas of short (2cm), heavily rabbit-grazed, neutral to calcareous grassland of moderate to high diversity, suffering from encroaching low scrub and erosion, particularly on the south face, although this is being managed. Lady's Bedstraw is frequent, and Fairy Flax *Linum catharticum*, Spiny Restharrow and Hoary Plantain are locally frequent. The Common qualifies as a CityWS for neutral grassland and calcareous grassland.

**Barnwell Lake** lies adjacent to the Common and to Newmarket Road and is edged by the railway line. Once Gray's clay pit, working the Gault for bricks in the nineteenth century, it had been dug to over 20m, but was flooded by 1949. It was re-landscaped some years ago and is now a fishing lake. Two small pits at the south end provide some additional wetland habitat, though they are quite shaded by willow. Scrubby areas at the north and south ends add additional habitat.



Barnwell Lake

Botanical recording on the Common has a long history. Ray visited the area and in his 1660 catalogue noted "Trifolium cochleatum folio cordato maculato Heart-Trefoile or Clover [Spotted medick *Medicago arabica*] in the field on the right hand of the lane which leads from Barnwell to the Pesthouses, or the Common called Coldham's, on the green by the lanes side." It is still there! Martyn noted Greater bladderwort *Utricularia vulgaris* in 1763, Relhan found Spiked water-milfoil *Myriophyllum verticillatum* in 1785 and Babington recorded Meadow saxifrage *Saxifraga granulata* in

1860. None of these survive today. Coprolite mining would have made dramatic changes in the second half of the nineteenth century, but marshy areas clearly remained. A large part was converted to playing fields in the twentieth century and it was not certain how many species from the historical record might remain.

### **Coldham's Common through the year**

A few visits to the area were made prior to the formal start of the survey, either to set up procedures for the project or during conservation work. In 2006 June Steve Hartley led a CNHS excursion to view the chalk flora of the rifle butts and “the triangle”. One unexpected find was pyramidal orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, which had previously not been recorded in this area of the city. During the summer, walks took place on Thursday evenings, but otherwise they were on Sunday afternoons, often with the enthusiasts meeting in the morning to cover an additional area. It frequently proved impossible to cover the entire Common in the allotted time, and so additional visits were made as necessary.

The formal survey began on 2007 January 1 on a mild sunny day. Altogether we identified over 150 species. We found over 20 that had never previously been reported from the Common; these included several garden escapes and common species, but also creeping jenny *Lysimachia nummularia* and fiddle dock *Rumex pulcher*. The most worrying garden escape is floating pennywort *Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*, which filled Coldham's Brook by the football ground, and was also present in the main drain, which leads across a corner of Ditton Meadows and Stourbridge Common to the Cam. It was noted as being present here the day before, so has clearly reached the Cam and will be multiplying furiously. Australian swamp stonecrop *Crassula helmsii*, another escapee, was also present in the Brook just above the football ground and had increased substantially since Steve Hartley surveyed it in 2005. A couple of follow-up visits confirmed the presence of soft shield fern *Polystichum setiferum* in the Barnwell West drain and also found butcher's broom *Ruscus aculeatus* in scrub at the edge of the common. A fortnight later on another sunny day we visited the common south of the railway and Barnwell Lake, and whilst recording these areas added a further 30 species to the list bringing the total to over 180 species. We found another 10 that had never previously been reported from the Common; though all were relatively common. Perhaps the most interesting was winter heliotrope *Petasites fragrans*, which we found near Barnwell Lake. On the way back we stopped at the railway bridge to look for comet McNaught, however the sky was too bright. We did however view the planet Venus.

The first general survey was on a fine spring day towards the end of March. The morning group headed for Barnwell lake via the wooded path between Coldham's Brook and the Main Drain, but made slow progress as there was much to note. The afternoon session looked round Barnwell East and West, and then finished with a quick look at the Rifle Butts. 38 additions to the flora list were made, and only nine of these had previously been reported. Most were of garden origin, but many had clearly made their own way out. Highlights of the day were finding pink sweet violet *Viola odorata var subcarnea* on the bank of the main drain in Barnwell West, dwarf spurge *Euphorbia exigua*, a red listed species, in Barnwell East and stinking hellebore *Helleborus foetidus* by the bridge in Barnwell West, which no-one had managed to spot on previous visits. In addition there was plenty of frogspawn in the Brook, and lots of 7-spot ladybirds *Coccinella 7-punctata* enjoying the sunshine.



*Adderstongue fern*

Another fine spring day at the end of April, in what was the hottest and driest April on record, saw a joint meeting with the Cambridgeshire Flora Group. A preliminary party met at 11am with a view to surveying Barnwell East and West, but never got beyond Barnwell East. Here we found several interesting additions, including Adderstongue *Ophioglossum vulgatum*, Sanicle *Sanicula europaea* and Twayblade *Listera ovata*. After a picnic in one of the glades we joined other members to head for the rifle butts and triangle. On the rifle butts we re-found Mouse-ear hawkweed *Pilosella officinarum*, but a group of party-goers lower down prevented complete exploration. Crossing to the triangle area we encountered abundant



*Twayblade*

field wood-rush *Luzula campestris* and boots turned yellow with pollen from bulbous buttercup *Ranunculus bulbosus*, but there was nothing outstanding in the triangle. Alan Leslie re-joined us here, having waded down the main drain in Barnwell West, where he had found large numbers of ferns including a solitary maidenhair spleenwort *Asplenium trichomanes* and an incredible 82 soft shield-ferns! Returning to the starting point via Coldham's Brook, we found a few flowers of common water-crowfoot *Ranunculus aquatilis*, with spike rush *Eleocharis palustris* and marsh horsetail *Equisetum palustre*. The dedicated remainder of the band then finished with further exploration of Barnwell West. There were lots of butterflies on the wing and we found an unusual form of the 2-spot ladybird *Adalia 2-punctata* f intermediate *annulata*. We recorded 105 species or sub-species of which 41 were new records for our survey, and of these 32 were new records for the area. A couple of visits were subsequently made to complete the April survey. The first covered the area south of the railway, and north up to Newmarket Road. Perhaps the best find was Whorl grass *Catabrosa aquatica* found barely 10m from where the CFG had joined the Brook. It is a rare species for Cambridgeshire, and the only other recent record is from Coe Fen.

The first of our evening walks took place in fine conditions at the end of May. It had been very wet during the previous week, and three times the normal rainfall fell during the month. We started by looking round the southern part of the common, which includes a children's playground. Somewhat to our surprise we found spike rush *Eleocharis palustris* in a slightly damper area of the playground. Elsewhere this part of the common had little new to offer, although we did find a small patch of quaking grass *Briza media*. Crossing to the north we encountered a nice patch of chalk grassland near the hockey pitch, which added yellow oat grass *Trisetum flavescens* to the list. The mountain bike area added several ruderal species, and finally the triangle area contained some seedlings of an introduced whitebeam, the Service Tree of Fontainebleau *Sorbus latifolia*.

The midsummer walk began with a tour round Barnwell Lake, and although the forecast suggested showers earlier in the afternoon, the first arrived as the party met by Newmarket road. It took us a while to get beyond the gate with a selection of trefoils, and hard grass *Catapodium rigidum*, a new addition to the site list was found growing in the gravel. There was a solitary great crested grebe *Podiceps cristatus* on the lake, and rather sadly we found feathers that looked suspiciously as if they might have belonged to its mate. We found several blue-tailed damselflies *Ischnura elegans* perching amongst the waterside vegetation some in brilliant colours, but others very drab, along with some snails on bulrush leaves. A tall bird's foot trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* caused some head scratching, until the latest edition of Rose gave the answer "do not confuse with the introduced *var sativus*" (a fodder crop), which it clearly was. We found a broomrape *Orobanche minor* and a member of the group noted that some years previously he had found one growing by the ditch dividing the sports field from the rest of the Common. Much of the Brook near the football ground was choked with the two invasive waterweeds, but we did spot the whorl grass, and decided that the water speedwell was *Veronica catenata*. The wooded section proved rather disappointing, and whilst nothing new was found at the rifle butts, the chalk grassland was in good health, with several bee orchids *Ophrys apifera*.

Our final evening walk, in mid July, focussed on Barnwell West, although we managed a brief visit to Barnwell East. The weather was fair, and although a few showers threatened it remained dry. Advancing high cloud from the deluge promised for the following day gave some good sky-scapes, with swifts *Apus apus* screaming aloft. We started by looking at the roadside verge, which is maintained for wildlife, and also has some interesting "sowings". These included many traditional

meadow flowers, but an addition to the list was the rayed sub species of Black knapweed *Centaurea nigra rivularis*. We continued back down the verge to its crossing with the Brook, where curled pondweed *Potamogeton crispus* was present. Returning to the LNR proper, we found a swarm of hybrid willowherbs *Epilobium spp*, which clearly included American, Greater, Small-flowered and Square-stemmed amongst the parents. Coming back along the Brook we found the hybrid between the hedge and greater bindweeds *Calystegia x lucana*. Although it was beginning to get rather gloomy, we crossed the road for a brief look at Barnwell East where we hoped to confirm some previous suspects. The level of water in the pond had dropped considerably, and we found some water plantain *Alisma plantago-aquatica*. We were able to find the site of one suspect fairly quickly and this was identified as corn mint *Mentha arvensis*. A further visit to Barnwell East took place a few days later, when we added several new species, including several brambles. Of particular note was the hybrid between dewberry and raspberry *Rubus x pseudoidaeus*.

Summer arrived at the end of August, and our return to afternoon walks benefited from a fine day. We started with a tour round Barnwell Lake, where we saw several hawk dragonflies *Aeshna sp*. One new addition to the flora was Wych elm *Ulmus glabra*, which had somehow escaped notice on previous visits! We then walked along the Brook, stopping to identify one of the many grass-hoppers, which the FSC card led us to name as the field grass-hopper *Chorthippus brunneus*. Leaving the Brook near the swimming pool, we checked on a section of ground recently turned over during the construction of new tennis courts. Here there were many arable weeds, including two *Chenopodium* species and field pansy *Viola arvensis*. At the rifle butts, Strawberry clover *Trifolium fragiferum* was found on the west facing slope, possibly the same "Rifle range" location where it was previously recorded in 1905.

A bright autumn day at the end of September gave nearly ideal conditions for the survey. We meandered slowly round the southern part of the common, beginning with an apparently dead tree near Coldham's Lane. Charles Turner identified it as Elm from the tree rings and that it had probably died from Dutch elm disease from signs of beetle tracks. This was confirmed by the find of a small suckering shoot with leaves. Perhaps if it was fenced off from the cattle it would re-grow. Continuing on to the children's playground we looked at some of the common species around the margins, and then continued behind the houses, where we found pale willowherb *Epilobium roseum* and Welsh poppy *Meconopsis cambrica*, the latter a garden escape. Continuing round the common we came across a Harlequin ladybird *Harmonia axyridis*, which is now being seen in significant numbers around Cambridge. We didn't find anything new in the meadow area or the rifle butts, but whilst walking back across the meadow to the playing fields Charles found a patch of salad burnet *Sanguisorba minor minor*. We concluded by looking at two unusual plants found by Jonathan Shanklin on a preliminary visit: Dittander *Lepidium latifolia*, which was growing on the neglected ground between the playing fields and main drain, and marsh cudweed *Gnaphalium uliginosum* growing on disturbed ground created by construction of a new all weather sports pitch.

The final survey visit was a fungal foray and took place on another bright autumn day in mid October. Although there had been some heavy rain the previous week, the ground was still very dry, and most of the fungi were small and brown. Led by Helene Davies, a large group met outside Barnwell West and after a brief explanation, which included the warning that a blast on the whistle meant we had found something interesting, set off along the roadside verge. The first find was a small brown toadstool, but getting beyond genus proved difficult. Entering the scrub we soon found many more small fungi, including jew's ear *Auricularia auricula-judae*, dead man's fingers *Xylaria polymorpha* and candle snuff *Xylaria hypoxylon*. With lots to try and identify, progress through the wood was slow, but we eventually crossed the road to Barnwell East. By this time numbers were dropping, but several additions were found including verdigris agaric *Stropharia aeruginosa*. In total we found over 30 species, but could only put names to 20. Surprisingly we also found a few vascular plants to add to the site list, including spindle *Euonymus europaeus* with bright red berries.

Many people came out on the monthly excursions, with the principal contributors being David Barden, Monica Frisch, Steve Hartley, Alan Leslie, David Seilly, Jonathan Shanklin and Charles Turner (& George). With around 470 vascular plant species or sub-species being recorded we greatly increased the number of species known from the Common. It is however unlikely that the list is complete, as even after the formal close of the survey in mid October additional species were found, either during conservation work or during deliberate search. The search success rate declined approximately

logarithmically and extrapolating this suggests that perhaps another 20 species could be found, ie that the vascular plant survey was complete to around the 95% level.

The 2008 survey area will be covering Stourbridge Common and Ditton Meadows. These flood meadows are unlikely to prove as diverse as Coldham's Common, however we should find some interesting water plants in the extensive ditch system of Ditton Meadows. Although the present group tends to concentrate on plants, we make records of other organisms too and would welcome beginners and experts with other interests. Do come and join in. Dates for the monthly surveys, 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  
2007 November