

Orthotrichum Workshop

Kingcombe Centre Dorset 16-19 May 2014

This workshop was planned by Tom Blockeel and Sam Bosanquet in response to dramatic changes in our *Orthotrichum* flora over the past two decades. Not only are many species now much more abundant than during most of the 20th century, but the past ten years have seen the discovery of two species new to Britain and the rediscovery of a third, as well as one species new to science. One of the aims of the workshop was to encourage participants to search for the less common members of the genus and to be aware of potential new arrivals.

Because of its relatively western location, Kingcombe might not seem to be ideally located for *Orthotrichum* species in the field, but it provided excellent accommodation and facilities, and most attendees were able to have rooms on site. We were very fortunate to have as our guest instructor Prof. Dr Francisco ('Paco') Lara from the University of Madrid (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid). Paco and his colleagues have contributed enormously to our understanding of *Orthotrichum*, both in Europe and elsewhere, and with Dr Ricardo Garilleti he has recently published the account of *Orthotrichum* (with 35 species) for *Flora Briofítica Ibérica*. We were also pleased to welcome another of our continental members to the meeting, Peter Erzberger, who joined us from Berlin.

The workshop began on the evening of Friday 16 May. Tom Blockeel gave a short introduction to the genus, noting in particular the large

increase in the number of species recorded per hectad since 1990 in many parts of southern Britain. The two subsequent days followed a common pattern: presentations and microscope sessions in the morning and evening, and a break in the field during the afternoon. The presentations on Saturday, by Tom, Sam and Paco, included:

- A review of diagnostic characters (TLB)
- The peristome of *Orthotrichum* (FL)
- Widespread species in Britain and Ireland (SDSB)
- The *pallens*, *pumilum*, *schimperi* complex (FL)
- Rare species in Britain and Ireland, and newcomers (SDSB and TLB)

On Sunday morning, Paco introduced us to a number of species not yet known in Britain and Ireland (or extinct in the case of *O. shawii*), and also gave us a brief update on the activities of his team at Madrid. Work on *Ulotia* has confirmed that the varieties formerly recognised under *Ulotia crispa* are good taxa and three separate species should be recognised: *U. crispa* s.s., *U. crispula* and *U. intermedia*.

The microscope sessions were productive. We confirmed two new collections of *O. pallens* from recent sites in Derbyshire and Sussex, and verified from herbarium specimens that both *O. pumilum* s.s. and *O. schimperi* are known from Britain. The biggest surprise came when Paco identified a collection by Sam from Sussex as *O. rogeri*, an addition to the British list!

△Above left *Orthotrichum sprucei* on ash tree at Fiddleford Mill. F. Lara. △Centre Paco Lara at work. R. Stevenson.
△Right Cerne Abbas. J. Denyer

Field outings

On Saturday afternoon in perfect sunny weather we investigated various parts of the Kingcombe Reserve, especially in the vicinity of Redholm Coppice, where we were able to appreciate the distinctive capsules of *Orthotrichum striatum*. The interior of Redholm Coppice is too dense for most *Orthotrichum* species, but *Ulotia* was plentiful and Chris Tipper spotted a tuft of *U. calvescens* on *Salix*, new to Dorset. *Orthotrichum tenellum* was seen on scattered trees but was less frequent than we expected. *O. pulchellum* was occasional, and some members saw a few tufts of *O. stramineum*, a species only recently found for the first time in Dorset in 2013. Sam spotted a tuft of *O. speciosum* on an ash tree, a second species new to Dorset, but we saw no more of it during the rest of the weekend. *Leptodon smithii* was present on several trees.

On Sunday our venue was Giant Hill at Cerne Abbas, famous for its giant man cut into the chalk hillside. The epiphytic *Orthotrichum* species were very similar to those seen at Kingcombe, but *O. tenellum* was more plentiful, and *O. lyellii* was common. *Leptodon smithii* was again present in good quantity.

On Monday 19 May a much reduced party visited the upper Stour valley near Sturminster. The first site was the DWT reserve at Girdlers Coppice by the R Stour. This small but attractive

piece of woodland produced 57 species, but the riverside trees had only a limited riparian flora, including *Dialytrichia mucronata* on *Salix*. The riverside flora was much more diverse on the river banks nearby, below the weir at Fiddleford Mill. Here *Orthotrichum sprucei* was very fine and plentiful on various tree species, and a patch of *Myrinia pulvinata* was located in silt on the branch of a blackthorn. *Didymodon nicholsonii* and *Scleropodium cespitans* were also present, along with the more predictable *Cinclidotus fontinaloides*, *Syntrichia latifolia* and *Leskea polycarpa*. Two *Orthotrichum* species, *O. anomalum* and *O. cupulatum*, grew side by side on concrete at the Mill. Paco pointed out that the latter was var. *riparium*, which he assured us is a good variety. In the afternoon we had time for a short visit to Turnworth Common, an area of open woodland with some very fine old hazels that supported occasional tufts of *Orthotrichum stramineum*. By the end of the meeting we had recorded all the species of *Orthotrichum* known from Dorset, as well as one addition, 10 species in total.

Our thanks are due to the Dorset Wildlife Trust and the staff at Kingcombe for their part in making this a very successful weekend.

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