

# Southern Group meeting at Chiddinglye Rocks, West Hoathly



We all dream of an ideal day in the field – perfect weather, a cordial atmosphere and, of course, exciting bryological finds. **Howard Matcham** describes just such a day at a recent Southern Group meeting.

Eighteen members arrived at Chiddinglye House at the kind invitation of Sylvia, Countess of Limerick, on a beautifully sunny clear spring morning to be welcomed by Sylvia with tea, coffee and biscuits. The perfect start to a perfect day spent recording familiar and the not so familiar bryophytes that are to be found on and around sand rocks in south-eastern England.

Our leader, David Streeter, began by demonstrating *Dichodontium pellucidum* on stones on the bank and stream bed in Philpotts Wood. This whetted the appetite for more, and Jeff Bates obliged by collecting *Pseudotaxiphyllum elegans* with sporophytes; to my knowledge this is only the second occurrence of this common moss with sporophytes in Sussex (both v.-c.s) during the past 25 years – it is highly unlikely that sporophytes are overlooked and so this is a genuinely rare event.

The sand rocks quickly obliged with some of the more unfamiliar species; *Tritomaria exsectiformis*, *Lophozia ventricosa*, *Odontoschisma denudatum*, *Kurzia sylvatica*, *Scapania gracilis* and *Barbilophozia*

*attenuatus*. Howard Wallis discovered that he had unwittingly collected *Scapania umbrosa* new to the wood, nestling within stems of *B. attenuatus*. Philpotts Wood has long been known as being one of the few sites in southern England where it could be guaranteed to demonstrate the moss *Orthodontium gracile* and putative material was found, but not in the quantity seen in the past. Collections of this species were not taken, but tufts with ripe capsules were obviously looking different to those with unripe capsules found nearby and recorded as *O. lineare*. Some 10 years ago I had surveyed the Chiddinglye Rocks SSSI and had remarked in my report to Royal Botanic Gardens Kew (not in the public domain) that *O. lineare* was disappearing from the sand rocks, its place being taken by the native *Dicranella heteromalla*. This still appears to be the case as *O. lineare* is nowhere near as abundant as 20 years ago and the *Dicranella* has obviously increased.

The undoubted highlight of Philpotts Wood is the huge quantity of female *Pallavicinia lyellii*. This is now the most important site for this species in southern England as Harrison's Rocks, which long

held claim to this record, has been decimated over the years by climbing (legal climbing!) and is but a shadow of former glory.

Both species of *Leucobryum* were recorded growing directly on rock with vast sheets of *Tetraphis pellucida*; the latter species would seem to have a restricted life span as moribund areas were frequent and where the hanging *Tetraphis* mat eventually drops off, the resulting bare patches allow re-colonization by small liverworts, ensuring a continuous cycle. Interestingly, all the small liverworts associated with the sand rocks possess gemmae, with the exception of *Kurzia sylvatica*, and this is probably the reason these very small plants are able to survive for long periods in a periodically harsh environment. This also applies to both species of *Orthodontium* and to *Dicranella heteromalla* which produce protonemal gemmae in abundance. It is possible that *D. cerviculata*, last recorded here as a gametophyte by Nicholson over a 100 years ago, still survives as protonemal gemmae on the rocks. Recent DNA sequencing of protonemal material from this wood suggests that this is a distinct possibility.

Although most of the sand rock specialties are liverworts, mention must be made of the moss *Dicranum scottianum*, one of our most oceanic species, and found in particular abundance, with sporophytes, at Chiddinglye.

In total, 59 bryophyte species were recorded.

◁ *Pallavicinia lyellii* growing on sand rock at Philpotts Wood. Howard Wallis

△ The myxomycete *Lamproderma columbinum*. Bar, 0.5 mm. David Mitchell

As a final note, Peter Howarth found another very rare species of the sand rocks, but on this occasion not a bryophyte, but the myxomycete *Lamproderma columbinum*, a specialist of Atlantic woods and ravines (Ing, 1999) and exceedingly rare in south-east England.

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## REFERENCE

Ing, B. (1999). *The Myxomycetes of Britain and Ireland. An Identification Handbook*. Slough: Richmond Publishing.