Ashburnham Place, East Sussex (VC 14)

12 April 2015

The beautiful Ashburnham Place estate lies a few miles west of Battle. The building has a complex history, and much of it was demolished in the 1950s, but the grandeur of the 200-acre Capability Brown garden can still be appreciated. It has several lakes and woods, providing a range of habitats for bryophytes.

Despite the gorgeous weather only a small group turned out for the field meeting, led by Tom Ottley. This did mean, however, that we could have a sedate tour around the grounds and spend some time closely examining many species. Tom has already spent several days surveying the estate, in which over 130 different bryophytes have been recorded, so we anticipated some interesting finds.

Starting off around the old wall near the car park immediately turned up Aloina aloides and the ragged-looking Rhynchostegium murale, along with Brachythecium albicans. A gravel path soon gave us the chance to re-familiarise ourselves with some small and common acrocarps before Tom and Jan Hendey found a patch of a Scleropodium, also on the gravel. A subsequent microscopical check by Tom confirmed this as S. touretii.
Tom then led us to the ornamental walls in the garden in front of the house, which is the site for the most noteworthy species of the day. The narrow, grass-free edges abutting the walls are home to *Sphaerocarpos texanus* and *Entosthodon fasciculare*, which we spent some time photographing. These were both species that Tom had previously located, and he noted that the estate gardeners were particularly interested to be shown these on an earlier visit, and are ensuring that the grass doesn’t encroach on the borders where they occur.

Heading into the woods some damp banks gave us the chance to see some less rare species, in particular *Riccardia chamedryfolia* (some with perianths), *Rhytidiadelphus loreus* and the pale *Cirriphyllum piliferum* with its almost right-angled branches and hair-pointed leaves. The shady
muddy paths revealed some additional species, too, such as Scapania irrigua, and a now rather flattened and dried-out Archidium alternifolium.

After lunch we continued through the woods around the lake edge. At the top of a shady stream was a grotto with a water source, providing a perfect damp environment for Eucladium verticillatum, Gyroweisia tenuis, Tortula marginata and Rhynchostegiella tenella. Heading up the steps from there revealed a patch of Scapania nemorea, with its brown gemmae, which could be contrasted with the S. undulata in the stream below, and the earlier S. irrigua.

We hadn’t seen that many epiphytes, so examined some of the willow on the lake edge. This resulted in finding Orthotrichum pulchellum, now with its beautiful orange peristome teeth.
Finally, a now depleted group of two went looking specifically for some rotting evergreen trunks. After some searching we eventually located a suitable Scots Pine without bark which turned out to have a couple of patches of the fruiting moss we were after. Indeed, Tom subsequently confirmed it microscopically as *Sematophyllum substrumulosum*, with its uncurved, *Hypnum*-like leaves and nodding capsules. This was a nice find to end the meeting, which proved to be a very enjoyable, sunny and illuminating day out.

Many thanks to the Ashburnham Christian Trust for allowing us access to the estate.

BRAD SCOTT