

Bryophyte Day in Wyre

ANN HILL

On Saturday 18 November 2017 a group of twenty eager naturalists gathered at Unclys Farm for a day of discovering more about mosses and liverworts: diminutive lower plants collectively known as bryophytes. The field meeting was led by Ann Hill, the appointed bryophyte recorder for VC37 Worcestershire and the day focused on using the Field Guide to Mosses and Liverworts (Atherton, Bosanquet & Lawley 2010) to introduce the Wyre Forest Study Group to mosses and liverworts. Bryophyte identification has become much easier since publication of the Field Guide but most individuals struggle trying to use the field key for the first time.

The day started indoors using the Field Guide to differentiate between thalloid liverworts (no leaves), leafy liverworts, acrocarpous mosses and pleurocarpous mosses. We used the line drawings shown on the inside front and back covers of the Field Guide and on pages 5-18 to identify four common bryophytes: *Pellia epiphylla* Overleaf Pellia (a thalloid liverwort), *Frullania dilatata* Dilated Scalewort (a leafy liverwort), *Mnium hornum* Swan's-neck Thyme-moss (an acrocarpous moss) and *Hypnum cupressiforme* Plait-moss (a pleurocarpous moss).

After the indoor session, the Study Group went outside and used the Field Guide to key out the robust, green/yellow-green *Pseudoscleropodium purum* Neat Feather-moss that was growing on the grassy banks along the drive to Unclys Farm. Hand lenses were used to look for the minute divergent leaf points at the tip of the stem (a distinctive feature of the plant) which are not easily visible to the naked eye. Hand lenses were also used to find the vertical plates of green tissue on the upper surface of the nerve of *Polytrichastrum formosum* Bank Haircap. The vertical plates was found to be a challenging feature to see in the field and this difficulty is often a stumbling block to beginners progressing through the field key. The structure of mosses and key features of moss leaves, such as the nerves (midribs), leaf margins and hair-points, were compared and discussed before the Study Group returned indoors to warm up and have lunch (valuable time for more discussion and looking at bryophyte books).

After lunch the Study Group explored a damp woodland hollow where the bryophytes grew in profusion and were easily found despite being covered by a deep layer of fallen leaves. Bryophytes are usually present all year round but are easier to find and look at their best during winter. Species the Study Group keyed out included the acrocarpous moss *Dicranum scoparium* Broom Fork-moss and the common pleurocarpous mosses *Hypnum cupressiforme* var. *cupressiforme*



Indoor bryophyte session at Unclys

Graham Hill

and *Kindbergia praelonga* Common Feather-moss growing over logs and tree bases. Hand lenses were used to study *Diplophyllum albicans* White Earwort: a common liverwort of non-calcareous soils. The plant appears to have four rows of leaves but the small ones are lobes pressed to the stem. The best diagnostic character lies in the band of long, narrow, colourless cells down the middle of each leaf lobe. This narrow vitta was easily seen with a hand lens. The highlight of the field day was finding *Bazzania trilobata* Greater Whipwort growing in local abundance and forming large deep yellow-green cushions on a woodland bank. This species is one of our largest liverworts and is considered "Scarce" in Wyre (The Nature of Wyre 2015) with records from Dowles Brook, Hitterhill Coppice, Knowles Coppice, Park Brook and Brand Wood. The Study Group finished the day by looking for the border of narrow elongated cells on the leaves of *Fissidens bryoides* Pocket-moss and the excurrent nerve of *Fissidens taxifolius* Common Pocket-moss.



Using handlenses

Graham Hill

The Wyre Forest Study Group only walked one mile in total but quickly found out just how fascinating these tiny bryophytes are. A very enjoyable field meeting was had with lots of fun, discussion and wonder at the marvels of bryophytes such as the pale green gemmae growing at the shoot tips of *Calypogeia fissa* Common Pouchwort and the lateral crinkles on the leaves of *Plagiothecium undulatum* Waved Silk-moss. Tired brains and poor light levels brought the day to a close at 3:00pm.

References

Atherton, I., Bosanquet, S. & Lawley, M. (2010). Mosses and Liverworts of Britain and Ireland: A Field Guide. Plymouth: Latimer Trend & Co Ltd.

Westwood, B., Shirley, P., Winnall, R. & Green, G. (eds) (2015). The Nature of Wyre. Newbury: Pisces Publications.



Out into the Forest

Graham Hill



Bazzania trilobata

Rosemary Winnall