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Overhall Grove Nature Reserve: Autumn 2018; Robert Enderby

## Hello, and Welcome to the CPERC 2020 Newsletter

Since the last newsletter in 2019 a lot has changed, including our way of working. The current restrictions have meant that, like many others, we have had to adapt to working from home, which presents challenges, but we have adapted to this successfully overall. We continue to function mostly as before and are still responding to data requests as normal.

Despite the brief respite wildlife had in the severest lockdown period in the Spring, the many threats to our local wildlife continue. Cambridgeshire is one of the driest areas in the country and although we have had a wetter period recently, recent years seem to have been particularly dry overall with several long spells without any rain. These significant periods without rain have put a great strain on wildlife and habitats in Cambridgeshire reliant on a natural water supply, such as chalk streams and wet meadows. It is yet to be seen whether this pattern will continue due to climate change. If so, extra care and attention will be needed to try and avoid the most damaging effects of this on our wildlife.

The current trend amongst nature conservation bodies and organisations to tackle the challenges that our wildlife face is aiming to create new networks of habitats and 'make more space for nature'. However, I was pleased to see that number one on the list of priorities recommended by Sir John Lawton and the *Making Space for Nature* panel in a letter to the prime minister recently (which can be seen on the [NBN website](#)) was 'Better protect and manage our remaining wildlife habitats', specifically mentioning SSSIs and Local Wildlife Sites. Through the monitoring we have done at the records centre over the past ten years we can see that these areas designated largely for their important local natural heritage value continue to be on the whole neglected and management work on them underfunded. Without further resources being put into the management of these sites first, any larger schemes and projects will ultimately be unsuccessful at preventing the loss of our native biodiversity overall.

I hope you find the contents of our latest newsletter of interest, which include articles updating readers about work we have been involved in since the last newsletter and more general news about our local wildlife.

Phil Ricketts, CPERC Centre Manager

## Team News

There have been no staff changes since the last newsletter, so the CPERC team is still Phil, David and Hazel. In 2019, David and Hazel each went to a day of the NFBR conference in Norfolk, which was an interesting insight into recording "beyond the honeypot". In the summer, Phil and Hazel helped out for a least one day each with the Wildlife Trust BCN's Rapid Grassland Assessment surveys and Hazel and David also assisted with the Wildlife Trust's Great Crested Newt monitoring project in Cambourne. We also went on a team recording day to Monk's Wood NNR.

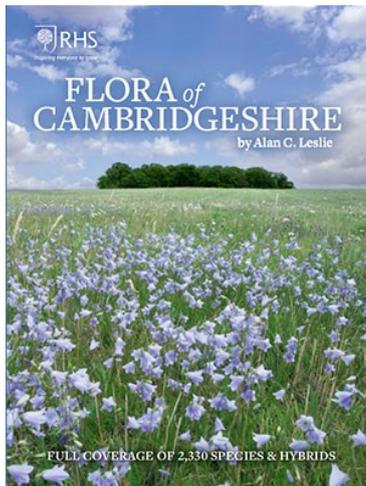
2020 has been a very different year: between us we usually attend several of the Wildlife Trust BCN training workshops, and so have missed these - as I am sure many of you have! - but it is pleasing to hear some workshops are now taking place with an online format. The 2020 ALERC conference took place online in October, which was a different experience for us, but still a great way to share work and ideas with record centres across the country.

Working from home has its limitations, particularly with IT, and we are looking forward to returning to the office, when it is safe to do so, so we can start with new project work.



Recording in Monks Wood: May 2019, Hazel Harbird

## Wider News



### New Flora of Cambridgeshire Published

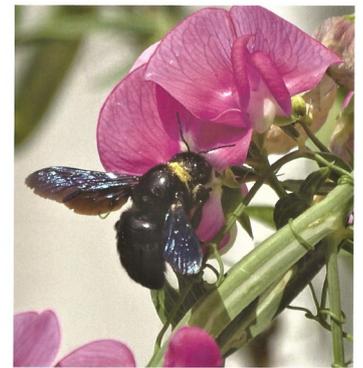
A new *Flora of Cambridgeshire* covering the 'old county' of Cambridgeshire area (Vice County 29) has recently been published. It is a very substantial piece of work compiled over many years and produced by Alan Leslie. It follows in the great tradition of *Floras* for this area, starting with John Ray's *Flora* in 1660. In the new *Flora* there is a significant amount of detail covering both present and historical information about plant species distributions across the area, showing how habitat changes have affected the county's flora over time.

### Nature in Cambridgeshire 2020 - Out Now!

The latest *Nature in Cambridgeshire* has recently been published and contains many interesting articles,

including ones on Wicken Fen, Devil's Dyke, Arthur's Meadow, Spotted Flycatchers, the Violet Carpenter Bee and others. There is also a short report on the recording of the UK's hottest ever temperature at the Cambridge Botanic Garden! More info on how to obtain a copy, and older copies can be found on the [Nature in Cambridgeshire website](#).

### Nature in Cambridgeshire No 62 2020



## In Remembrance

We were very sorry to hear that a number of local naturalists passed away in recent times.

Richard Shotbolt, who was the vice-county fungi recorder for Huntingdonshire passed away in March. Many people benefitted from his expertise and attended his training workshops. An obituary for him can be seen on the [British Mycological Society website](#).



Fungi in Woodwalton Fen, taken on one of Richard's Training Workshops in 2018 (Hazel Harbird)

Hertfordshire naturalist, Trevor James, who as well as being a keen recorder was a key figure in the development of the LERC movement and the NBN, passed away in June. Trevor was the author of the recently published *Beetles of Hertfordshire* book, probably the most substantial county beetle atlas ever produced. An obituary for him is on the [NBN website](#) and another is on the [Hertfordshire Natural History Society website](#).

It is also with sadness that we report that Gigi Crompton, formerly the VC29 plant recorder, passed away in January, aged 97. Gigi contributed greatly to the knowledge of the natural history of plants in the area, with her most significant work in the last twenty years being the website [Cambridgeshire Flora Records since 1538](#) which was used to help inform Alan Leslie's most recent book. We would recommend anyone with an interest in local natural history read some of Gigi's articles in the journal [Nature in Cambridgeshire](#), such as the description of the lost wildlife riches of the *Thriplow Peat Holes* (Issue 2). An obituary for Gigi has been published by [the Guardian](#). There are also obituaries in the latest editions of [BSBI news](#) and [Nature in Cambridgeshire](#).



Phil Ricketts



Vince Lea

Bryophyte enthusiast and Norfolk recorder, Charles (Robin) Stevenson passed away in 2019. Robin often ventured into Cambridgeshire from his home in King's Lynn and had recently contributed to the *Cambridgeshire's Mosses and Liverworts* book with a chapter on one of his specialist subjects - the bryophyte flora of orchards. Robin also contributed towards the Phase 3 Cambridgeshire Traditional Orchard Surveys in 2009-11 (report available from the [Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Biodiversity Group](#)). An obituary for Robin is also in the latest copy of [Nature in Cambridgeshire](#).

## Improving the Recording Structure in Cambridgeshire

Since the previous CPERC newsletter the *CPERC Recorders Advisory Group* has been set up to improve coordination of the recording network across the area. The group comprises representatives of the major local natural history societies in the area (Huntingdonshire Flora and Fauna Society and Cambridge Natural History Society) and CPERC. In time this will hopefully grow to be a forum for all county and vice-county recorders, and representatives of local recording societies across the area.

An initial aim of the group is to make more information readily available about who the relevant vice-county recording contacts are for different taxonomic groups. More information will appear on our website in due course.



David Gregory

## Recording Highlights

### Godmanchester Seal

Marine mammal records are unusual in land-locked Cambridgeshire, but sightings of intrepid seals that have swum up-river from the Wash are not unheard of! In March 2019 we received two independent records (with photographs) of a seal in Cook's Stream, a backwater of the River Great Ouse, at Godmanchester Nature Reserve. The recorders, including one person who had seen the seal twice on separate days, reported a young seal who appeared to be calm and not showing signs of distress.



David Basford

### New Centipede Recorded in Cambridgeshire

A surprising record of centipede species *Henia vesuviana* from 2014 has now been confirmed. This species, more commonly associated with coastal areas, was recorded for the first time in Cambridgeshire at Conington Railway Sidings, by Peter Kirby, in an old decomposing railway sleeper. The record was confirmed in 2019 after it was spotted by a national myriapod expert in a CPERC dataset for verification, and a specimen was examined.



*Henia vesuviana*  
Copyright Malcolm Storey,  
[www.bioimages.org.uk](http://www.bioimages.org.uk). Used  
under licence: CC BY-NC-SA 2.0 UK

Val Perrin  
2007

### Peterborough's Back Garden Otters

In 2019 we had several reports of otter activity in people's back gardens in the Werrington area of Peterborough. In one garden, an otter had been caught on a CCTV camera, other households had spotted one and there were also signs that an otter had been eating fish from a garden pond. We already had records for otters from Werrington, so these sightings confirmed they are still there. If you live in the area, especially near the Werrington Brook, then keep your eyes open, and please submit records of any sightings (along with any photos or videos you are able to get) ... and make sure you secure any fish ponds!

### Black Hairstreak News

A 'new' site for black hairstreak *Satyrrium pruni* butterflies has recently been discovered on the edge of a woodland in the Castor Hanglands area west of Peterborough. Black hairstreaks are rarely seen and are strongly associated with blackthorn thickets. They are also largely geographically restricted in the UK to the East Midlands. The CPERC area contains only a handful of known sites for the species, therefore it was great to hear of this new discovery. However, when we looked at our historic records we could see that black hairstreaks had been previously recorded near this new location in 1955 by H.F. Tebbs - showing that old records are still very useful for indicating where new ones might be found!

Matthew  
Webb

## Year of the Fly

2019 was designated *International Year of the Fly*, with true flies (or Diptera) being celebrated around the world. Diptera are abundant and diverse and many fulfil vital roles as pollinators and decomposers. Like many invertebrate taxa, Diptera are difficult to identify and so hard for beginners and amateurs to record. Most of the Diptera records CPERC receives are from experts or people with a special interest.

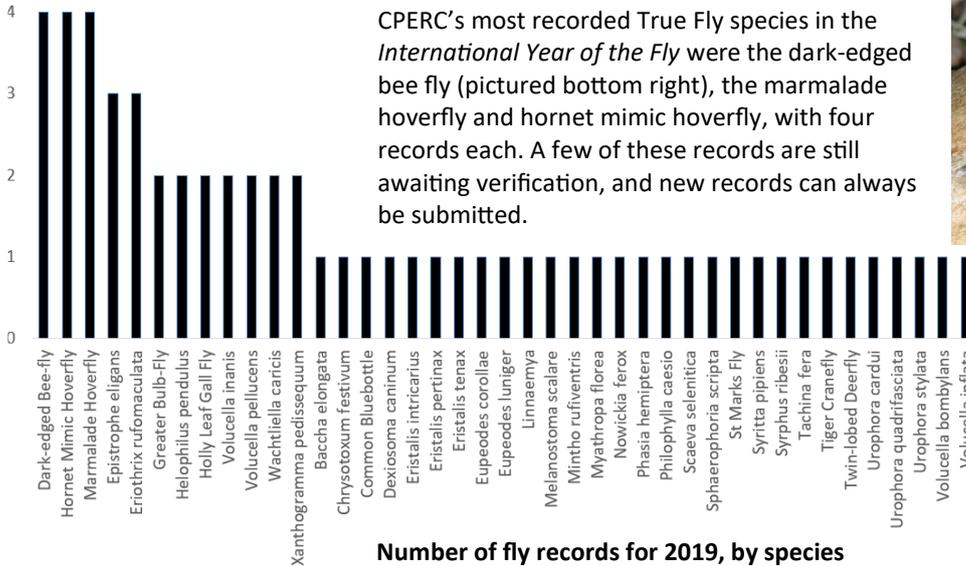
We have received 61 records from the order Diptera from 2019, which represent over 105 individual flies of 41 different species, meaning that most species recorded were only recorded once—including the common blue-bottle and St Marks fly (pictured top right)! This is an example of how records often tell us more about the number and distribution of people who record, rather than the species recorded!



St Mark's flies, 2015, Sonia Kheler



Dark-edged bee-flies, 2007, Val Perrin



CPERC's most recorded True Fly species in the *International Year of the Fly* were the dark-edged bee fly (pictured bottom right), the marmalade hoverfly and hornet mimic hoverfly, with four records each. A few of these records are still awaiting verification, and new records can always be submitted.

If you attended an *International Year of the Fly* event, or if you have Diptera records from 2019 or any other time, please submit them to help increase the numbers of records we hold for this under-recorded but very important group.

## Understanding your Records Centre: Why haven't you got *that* record?

A common misconception is that records centres hold a comprehensive set of species records which covers all taxa, from all places, within their area of remit. The ultimate aim is to get as close to this as possible, but, in reality it is impossible to achieve as the amount of information out there is vast and record production is never-ending. The great complexity of the natural world cannot ever be represented fully in digital form.

Records centres are relatively new and many, like CPERC, are under 20 years old, meaning we are still in an initial phase of obtaining, digitising, validating and verifying data from a range of old and new sources. Even well organised and already digitised sets of records can take many months to validate and process as differing formats are matched to that of our own database. For example, we validate every record we receive geographically, no matter who or where it is from, to check that grid references and location descriptions match. Grid references are often given incorrectly or at an inappropriate precision. This takes time, and needs experienced and trained staff to spot issues and know how to deal with them. Verification requires external voluntary effort from local experts, and it can be hard to find appropriate local expertise with time to do this. We appreciate the work of these verifiers greatly.

At the same time we work on other projects and work improving our habitat data as well. When looking at habitats on a field by field basis, as we aim to, the geographical area we cover is vast.

I believe a records centre's priority is to hold as much data as possible on a range of species and habitats (particularly those of nature conservation interest) but, above all, for the data to be as accurate as possible. Inaccurate data is either useless, or worse, misleading. Of course, there will always be some inaccuracy, but a records centre's job is to try to keep it to a minimum.

When records centres were formed there were already local and national species data repositories in place: local natural history societies and groups, vice-county recorders, and national schemes and societies. The data flow between these was patchy and complex, and this has now been complicated further by the proliferation of online recording websites, some without adequate verification processes in place. Records centres can be at the centre of trying to improve the data flow locally, but it is difficult and time consuming. There are many datasets (or dataset updates) that we do not currently hold, and often we have to prioritise the processing of one dataset over another, due to time and funding constraints. Therefore next time you ask 'why hasn't your records centre got these records?' (or at least 'why are they not showing in their outputs?') please give thought to the time and effort that goes into providing what we currently have, and the progress that has been made in a relatively short period of time.

If we don't have the data you need, we often have the contacts and knowledge to point you towards where it *can* be found.



# Species in the Spotlight: Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*)

## Why Newts?

Great Crested Newts (GCNs) are protected by both UK and EU law because their populations have suffered hugely due to habitat loss. They are native to Great Britain and most common in the south—so we are lucky in Cambridgeshire that they are relatively abundant here. The efforts to protect them have attracted negative attention due to the delay to development



A GCN Torch Survey  
at WTBCN HQ  
David Gregory, 2019

projects that they can sometimes cause.

At CPERC we have been fortunate to have the opportunity to help the Wildlife

Trust BCN team with their annual GCN surveys in Cambourne for the last couple of years and, before lockdown was announced in March, we were looking forward to the 2020 surveying season!



A female GCN  
Robert Pond, 2015

## Why Now?

Before undertaking development, a developer must arrange for field surveys to check for the presence of GCNs at the site, and plan for mitigation to take place if they are found so that new habitat is created to replace any that will be lost. At the moment mitigation licences are issued by Natural England on a project by project basis.

However, across the country, a new approach called District Level Licencing (DLL) is being gradually introduced. This involves mitigation for GCN habitat loss being licenced initially using a GCN population distribution model based on intensive field monitoring and established records (many provided by local records centres). The model is used to assess the development's risk level to GCNs and, depending on this risk level, field surveys by an ecologist may be required, or it may be determined that GCN surveys are not necessary. Advantages to DLL are the potential for mitigation for multiple developments to be done cohesively and, for the developers, a faster turn-around time. Disadvantages may be the potential loss of GCNs from previously unknown populations which are not highlighted in the modelling.

## What's the Cambridgeshire Picture?

There are lots of isolated GCN populations here that are known about, with potential for there to be additional populations that are currently either completely unknown or locally known but unrecorded. These populations are particularly vulnerable if their habitat is lost or damaged and not replaced.

## What Can You do for Great Crested Newts?

If you are an Ecological Consultant, or you have a GCN Licence, remember to e-mail your licence returns into CPERC.

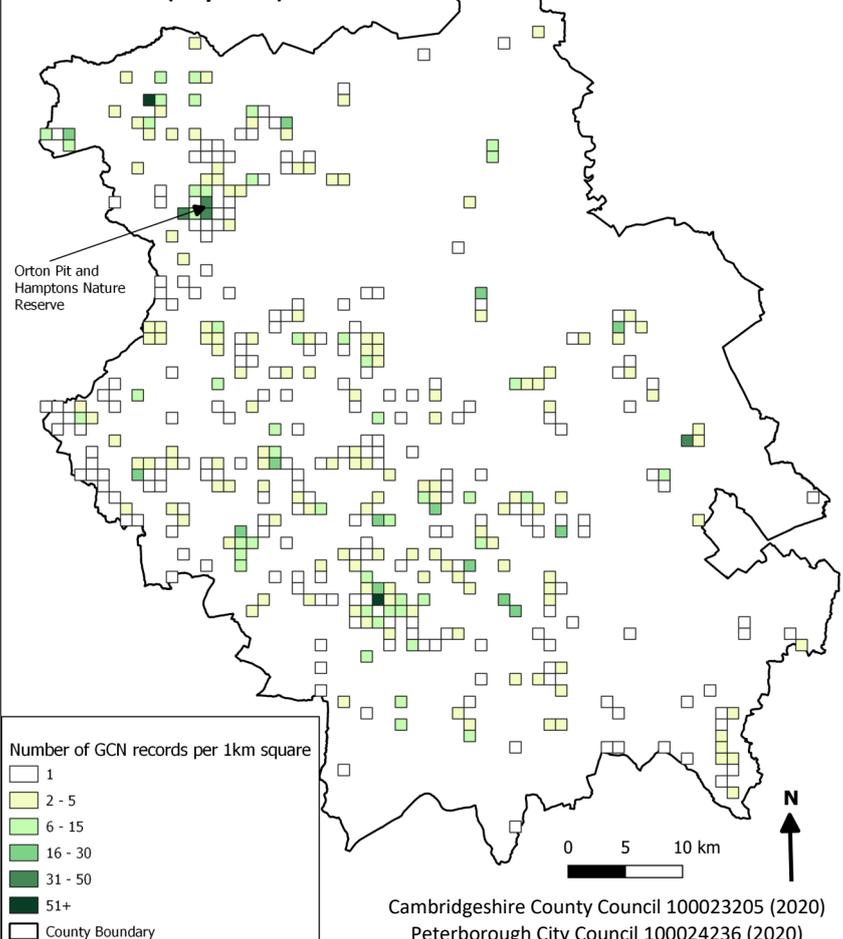
If you have a pond in your garden, or a pond near you, then why not have a look for newts? Head out in the evening during spring or early summer and shine a torch into the water. Male GCNs are the easiest to spot, with a noticeable stripe of silver along the tail that catches the torchlight and their namesake feature, a jagged crest, along the back. They are about 15cm in length. Females are a similar size, but lacking the crest. You are also likely to see smaller smooth newts that are very common, but still worth recording! Submit any records to us by e-mail at [data@cperc.org.uk](mailto:data@cperc.org.uk) to get your local GCNs on the map!

**Remember that it is illegal to handle, trap or otherwise disturb GCNs unless you have a licence to do so.**

## Is your Garden Suitable for a Pond?

Froglife are encouraging people to build ponds in their gardens with a campaign called *Just add Water!* For a fun project, download their campaign information booklet, with instructions, from the [Just Add Water page](#) on the Froglife website. If GCNs move into your pond, don't forget to send us the records!

Cambridgeshire GCN Distribution Map  
(July 2020)





## Colin Welch Coleoptera Records

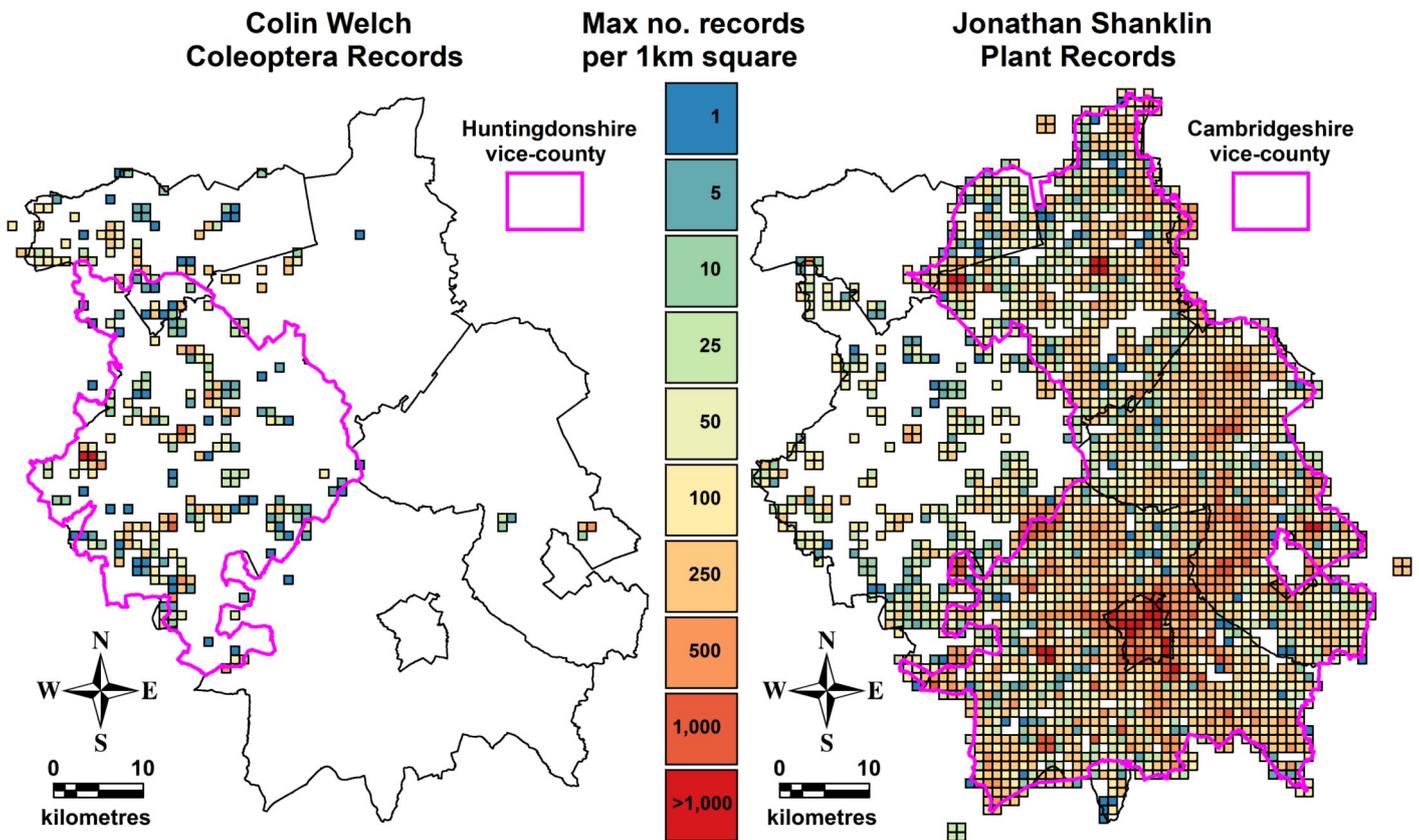
At the end of 2019, just under two years after starting the project, we finished digitising and importing ten A4 ring-binders of records from the Huntingdonshire vice-county beetle recorder, Colin Welch. The records, ranging from the 1950s to 2015, cover almost 20% of the monads (1 x 1 km squares) that intersect the historic Huntingdonshire vice-county (outlined in pink on the map below left), and extend into the other districts of the modern day county. In total, 21,595 detailed records, most with comments referencing where on the sites the species were found, representing 1,736 different species were digitised. This collection now represents over 25% of our records for Coleoptera (beetles), adding 222 new species to our database.

Some of the records in the folders that were from recorders other than Colin were not digitised and imported as we either already had them in the database or are likely to obtain them from other more direct sources in the future.

## Jonathan Shanklin Plant Database

We have now largely completed merging the database of the Cambridgeshire vice-county plant recorder, Jonathan Shanklin, with our own. The project involves our usual procedures for data validation, with the additional step of identifying records duplicated from other sources to avoid replicating entries in our database.

So far, the project has added 251,424 flowering plant records to our collection, representing just over 35% of our records for this taxonomic group. We have also been able to add thousands of records of liverworts, ferns and conifers. The flowering plant records range from 1980 to 2020, and cover close to 90% of the monads (1 x 1 km squares) that intersect the historic Cambridgeshire vice-county, as well as areas of the historic Huntingdonshire vice-county.



Distribution maps of Coleoptera records digitised from Colin Welch’s collection (left) and flowering plant records merged from Jonathan Shanklin’s database (right) Cambridgeshire County Council 100023205 (2020); Peterborough City Council 100024236 (2020)



We look forward to using this data to help answer questions about the county’s biodiversity, and thank Colin and Jonathan for sharing their work, as well as their extraordinary efforts in identifying and recording the species.



## Habitat Indicators

We have recently been trialling making heat maps using habitat indicator information with the Field Studies Council (FSC) Biolinks QGIS Biological Records Tool to show distributions across our area.

The Biolinks tool is a very adaptable and useful way to make a variety of maps out of species records quickly and easily. It is also freely available so can easily be used by recorders at home with a modest amount of GIS knowledge. See the [FSC website](#) for more information about the tool. The [QGIS website](#) is a good place to start for an introduction to the open-source QGIS software.

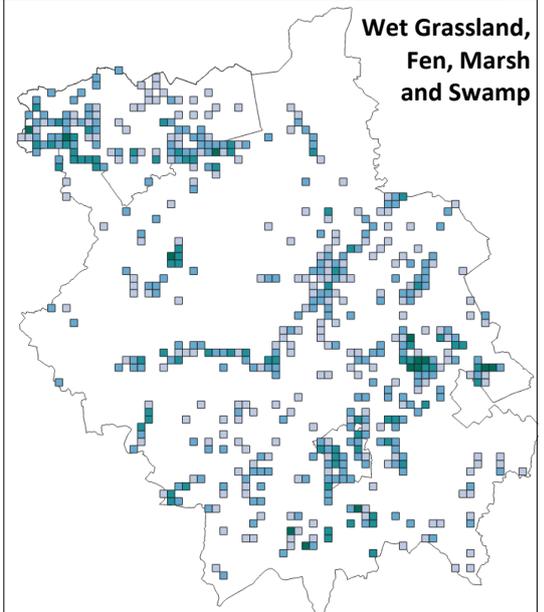
To create the heat maps, we first compiled sets of botanical indicator species for different habitat types using the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough County Wildlife Site criteria indicator lists combined with other sources. Species records for each habitat indicator type were then exported from the database and the records could then be summarised and squares mapped and coloured according to the number of habitat indicator species within the square.

The information can be mapped at different scales. The maps shown are at a 1km square resolution, but maps can be made at more precise resolutions such as 100m square when looking at a greater level of detail. However, at this scale, all records at lower resolutions (1km or above) have to be ignored, so fewer records are used - a good reason to record at higher resolutions if possible!

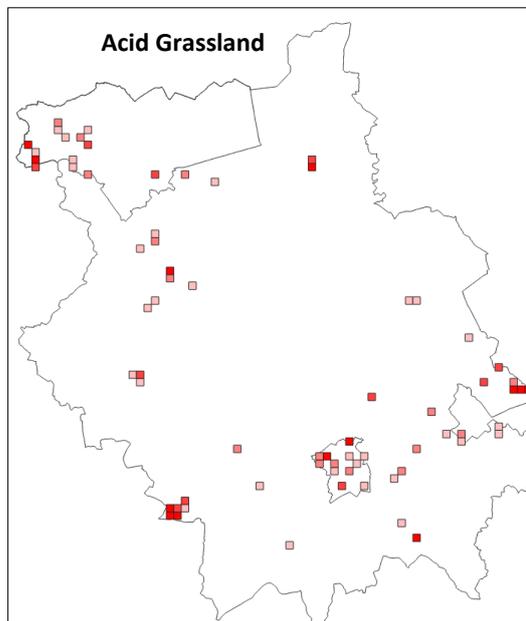
The maps show that distributions of habitat indicator species vary primarily with the geological conditions and the location of nature reserves and designated sites. A higher level of recording effort combined with accidentally or deliberately introduced species may also have some impact in more urban places such as Cambridge.

In future, this information could be combined with other habitat data to verify known habitat areas or highlight those which may not be so well known. Other taxonomic groups, including invertebrate groups, could also be used as indicators where the habitat associations are strong. At a larger scale, where more detail can be shown, maps could be made to show how characteristics change across sites, for example how species richness varies across a nature reserve.

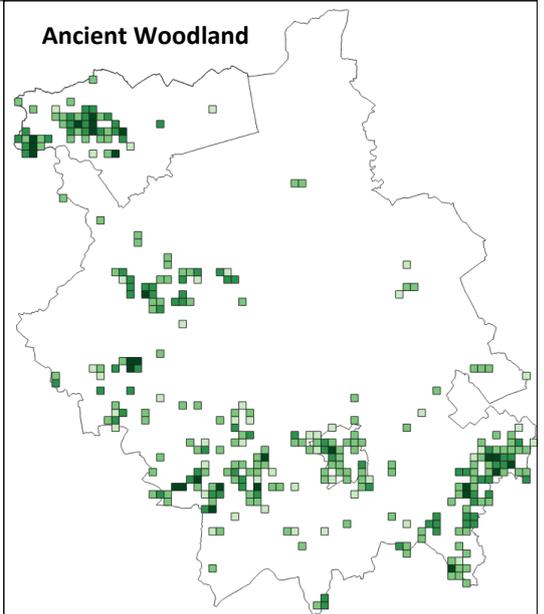
All maps include information from records post 1970 on the CPERC database at 1km square resolution or higher. All rights reserved. Cambridgeshire County Council 100023205 (2020); Peterborough City Council 100024236 (2020).



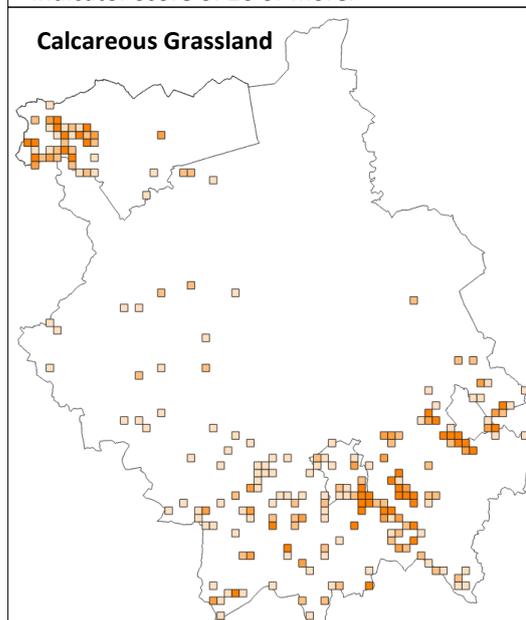
Squares are only shown if they contain 8 or more indicator species.



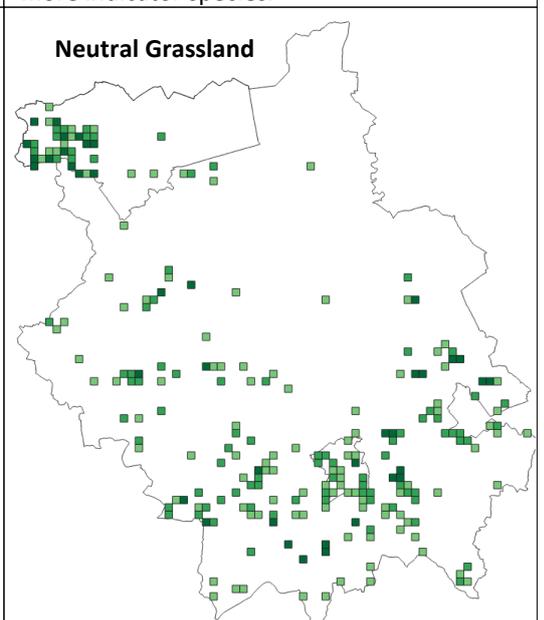
Squares are only shown if they have a habitat indicator score of 20 or more.



Squares are only shown if they contain 5 or more indicator species.



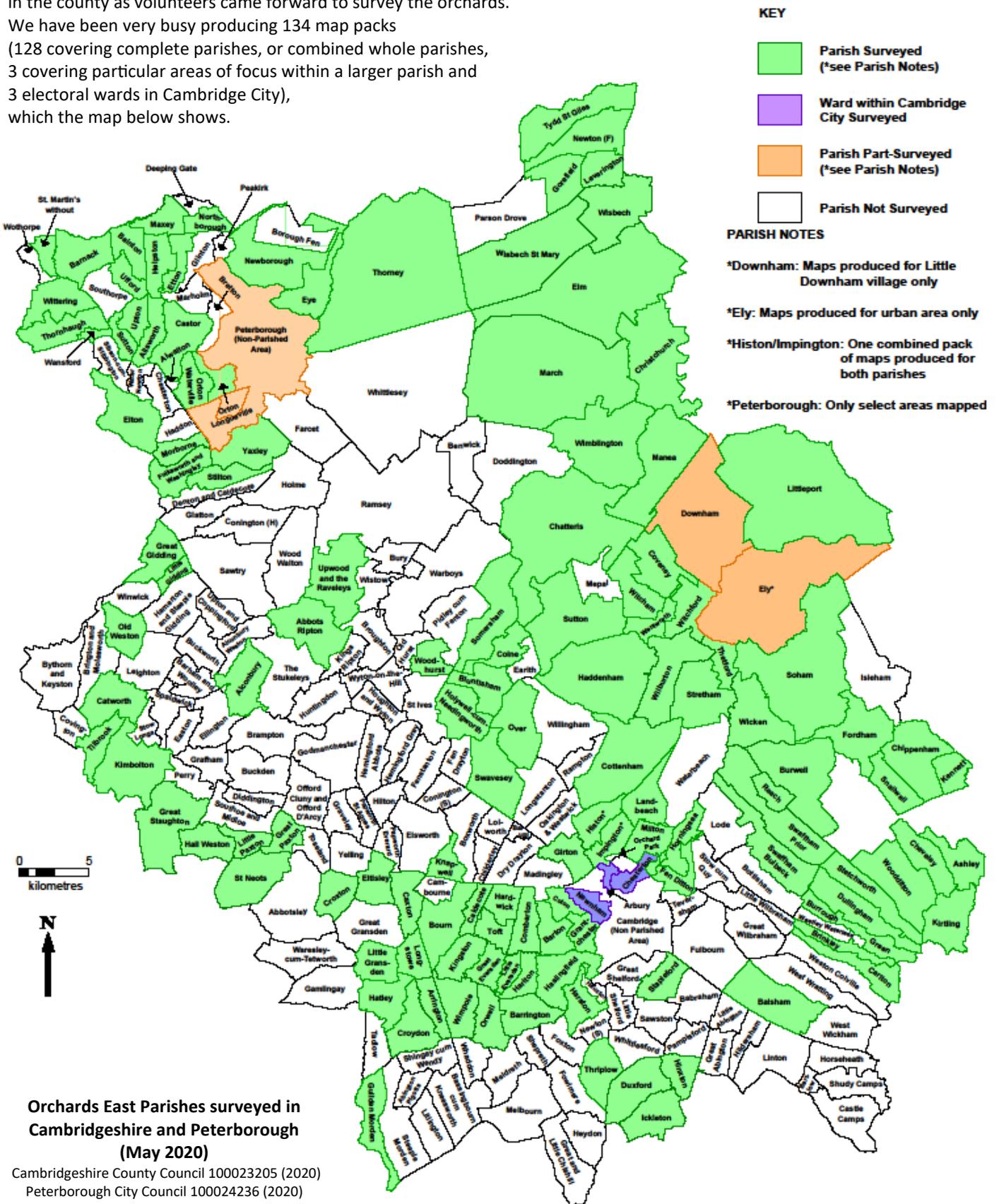
Squares are only shown if they have a habitat indicator score of 30 or more.



Squares are only shown if they have a habitat indicator score of 30 or more.

# Orchards East

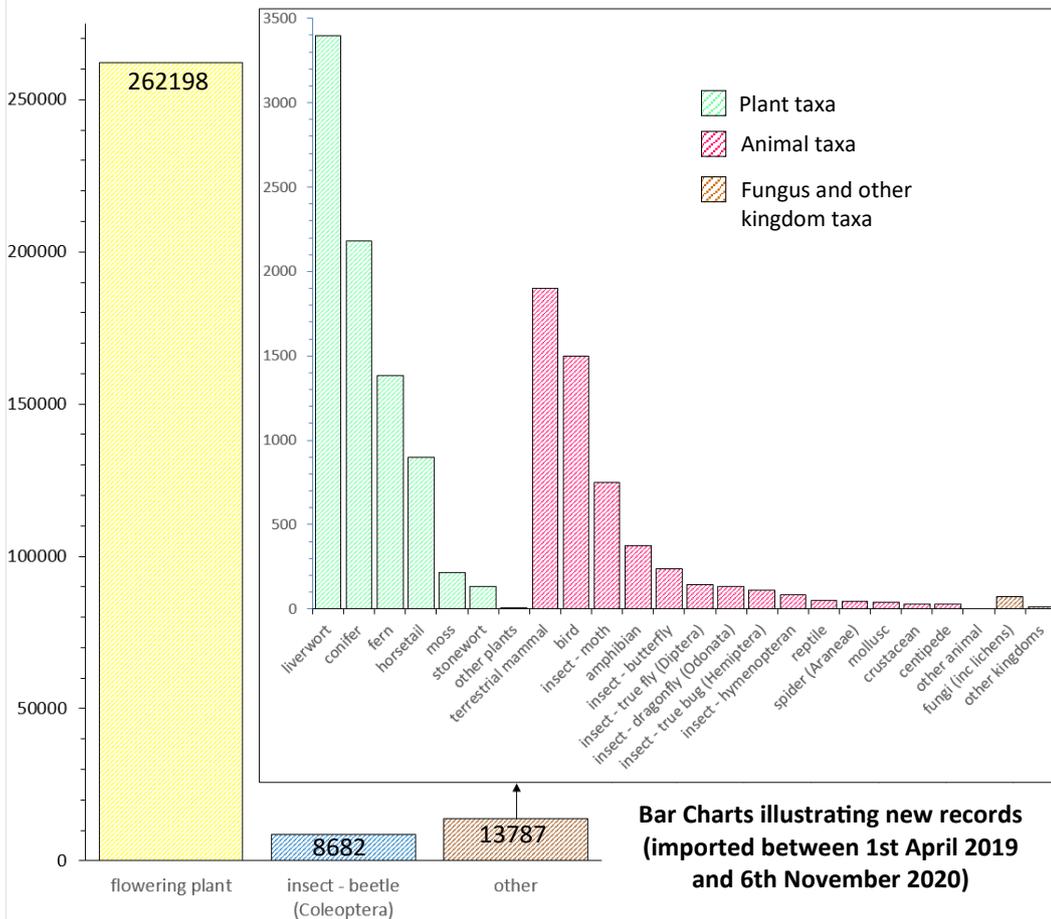
As this project reached the surveying stage, CPERC’s involvement over the past year has been primarily producing map packs of parishes in the county as volunteers came forward to survey the orchards. We have been very busy producing 134 map packs (128 covering complete parishes, or combined whole parishes, 3 covering particular areas of focus within a larger parish and 3 electoral wards in Cambridge City), which the map below shows.



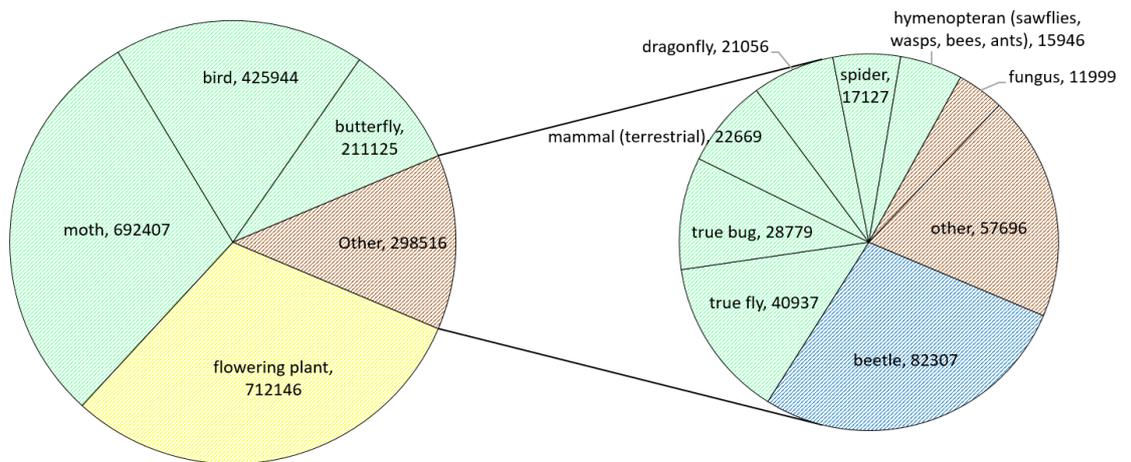
Although the Orchards East project is now coming to an end and the bulk of surveying is likely to have now been completed, if you live in a un-surveyed parish and, feel that surveying orchards might be something you are interested in, then visit the [Orchards East project pages](#) on the UEA website to find out more. The Orchards East survey work will build on the information that we already hold from previous surveys of orchards in Cambridgeshire.

# Data Holdings Update

As of 6th November 2020, CPERC holds **2,346,291** records! These bar charts illustrate our new records since April 2019—since then the size of our database increased by over 10%! Our two recent large data entry projects - Jonathan Shanklin’s plant database and Colin Welch’s Coleoptera records (see [page 7](#)) - explain the impressive number of new Coleoptera (blue bar) and flowering plant (yellow bar) records that have been imported as well as the significant increase in the size of our database overall.



These pie charts give a break down of all the records we hold by taxon group. Only groups with over 10,000 records have their own wedge (with other important, but less recorded groups included under the “Other” category). Flowering plants have recently overtaken moths as the most-recorded taxon in the county.



## Recording Opportunities

There are surveys still going that need your help – either when you are out and about (in accordance with current government guidance) or from your garden!

Information about the BRIGIT and University of Sussex spittlebug survey can be found on the [project website](#) where you can also submit records.

The Wildlife Trust BCN Swift Survey was live again for a second year in 2020 and is something to make a note of for 2021! For this survey, records for Beds, Cambs and Northants are all being collated by the Northamptonshire Biodiversity Records Centre, so please submit your swift sightings for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough using the online forms on the [NBRC website](#) - CPERC will still receive your records!

For anything else you discover in the county, our online recording website [www.cperc-record.org.uk](http://www.cperc-record.org.uk) is really easy to use or if you prefer, email us at [data@cperc.org.uk](mailto:data@cperc.org.uk) to submit your records and let us know what is out there!



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