

FOUR DAYS CHAROPHYTE COLLECTING IN THE ELY DISTRICT

By G. O. ALLEN.

My previous acquaintance with the Cambridgeshire fens being limited to two brief visits some fifteen years ago, I welcomed the proposal of Mr L. C. Lyon to join him for a few days in exploring some of the localities that Canon Bullock-Webster searched so thoroughly for charophytes from 1894 to about 1904.

The first week in August was evidently too late for several species, as we did not find a single *Tolypella* or *Nitella*, and the exceptionally dry summer (1949) did not improve matters. The increase in motor roads since the war made the area much more accessible, but many of the smaller ditches had become overgrown. We were guided to a considerable extent by Bullock-Webster's diary as to what places were best worth visiting.

In Wicken Lode, the first locality tried, charophytes were at once in evidence, amid a pretty setting of yellow and white waterlilies, and comprised *C. vulgaris* L. and var. *papillata* Wallr., *C. hispida* L., *C. aspera* Willd. in quantity, *C. globularis* Thuill. var. *capillacea* (Thuill.) Zanev. and some fine plants of *C. aculeolata* Kuetz.; peaty pools in the Fen yielded *C. delicatula* Ag.

Though not altogether unexpected, it was a disappointment to find no trace of *N. tenuissima* Kuetz. In 1896 Bullock-Webster found it abundant there even as late as October. He continued to find it there and in the neighbourhood for some years, his diary for July 2, 1902, describing the Lode as "covered along its bed with a thick growth of *Nitella tenuissima* from end to end, good green colour in excellent condition." On June 25, 1904, however, he found this species there "very poor, hardly growing at all" and on a visit in July 1922 he could only with difficulty find a few specimens of it. This is the last record I have of its being collected in this area.

The counterdrain between Sutton Gault and Mepal, another rich locality, produced *C. vulgaris* L. var. *longibracteata* Kuetz., *C. globularis* Thuill. and *C. hispida* L. The attractive yellow flowers of *Nymphoides peltatum* were a novel sight to me though they had a vaguely familiar look. Later, on looking up my old records, I recalled how I had so often admired its little white counterpart in India, *Limnanthemum indicum*.

In the Gault Hole near Mepal and in pits by the New Bedford River were further splendid growths of *C. vulgaris* L. var. *papillata* Wallr., the charophyte that we found the prevalent one at that time of year; the pits also contained *C. globularis* var. *capillacea* and *C. hispida*.

The Quy coprolite pits figure so often in Bullock-Webster's diary that we were anxious to visit them too. The ones in the fields to the

north side, though highly popular with wild duck, were unsuitable for our purposes as they were so shaded by large trees. There was one, however, on some rough land that was particularly attractive. This we reached via Quy station and then on beyond Lower Farm across some grassland. It contained a fine mass of *C. aculeolata* but past its best, and a quantity of *C. delicatula*; in this and other smaller pits near-by *C. hispida* was plentiful. This is no doubt the large pit in which Bullock-Webster has recorded finding, in all, ten species and varieties.

Bottisham Lode at its southern end was dry but further up it had become so choked with chara growth that it had been dragged out. It proved to be mainly *C. contraria* Kuetz. var. *hispidula* Br. with some *C. vulgaris* var. *refracta* Gr. & B.-W.

In all we found eleven species and varieties of *Chara*.