

Rusthall Rock bryophyte survey

Introduction

The sandstone rocks in the Weald of Sussex and Kent are famous for their unusual bryophyte flora. This included many species not found anywhere else in the Southeast of England. In the past this flora was found at the rocks at Rusthall, with species such as *Barbilophozia attenuata*, *Scapania compacta*, *Nardia geoscyphus*, *Calypogeia integristipula*, *Marsupella emarginata* and *Scapania umbrosa* being recorded by Francis Rose in the 1940's. The records for *Cynodontium bruntonii* were made by Edward Holmes in the late 19th century and William Nicholson in the early 20th century.

Survey result

None of the rare and specialised species found at Rusthall previously recorded were found again. The bryophytes found on rocks included generalist species such as *Mnium hornum* and *Kindbergia praelonga*. The most dominant species found on the rocks was *Diplophyllum albicans*. The most scarce (although not nationally scarce) species found were *Isopaches bicrenatus*, *Cephalozia connivens*, *Cephalozia lunulifolia* and *Lophozia ventricosa*.

Species

1. *Brachythecium rutabulum*
2. *Bryum capillare*
3. *Calypogeia fissa*
4. *Calypogeia arguta*
5. *Campylopus flexuosus*
6. *Cephalozia bicuspidata*
7. *Cephalozia connivens*
8. *Cephalozia lunulifolia*
9. *Dicranella heteromalla*
10. *Dicranum scoparium*
11. *Didymodon insulanus*
12. *Diplophyllum albicans*
13. *Hypnum cupressiforme*
14. *Isopaches bicrenatus*
15. *Isothecium myosuroides*
16. *Kindbergia praelonga*
17. *Lophozia ventricosa*
18. *Mnium hornum*
19. *Pohlia nutans*
20. *Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus*
21. *Tetraphis pellucida*

Evaluation and recommendations

The current bryophyte assemblage of the rocks at Rusthall is not a good example of the typical Wealden sandstone assemblage. Most of the records of the rarer species are not recent and the decline in the species here is likely to be representative of wider decline of these species in the Weald over the last 50 years. In terms of management recommendations there very little guidance for managing for bryophytes. However, the general approach should be to both prevent the development of scrub on and close to the rocks, and keeping the rocks sheltered to maintain a humid environment.