

## British Plant Gall Society - Reports presented at the AGM on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2019

### Chairman's Report – Brian Spooner

This year has seemingly passed with its customary speed, but it is pleasing to report that it has been another eventful and quite successful year for the Society. It is our first full year with affiliation to the BENHS, and this presented various opportunities, as mentioned in Jerry's report, which hopefully can be further availed of in the coming year. One such opportunity was to participate in the BENHS annual exhibition which took place on 3 November. This was at their usual venue at Conway Hall, at Holborn, and proved to be a successful if somewhat tiring day. For this, thanks are especially due to Alan & Ann Rix who brought along books, leaflets, specimens and a microscope with a viewing screen to demonstrate various gall material, which all proved of interest. It was attended and assisted also by Jerry Bowdrey and myself, who took turns manning the stall. There was plenty of general interest shown, gall queries answered, and lots of leaflets distributed, and it resulted in at least one new member to the Society and one lapsed member re-joining. The event helped advertise the Society more widely and gave a chance of course to see other exhibits and chat with like-minded participants. The 2019 exhibition will go ahead this year on 2 November at the same venue, and it is hoped that we may again be able to participate.

The year has seen another excellent programme of field meetings, thanks to Keith who has collated the details and also arranged several, including further visits to some of London's Victorian Cemeteries. These also involve Tommy, and others, and produce many worthwhile and interesting records. One field visit, arranged to the Knepp Castle Estate in West Sussex in August, was held in conjunction with mycologists from the West Weald Fungus Recording Group. This site, famous now for its highly successful and inspiring rewilding programme, is actively collating biodiversity information and welcomes recorders. An interesting introductory presentation, with coffee and biscuits provided, was given by their ecologist Penny Green and the records for the day, collated by Tommy and Keith, have now been passed on. A copy of the book '*Britain's Plant Galls*' by Michael Chinery was presented to Knepp on behalf of the Society by Alan Rix and was very gratefully received.

The Invertebrates Interest Group run by Chris Leach had another successful meeting at Oadby in October, with a full report published in *Cecidology*. This annual event has been an excellent forum for studies in the ecology and biology of gall invertebrates and will be held again this year on 6 October.

Two workshops have been held this year and were undoubtedly useful and important for the Society. As Margaret's report notes, one, at Treborth Botanic Garden in Bangor on 6 July, was led by Margaret, Tom and Ian to whom thanks are due; it was clearly a very successful day, much appreciated by the participants, and led to a valuable list of galls for the site. The other, at request to BPGS from the Bedfordshire Natural History Society via their organiser Alan Outen, was a day providing tutoring on galls to their members. This was held on 1 September at Maulden Wood, and tutored by Tommy Root, Peter Shirley and myself. It involved lectures for the morning session, Tommy providing an overview of galls and gall-causers, Peter covering cynipids, and myself looking at gall-causing fungi. This was followed in the afternoon by field work in the Barton Hills National Nature Reserve, a great chalkland site with a rich flora and fauna, and a fair list of galls was compiled. Feedback for the day has been positive.

Our journal *Cecidology*, ably edited for the second full year by Roelof, has seen the usual two issues during the year, with lots of interesting papers and articles. This is an international journal, and is an important advert for the Society, perhaps now the only extant journal devoted to the subject. It is hoped that it will continue to evolve as it has done since its inception, and will continue to be supported by plenty of contributions. Our other publications are also important and it seems that the photo guide to cynipids by Jerry Bowdrey has progressed well and may be ready for publication within the next couple of years. The Keys volume, as we hear from Margaret, is also under revision towards a 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, a major but very valuable task, to be completed and published as soon as is feasible. The ongoing need for revision of course reflects the dynamics of the subject, and the continuous progress which is being made in studying and recording Britain's gall inducers; it is an integral and vital part of the aim of the Society 'To encourage and co-ordinate the study of plant galls, with particular reference to the British Isles.' The records database administered by Janet Boyd has also progressed, and is adding to our knowledge of the distribution of our galls. It is a valuable tool; please continue to send records to Janet. Also valuable nowadays is maintaining a high profile for the Society on Social Media, and thanks are again due to Peter Shirley who

has continued admirably to achieve this. Finally, our website, should be mentioned. It is an essential forum for the Society, and for its maintenance and upkeep thanks are due to our webmaster, Alan Rix.

Overall, this seems to have been another successful year for the Society. Our finances remain healthy, and membership good. However, whilst we welcomed new members, we also sadly reported the loss one of our longest-serving, Barbara Hancy, who died in February. Barbara, along with her husband Rex, was a founder member and ever enthusiastic about galls; she is much missed.

What of the galls themselves? Given another generally dry year, at least in the South, there appear to be a dearth of some species which, let us hope, proves temporary (as it usually has done) and will see recovery in the coming season. Some re-discoveries and additions to the British list have also turned up, mostly appropriately documented or noted in the pages of *Cecidology*, and, with climate change here to stay and the depressing but ever-increasing loss of habitats due to development, we can surely expect more. But, whatever next season brings we will surely be able to read about it in *Cecidology*.

Finally, I would like once again to emphasise the importance of the work that takes place ‘behind the scenes’, and is absolutely essential to the success of the Society. It can too easily be taken for granted, and I would, therefore, extend thanks to everyone, officers and committee, in the BPGS for their continued dedicated input throughout the year; it is greatly appreciated. I especially, though, extend thanks to Tom for his support throughout the year, and his excellent work in the essential role of Hon. Secretary, to Keith as meetings secretary for organising the meetings programme and current AGM venue, to Alan for his role as treasurer, membership secretary and webmaster, to Peter for maintaining a high profile for the Society profile on Social Media, and to Margaret for her role as Scientific Officer, once again handling enquiries, reviewing many of the submissions to *Cecidology*, and progressing with the Keys revision. It seems we can confidently look forward to another exciting and productive year ahead.

#### **Membership Report for 2018/19 - Alan Rix 11<sup>th</sup> September 2019**

Sadly I have to report the deaths of Barbara Hancy and Sidney Skellington, both long standing members. Our condolences go to their respective families.

At the end of 2018 there were 167 members on the books. Since then 7 members have been removed for non payment despite reminders. Eleven new members have joined so the current membership is now 169.

Subscriptions fall due on 1<sup>st</sup> January. The expiry date of your subscription is shown on your envelope. Standing order payments are shown with a following ‘S’.

There are still a small number of standing orders paid late in the year. It would help me if they could be moved to the 2<sup>nd</sup> January when subscriptions are due. Membership is automatically cancelled if you have not paid by the end of March.

If you change any of your details – move house, get married and change your surname, change your telephone number, e-mail address etc., please let me know.

Please note that all records provided by members relating to membership are held on a password protected computer database at my home. These records will also be taken to the AGM. If you wish to see a copy of your data, please send me a stamped addressed envelope or I can e-mail them to you.

#### **Financial Report for 2018 - Alan Rix 11<sup>th</sup> September 2019**

You will see from the summary that our main income was subscriptions amounting to £1736. This is £153 more than last year. The figures are skewed since most overseas members pay for several years in advance and most of them paid for three years in 2017 or 2018. We encourage new ones to do the same as it reduces the effect of bank charges. Book sales and royalties of £323 are down by £23 on last year as the royalty from the Photo Guide is lower and will likely reduce further in 2019.

We have stocks of both Bedeguar books, and the Recording Handbook. NHBS buy several copies of the Bedeguar book each year as do Pemberley Books. The Invertebrate Day in March made a small profit as it was well attended – and well worth attending as always. This year’s one is a ‘no charge’ event.

Expenditure is mainly *Cecidology* printing, postage, insurance, room hire, equipment/software and the website which is paid alternate years. A direct debit has been set up to pay this in December this year.

The accounts for 2019 to date suggest that we will have a surplus of around £500. The Society has a healthy balance so I see no need to increase subscriptions for 2020. We need to decide what our ever increasing funds can be usefully used for.

Thanks to Kevin Ogilvie for examining these accounts. I propose that he be retained as independent examiner for 2019.

### **Editor's Report - best regards, Roelof Jan Koops**

First of all I would like to announce the birth of Welmoed, Elisabeth Sanna Koops, our daughter. She was born on 29th July 2019. So besides a good husband, a loyal employee, an Editor, I can add: Father. We are fine and we hope to teach Welmoed all the fascinating things about nature.

As usual, we had two nice volumes of *Cecidology* (Autumn 2018, 33, (2) and Spring 2019 34 (1)). We had some nice contributions from our British members, but also from overseas members. Some of the articles covered many pages and were maybe a bit too long, but there was some balance with shorter notes about field observations and anecdotes. Personally I am very happy with the contributions from other countries. It means that we become more of an international organization with many moments of exchange via *Cecidology* or via international field meetings like the ones in Poland and Belgium.

A critical note for myself is the follow-up after publishing *Cecidology*. In two recent volumes there were articles with tables covering a large amount of data. We decided to save pages in *Cecidology* and publish this data on our website. We referred to the website in the articles. But at the end the tables were not published on the website (forgotten). The only one who noticed this was Chris Leach (one of the authors). If we can decide where the tables should be published, I am happy to send them to Alan as soon as possible. On the other hand this can also mean that we should not publish data on the website because nobody seems to look on the website for this data.

I am sure the next issues of *Cecidology* will not be a problem to fill with nice articles. I hope Welmoed gives me enough time to make another two volumes during the coming year.

### **SCIENTIFIC OFFICER'S REPORT 2019 - Margaret Redfern, 31 August 2019**

After the beautiful summer of 2018, summer 2019 has been chilly in South Yorkshire but with short hot periods that have broken records – some notable in falling at holiday times and on bank holidays.

I have been field-working very little this year due to my poor walking ability, which is unlikely to improve, so I will leave reporting on the distribution of galls to others. But my impression is that the abundance of many common galls especially on trees, on oaks, sycamore, etc., continues to be low. I'm sure they will recover given time. But I think cecidologists are finding more species on herbaceous plants – though perhaps this is due mainly to more careful searching for them than we used to do in the past. One group of species that I know fluctuates dramatically over time are the *Semudobia* galls in female birch catkins, which I collect from the same few trees every year from a wood here in South Yorkshire. They had a bumper year last year but parasitism was also high, so there might be a crash in 2019. The same sort of thing seems to be happening with Chris Leach's observations of the lethal inquiline *Paralellocladiplosis* which lives beneath common spangle calls on oak. The pattern of boom and bust in numbers over the years probably is the norm with many species.

Following the successful workshop at Marbury, near Chester, in August last year, led by Tom Higginbottom, Norman Bamforth and me, we had another very enjoyable day in July this year at the Treborth Botanical Gardens on the Menai straits in Bangor, where we had been invited by the warden Richard Gallon. This time, besides Tom and myself, Ian Farmer came to help. The day followed the same pattern as at Marbury, with fieldwork in the morning and the afternoon in a well-equipped work room. In the group were expert botanists and mycologists as well as us more familiar with insect and mite galls and everyone shared their expertise and enjoyed the day.

This year, Peter Shirley and I have been busy revising and re-writing *British Plant Galls* for the third edition of the keys. It is a longer job than I had anticipated as there is a lot of new information, and some of the keys need complete re-writing. So, it will be a while before it is complete.

Remember to continue to send any information of interest to Roelof, who edits *Cecidology* so efficiently. He is always ready to receive material for publication, though this year he might understandably

be a bit distracted from galls by his new daughter, born in July – congratulations, Kristianne and Roelof! Email any contributions to him (r.j.koops@gmail.com). His postal address, phone number and email address are on the back cover of *Cecidology*.

### **BPGS Invertebrate Interest Group Co-ordinators Report – Chris Leach**

The Invertebrate Interest Group held its annual “Workshop” in October 2018 at the Environmental (Eco) Centre at Brocks Hill in Oadby. Since its formation under the guidance of Robin Williams, the programme of the group has become an interesting eclectic mixture of talks, demonstrations, hands on activities and discussions ranging from focussed studies of particular galls (bedeguar galls, birch fruit galls etc) through to “one off” subjects such as tannin production from aphid galls in China. The 2018 event was no exception encompassing;

Determination of the frequencies of the midge larvae of *Parallelodiplosis galliperda* associated with common spangle galls collected from the geographical area bounded by Yorkshire to the North, Middlesex to the South, Cambridgeshire to the East and Warwickshire to the West;

A description of the occurrence and morphology of the galls of a gall causer hitherto unrecorded in Britain, the mite *Aceria cerrea* (Tommy Root);

Examination of the inhabitants of a variety of collected galls (most notably finding the larva of a predatory hoverfly being attacked by the soldier-caste of the aphid *Pemphigus spyrothecae*);

A description of the occurrence of the galling sweet chestnut by *Dryocosmus kuriphilus*.....an organism listed by The Forestry Commission as a tree pest. (Presented by Jerry Clough);

A discussion of recent evidence emerging from DNA analysis on the evolution of cynipid gall causers. Further details of these were published in *Cecidology* Vol33, no2, pp67-74 and pp75-80

### **Checklist of Galls and Gall-causing Organisms: Progress Report 2019. - BRIAN SPOONER**

The Checklist, for various reasons, has, unfortunately, received minimal progress this year as it has not been possible to spend any significant amount of time on it. As a result, no new parts were published in 2019. The last part to appear, Part 13, covering small groups of invertebrates, was published last year (Spooner 2018). However, the project is ongoing, and a checklist for Bacteria, to be the subject of Part 14, remains in preparation and will, it is hoped, be completed and published during 2020. As noted in last year’s AGM report, parts on viruses and on smut fungi (Ustilaginales) are planned to follow that.

Plans for preparation of a U.K. checklist of the gall midges (Cecidomyiidae) were outlined at last year’s AGM. This venture is part of the Checklist project but, due to the size of the group, requires different treatment for publication and preparation, with input from specialist contributors being essential. This Checklist remains in the planning stage but, unfortunately, has not seen progress this year.

#### **Reference**

SPOONER, B.M. Checklist of British Galls and Gall-causing Organisms: 13. Rotifera, Crustacea, Arachnida: Acarina (excl. Eriophyoidea) & Insecta: Odonata. Preliminary List. *Cecidology* 33(1): 19 – 32.

### **BPGS AGM 2019. Outreach Officer’s Report - Peter Shirley 11/09/19**

This is a very brief report because things have continued much as reported last year, although I rarely do anything at all on ispot now. There are daily new posts on both the Twitter account and the British Plant Galls Facebook site. The number of Twitter followers has nearly doubled in the past year, to 870 at the time of writing. Gall of the week continues, usually with hundreds, or one or two thousands of views. The Facebook site continues to provide a steady stream of high quality images for the ever growing library, and to contribute to gall of the week.

This means that I continue to enjoy a never-ending virtual field trip, although I have managed to contribute to one event. This was the Bedfordshire Natural History Society’s gall workshop, where I assisted Brian Spooner and Tommy Root.

The irecord cynipid project seems to have died, despite all the apparent enthusiasm when it was proposed by CEH.

### **Report of the BPGS/BENHS Representative - Jerry Bowdrey**

As this is the first full year of the Society's affiliation with the British Entomological and Natural History Society, there is not an enormous amount to report.

In October 2018 our Chair Brian, Alan and Ann Rix and myself represented the Society with a stand at the annual BENHS exhibition in London. The event was well attended and our display attracted interest from a wide range of the mainly entomologists attending. The event was also a good opportunity to 'network' with attendees.

In 2019 I co-authored with David Notton of The Natural History Museum, a paper on a new British inquiline gall wasp *Saphonecrus gallaepomiformis* which was published in the BENHS's British Journal of Entomology and Natural History (32(2),147-153).

Several other affiliate societies are making use of the excellent facilities at BENHS's Dinton Pastures HQ in Berkshire to hold identification workshops and this is something that perhaps BPGS might consider in the future.

I would like to remind members that, under the affiliation agreement, BPGS members are entitled to use the library and collections on an individual basis as well. Further details on the BENHS website [www.benhs.org.uk](http://www.benhs.org.uk).

### **Guide to British and Irish Cynipid galls - Jerry Bowdrey**

The aim was to produce a predominantly photographic guide to the galls of all the species of cynipids found in Britain and Ireland. Information on the adult wasps will be included where appropriate.

Good progress has been made in gathering information on the different species and accounts for the herb gall wasps are almost complete.

A start has been made on the oak galling cynipids but it is proving difficult to find good photographs of some of the less well known sexual generation galls, especially those on catkins.

I have established contact with Willem Ellis of the Netherlands Bladmineerders website and hope it might be possible to negotiate using some of that site's images, subject to the photographer's permissions. A few other published images will need consent from the copyright holders before they can be used.

I hope to complete the species accounts over the winter 2019-2020 and then the introductory chapters and index. After that I will be needing some expertise on layout and design.

The non-appearance of the proposed Ray Society European Oak Gall book by Graham Stone et al, whilst disappointing, should provide a good opportunity for the Society to fill a gap with a more popular photographic guide.

My thanks to members of the Society who have assisted so far in the project.

### **Bibliography of Regional Plant Gall Lists: Progress Report 2019 – Brian Spooner**

The previous report on this project was presented at the AGM in 2016, and an article providing background, aims, scope, format, current status and progress was published in *Cecidology* that year (Spooner 2016). The project was initiated way back in 1984, but has been at a rather low ebb for the past two years.

Further references are added as available, but the *Cecidology* report unfortunately resulted in very few items for inclusion. However, the list has progressed to include now around 1200 or so references, and is ongoing. The principal aim is to create an online database which will be searchable by county/vice-county and gall-causing group, to provide a good basis for studies of distribution and related aspects, and for further studies of the galls of any given area. The task of creating such a database proves awkward, though, but has had helpful input from Ken Merrifield, to whom grateful thanks are extended.

The compilation covers all areas of the U.K., and all regional accounts and lists, from the earliest to the most recent, are of interest. As publications in the many local journals that exist country-wide are often difficult to see or be aware of, any received or notified will be gratefully received.

### **Reference**

SPOONER, B.M. 2016 A Compilation of Regional Plant Gall Lists. *Cecidology* 31(2): 88 – 91.

## **Data Manager's Report 2019 – Janet Boyd**

The database now stands at 88,195 records, with a further 1,080 in the Dump. A good number of straightforward records sent in by email have been added to the database but lengthy lists are still having to be put on hold and I have not been able to make any inroads into the backlog.

This has been a difficult year for me personally and I'm afraid I have not been able to make much progress in my efforts for the BPGS. However, our aim of sending our records to NBN has not been forgotten and I hope to look into that again in the coming year.

I have still been receiving a small number of enquiries and requests for searches on the database. It's good to have the opportunity to interest new people in joining the BPGS.

I was pleased recently to receive a request from Sue Timms, from the Leicestershire and Rutland Environmental Records Centre for VC55 (LRERC) for exchange of data. This is work in progress.

I would like to thank everyone who has helped me this year, particularly those people who have taken the trouble to send in their records. They are being carefully stored and I hope to catch up soon.