

FERNS OF STANMORE COUNTRY PARK

Compiled from Howard Matthews' records, July 2000 to the present.

The following species are ubiquitous in suitable habitats in the reserve:

***Dryopteris dilatata* broad buckler fern.**

***Dryopteris filix-mas* male fern.**

***Pteridium aquilinum* bracken.**

Less common species are as follows, in alphabetical order:

***Asplenium scolopendrium* (syn. *Phyllitis scolopendrium*) hart's-tongue**

1. A splendid concentration of plants lines the banks of the stream in woodland at the south-west of the reserve. Most of these are a narrow-fronded undulate form. TQ171928. Just two plants were recorded in 2000, since when there has been a big increase in numbers. Scattered individuals can be found on the banks further upstream.

2. At the base of a low brick wall in woodland due west of the north end of Kerry Avenue. (Duke of Chandos landscaping?). TQ17389281. 2 plants were recorded in 2000, which have multiplied to 14 in 2012.

A species that is becoming more common on streamsides and damp walls not just in our area but nationally. A possible reason is that, with its evergreen fronds, it is benefiting more from the reduction in atmospheric pollution since the latter half of the 20th century, although Braithwaite *et al* (Change in the British Flora 1987-2004, BSBI 2006) suggests it could be a response to climate change or perhaps a more hardy variety introduced as garden stock is naturalising.

***Athyrium filix-femina* lady fern**

1. A small number of plants on east bank of upper end of stream on west side of the reserve, under trees near where the stream emerges from the former rubbish tip. TQ171929/171930.

Present 2000–2012.

With its requirements of moisture, shelter and neutral-to-acid habitats, this species is relatively scarce in the north-west London/south Hertfordshire/south Buckinghamshire area. Its only other known locations in London Borough of Harrow are in small numbers at Grimsdyke, Stanmore Common and Harrow-on-the Hill.

***Dryopteris affinis* subsp. *affinis* western scaly male fern**

1. A moderate number of plants in south-west of the reserve, concentrated in a wooded area east of the stream. TQ171927/171928. Present 2001–2012.

2. In 2001 five plants were recorded at TQ170929 in Cloisters Wood, "in thin woodland several metres east of a path bordered by Bluebells". To date I have not looked for these again.

Scarce in north-west London/south Hertfordshire/south Buckinghamshire area, where it is usually only found in older woodlands and generally only occurs as scattered single plants. It is only known elsewhere in L.B. Harrow as 2 individuals at Pinner Hill and 2 at Bentley Priory, while the only one at Grimsdyke was destroyed by the renovation of a path in 1995.

***Dryopteris borreii* (syn. *D. affinis* subsp. *borreii*) Borrer's scaly male fern**

1. A similar number of plants as *D. affinis* in the same site (see above). Present to 2001–2012.

2. A solitary large specimen grows on the north edge of the London Loop path where it follows Grimsdyke; it is roughly opposite a deep, damp hollow and a small section of wall

below the south side of the path (Duke of Chandos landscaping?) Grid reference undetermined to date, estimated as TQ173928. Present 2007–2012.

3. Circa 10 plants were recorded in 2000 in a hollow by the west end of a low brick wall in woodland due west of the north end of Kerry Avenue. In 2012 just 4 plants are present in this site, confined to the rotting base of a fallen tree. TQ17389281.

Uncommon in north-west London/south Hertfordshire/south Buckinghamshire area, although more frequent than *D. affinis*. It is only known as a handful of individuals elsewhere in L.B. Harrow itself, from Harrow Weald Common, Bentley Priory and Harrow-on-the-Hill.

***Dryopteris carthusiana* narrow buckler fern**

1. A solitary plant in the same wooded area as *D. affinis* and *D. borrei* (above). TQ17149277. Present 2001–2012.

2. One plant was recorded in 2001 near the garden fence of what was then the most northerly house on the east side of Dennis Lane. TQ16949282. This has not been refound.

Not particularly common in north-west London/south Hertfordshire/south Buckinghamshire area, where it favours damp woodlands of greater maturity. The plant existing in Stanmore Country Park is the only one currently known in L.B. Harrow.

***Polystichum setiferum* soft shield fern**

1. A solitary plant on the steep east bank of the stream in the west of the reserve. It is just a few metres upstream of a plank bridge. TQ17139286.

2. A solitary plant under edge of trees, by a once-coppiced ash tree, on the west edge of a narrow grass area that runs parallel with Dennis Lane up the west side of the reserve. TQ169928. Present 2010–2012.

There may be other plants. While one recorded in 2001 near gardens of Dennis Lane houses has not been refound, a sporeling found in 2010 at TQ17109295 on the east bank of the stream, between the above-mentioned bridge and the *Athyrium* location, may still be present.

Although far from common, this species was even less so 30 years ago. It has shown a large increase in the Greater London area more recently, where one of its favoured habitats is on the banks of streams in woodland. My feeling is that climate change could be the reason for its increase. However, in many locations the survival of young plants is threatened by the browsing of their shoots by muntjac deer.

In L.B. Harrow well developed specimens ranging from individuals to small groups are found at Pinner Hill, Grimsdyke, Bentley Priory, Lower Priory Farm, Stanmore Common and Harrow-on-the-Hill.

Howard Matthews, October 2012

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