

## MORSTON QUAY, NORFOLK 19<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER

Unusually for a WFS meeting, we gave the car-park short shrift and, leaderless and rudderless (Stephen Clarkson was unable to join us), cast off from Morston Quay into the saltmarsh to see what we could find. We soon came across that East Anglian speciality Shrubby Sea-blite *Suaeda vera* living on the edge, along with its smaller annual sibling *Suaeda maritima*. Then came the glassworts; millions, possibly billions of them! Armed with Liam Rooney's excellent WFS Magazine centrefold and the relevant pages from the Rich and Jermy Plant Crib, we set to and quickly identified Purple Glasswort *Salicornia ramosissima*, many of which gave us a helping hand by being bright purple. This was soon followed by the characteristically stubby-branched One-flowered Glasswort *S. disarticulata* and its hybrid with Purple Glasswort, *S. x marshallii*, which variously has 1, 2 or 3 flowers.

Where was Common Glasswort *S. europaea*? Bizarrely and not for want of trying, we didn't find any 100% convincing specimens all day. Long-spiked Glasswort *S. dolichostachya* didn't elude us for long though, with its elongated, tapering branches. Nearby, we spotted a small stand of unfamiliar-looking glassworts, with wiry lower stems and upswept yellow branches. These keyed out nicely to Glaucous Glasswort *S. obscura*, one of the rarer species.

An area of bare mud above one of the numerous channels yielded three of the remaining glasswort taxa in one go: Perennial Glasswort *Sarcocornia perennis*, with its sprawling habit and woody stems; Yellow *Salicornia fragilis*, with its bright, round-ended spikes; and, all on its own, a more slender, shiny (once we'd brushed the mud off) and rather elegant plant, different to all the others that we'd seen. After quite a bit of debate and much measuring, we concluded that this was Shiny Glasswort *Salicornia emericii*, another of the rarer taxa. Full house then, apart from the exasperatingly uncommon Common.

Given the lateness of the season, there wasn't a great deal else still in flower on the saltmarsh, although there was an abundance of both the rayed and unrayed forms of Sea Aster *Tripolium pannonicum* and Common Sea-lavender *Limonium vulgare*. Here and there we also encountered small patches of Greater Sea-spurrey *Spergularia media*, with its broadly winged seeds, and much gone-over Sea-milkwort *Lysimachia maritima*. We thought that there ought to be a few maritime oraches, but it took a lot of hunting just to find a single, rather sad-looking Spear-leaved Orache *Atriplex prostrata*.

From late morning, we'd been stalked to the west by a baleful and ever-darkening sky. At first it stayed parallel to where we were, but just after lunch we noticed it sneaking up behind us. We called its bluff for a while but then it signalled its intentions with a distant clap of thunder, which sent us scurrying post-haste back to the car park. We barely had time to say goodbye to each other before the heavens opened. We scattered to our cars, grateful for the dry interlude that had allowed us to enjoy botanising in a very interesting and species-rich location.

STEVE LITTLE