Sphagnum workshop:

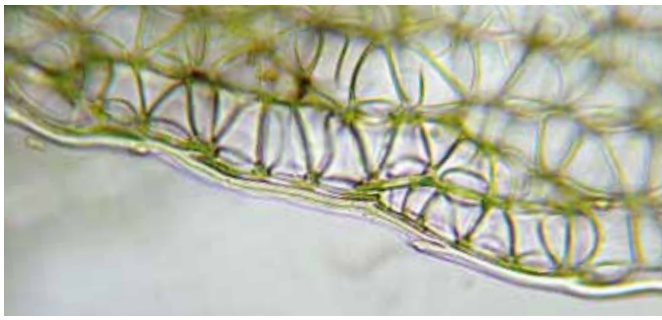
Preston Montford 11–13 November 2011

Twenty members of the BBS (plus two partners) gathered at Preston Montford to exchange information and learn techniques for examining *Sphagnum*. The workshop was organized by **Martin Godfrey**, with **Mark Hill** as tutor.

There is much current research on the genetics of *Sphagnum*. Results from A.J. Shaw and co-workers suggest that Northern Hemisphere sphagna are a relatively young group which is still rapidly evolving. Puzzling intermediates can be found between several species. We examined specimens of *Sphagnum palustre* and found that branch-leaf chlorocysts in cross section were either of standard *S. palustre* shape (triangular) or were variable (mixed triangular and barrel-shaped). An American specimen, supposedly of the 'true' *S. centrale* had a few more-or-less triangular chlorocysts as well as the majority of typical barrel shape. From British material, there is no evidence of the existence of two species, merely of variability which may or may not have a genetic basis.

All of us who attended the workshop learnt new techniques, and some of us learnt new sphagnological lingo, speaking of 'retort cells' (more like slugs than retorts), 'resorption furrows' and 'comb fibrils'. For the field excursion we went to Whixall Moss, which we had last visited in September 2007. Des Callaghan demonstrated downward-pointing, whitish, pendent branches emerging from the capitulum of *S. fallax*. These distinguish it from *S. cuspidatum*, in which the emerging pendent branches are greener and stick out sideways. We were fortunate to find a good patch of *S. angustifolium*, typical in appearance and recognized by its long pendent branches. Several participants had brought interesting specimens. Jo Denyer showed us two beautiful examples of *S. skyense* from Ireland. Mo Richards brought *S. majus* from Abernethy, and Joan Bingley showed us fine fresh *S. contortum* from south Wales. We also saw some difficult specimens. One of them, brought by Tom Blockeel, was a highly coloured form of *S. fallax* with rounded (but not fringed) stem leaves.

Martin Godfrey & Mark Hill
e martinandrosie@aol.com, moh@ceh.ac.uk



△ Resorption furrow bordering the branch leaf of *Sphagnum molle*. The outer surface of the border cells is lacking, so they appear as a trough or furrow interspersed by projecting cell ends. *Martin Godfrey*

△ Male *Sphagnum fallax* with the detached and inverted capitulum showing the characteristic whitish, paired pendent branches. *Jo Denyer*