

## *Chenopodium giganteum* Tree spinach near Elmley Castle

Graham Martin

Wagtails, Broadway Road, Aston Somerville, Broadway, WR12 7JF  
[graham.martin8@btinternet.com](mailto:graham.martin8@btinternet.com)

Tree spinach *Chenopodium giganteum* is a striking plant. As the name implies it is a giant member of the goosefoot family Chenopodiaceae. It is reputed to grow to nearly 2 m but I first spotted these plants when they were less than a metre tall. I was attracted by the bright purple leaves at the growing tips (01, 02, 03) but was stumped as to what it was. I thought that it might just be a variant of Fat-hen *Chenopodium album* which is described as very variable and I wondered whether part of that variation was in the colour of the growing-tip leaves.



01. Tree Spinach *Chenopodium giganteum*.

I was delighted that John Day, Worcestershire Botanical Recorder, suggested that it was not *C. album* but *C. giganteum*. Subsequent searching on the web produced photographs that matched the specimens that I had found.

Initially I was doubtful that this was a plant worth recording. It is described in Wikipedia as a food plant whose origins are in the mountains of India that is grown occasionally as a human food in Europe and in North America, as well as in its native region. It is, however, regarded as naturalised in the UK, but it is far from common, the NBN Atlas lists only 17 records. It is regarded as an annual weed. Two of these records are from grid square SP04, (Wood Norton, about 4 km North West of Evesham) and so it is something of a Worcestershire speciality.

The site where *C. giganteum* were recorded this year (19<sup>th</sup> August 2018 onwards) is approximately 5 km to the south west of the original site where it was recorded in both 1953 and 1959. Whether there is a link between these sites over a 60 year period is not clear, but it is possible. The actual site of this new record is on the land of

Chapel Farm, Netherton (SO 99674234) in a rather scruffy neglected corner on an otherwise well run and tidy organic farm. The plants were growing in abundance at this site and had reached over 2 m in height by September 27<sup>th</sup> (04).



02. Tree Spinach *Chenopodium giganteum*.



03. Tree Spinach *Chenopodium giganteum*.





04. Tree Spinach *Chenopodium giganteum*.

*C. giganteum* is grown as a food crop and has a number of alternative names (Magenta Spreen, Purple Goosefoot, Giant Lambsquarters are listed in a Wikipedia entry) and it is certainly edible. I enjoyed it both raw and cooked. It is very much like spinach. Perhaps the original records from the 1950s have their origin in Vale of Evesham market gardening?

I suspect these plants have been growing in this location for some time but I have never paid too much attention to this scruffy corner, preferring to keep my dog away from the rats that enjoy living there. However, this year the bright purple of the growing tips caught my eye, perhaps the plants benefited particularly from the hot dry summer, maybe dormant seeds were coaxed into germination?

#### Images

- 01. Tree Spinach *Chenopodium giganteum*.
- 02. Tree Spinach *Chenopodium giganteum*.
- 03. Tree Spinach *Chenopodium giganteum*.
- 04. Tree Spinach *Chenopodium giganteum*.