

## WFS AGM Field Meetings September 2021

To accompany the AGM every year the WFS holds a series of field meetings. The reports below give a flavour of the meetings held in September 2021 to accompany the AGM held at Margam Field Centre, Port Talbot, South Wales.

### SUNDAY 7<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER: OXWICH BAY AND LLANRHIDIAN MARSH

On a beautiful sunny day, we congregated at the car park at Oxwich Bay. After dividing into smaller groups we set off to explore the National Nature Reserve. The habitat comprises sand dunes, some woodland and marshy areas (though these were mostly quite dry).



Dutch Helleborine

The edge of the car park soon yielded Sea Rocket *Cakile maritima* and Fragrant Evening-primrose *Oenothera stricta*. On entering the nature reserve, we encountered extensive areas of Dewberry *Rubus caesius*, a trip hazard for some and a source of food for others. Here too were Large-flowered Evening-primrose *O. glazioviana* and Bilbao's Fleabane *Erigeron floribundus*, a South American species first found in the UK in 1977. More exciting were some fine specimens of Dutch Helleborine *Epipactis helleborine* ssp. *neerlandica*, a subspecies of Broad-leaved Helleborine, found in the dunes on the South coast of Wales.

Nearby were Autumn Lady's-tresses *Spiranthes spiralis* and the dwarf, coastal variety of Lady's Bedstraw *Galium verum* var. *maritimum*.

In slightly damper areas there were good stands of Sharp Rush *Juncus acutus* which certainly lives up to its name. Less vegetated areas had patches of Wild Thyme *Thymus drucei*, Bloody Crane's-

bill *Geranium sanguineum*, Yellow-rattle *Rhinanthus minor* and old spikes of Marsh-orchids *Dactylorhiza* spp. We saw some good specimens of Sea Holly *Eryngium maritimum*, with Sea Bindweed *Calystegia soldanella*, Sea Stock *Matthiola sinuata* and Blue Fleabane *Erigeron acris* nearby. Abundant Virginia-creeper *Parthenocissus quinquefolia* dominated along the track.

After a lunch-break we continued through the nature reserve to find the Dune Gentian *Gentianella amarella* ssp. *occidentalis*, a very rare plant with a distribution restricted to a few sites on the coast of the Bristol Channel. Autumn Gentian *Gentianella amarella* ssp. *amarella* appeared close-by and sparked debate over whether some might have hybridised.

As we walked back towards the beach the flora included Carlina Thistle *Carlina vulgaris*, Fragrant Agrimony *Agrimonia procera* and Corky-fruited Water-dropwort *Oenanthe pimpinelloides*.

A very successful and enjoyable morning rounded off, for some, with ice cream on the beach.



Autumn Gentian

BARBARA LEWIS

The second stop of the day for some of us was Llanrhidian Marsh which is a SSSI and National Nature Reserve owned by the National Trust. I must admit I was expecting to see the sea but there was no sea in sight. All the saltmarshes I've ever been to have either been along a riverside or been a small area next to the sea. This saltmarsh stretched as far as the eye could see. It was rather flat except for a small bump which people were immediately drawn to. We began looking for Glassworts, our target plants. Soon the cry went up and people were surprised to find Common Glasswort *Salicornia europaea* so high up the saltmarsh. *Salicornias* are difficult to identify but can be broadly divided into groups with similar characteristics. Luckily, we all had the ID sheet on *Salicornias*, that was printed in the WFS magazine a short time ago, to aid our identification.

A chance find of a *Salicornia* with flowers in groups of one and three on the same stem caused much puzzlement and discussion until it was identified as *S. x marshallii* which is the hybrid between One-flowered Glasswort *S. disarticulata* and Purple Glasswort *S. ramosissima*. A great find! Later and further towards the sea, in a wetter runnel near the mound, Long-spiked Glasswort *Salicornia dolichostachya* was discovered. Compared with the Common Glasswort *S. europaeus* it looked and felt flat-sided and much longer spiked, hence the name.

We also saw lots of other nice plants like Sea Wormwood *Artemisia maritima*, a species declining greatly along our coasts, Marsh-mallow *Althaea officinalis* and a Cord-grass identified as *Spartina anglica*. Saltmarsh Rush *Juncus gerardii* was present and of course, Sea-spurreys *Spergularia* spp.



Thank you to the organisers, leaders and those who recce'd the site for their hard work. It was a good day and the sheep hadn't managed to eat everything in sight, YET!

SUE GRAYSTON

## **MONDAY 6<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER: NASH POINT, MARCROSS, LLANTWIT MAJOR AND LIMPERT BAY, ABERTHAW**

We arrived at Nash Point to find a chilling mist clinging to the cliffs and lighthouse. Luckily this was gradually cleared by the sun. The cliffs here date from the Jurassic period and are Blue Lias, so they are dangerous and unstable with sheer drops to the sea. The area is renowned for its fossils, especially ammonites.

Julian Woodman, the VC Recorder for East Glamorgan, greeted us and was most informative. Our first excitement was seeing a beautiful rosette of the Woolly Thistle *Cirsium eriophorum* with prickly, hairy leaves. In the lighthouse compound were several plants of the rare Tuberous Thistle *C. tuberosum*, a graceful thistle with a cottony, spineless stem. Just before we climbed over the stile onto the cliff path, we saw some robust plants of Elecampane *Inula helenium*, a few still in flower. From here we explored the edge of a large arable field, unspoilt by pesticides. We found several treasures including Field Woundwort *Stachys arvensis*, a few plants of Dwarf Spurge *Euphorbia exigua* and both species of Fluellen, the more robust, stickily-hairy Round-leaved Fluellen *Kickxia spuria* and Sharp-leaved Fluellen *K. elatine* which is less hairy.



We then returned to the car park for lunch and some of us walked down into the valley where Julian pointed out two Tuberous Thistle hybrids and explained their features. On one side of the valley there was a large patch of the hybrid of Tuberous and Dwarf Thistle *C. x medium* which has branched stems to 60 cm and has both jointed and web-like hairs. On the opposite side, almost buried in scrub, was a single plant of the Tuberous and Marsh Thistle hybrid, *C. x semidecurrens*, which is intermediate in leaf, stem and capitulum character. These differences were hard to see as the plants were fairly dead! From the valley we had stunning views of the layered Blue Lias and shale cliffs. Many thanks to Julian for a wonderful morning.

It was so fabulous to be back botanising with the WFS.

JAN ARMISHAW

The weekend's field meetings concluded with a visit to Limpert Bay at Aberthaw. The site consisted of foreshore and saltmarsh. The habitat nearest the car park had been somewhat altered by the positioning of concrete tank traps during WW2 which are still there. We soon found Red Hemp-nettle *Galeopsis angustifolia* growing in profusion in the pebbles on the landward side of the tank traps. Nearby, on the opposite side of the path there was a large stand of Orange Mullein *Verbascum phlomoides*. This differs from Great Mullein *V. thapsus* in not having decurrent stem-leaves.

As we walked further into the saltmarsh we began to see Sea-lavender plants. These were the Bristol Channel Sea-lavender *Limonium procerum* ssp. *procerum* var. *medium*. Also here were more Glassworts *Salicornia* spp., including Purple Glasswort *S. ramosissima* and the rare One-flowered Glasswort *S. disarticulata* which, as the name suggests, has single flowers, whereas the other species usually have three in a group.

The outstanding thing about the Wild Flower Society is the way that it welcomes and caters for people with all levels of botanical knowledge and interest. The three-day meeting had been thoroughly prepared beforehand with the production of maps and grid references and four knowledgeable people led groups of us around all the sites. On the Monday we were joined by Julian Woodman, the VC recorder for East Glamorgan. September is always a challenging month in which to find plants still in good condition. Well done and a big thank you to all the organisers.

FAY BANKS