

## FINDHORN FIELD MEETING – JULY 2022

We have all been there before: the leader asks for someone to write a report on the day and everyone examines the ground as if a rare flower is about to spring up. Who would crack first? This time, me.

Most of the day was spent at Findhorn on the coast, at one time a small fishing village, now a seaside resort, but perhaps best known for the Findhorn Foundation nearby. We met at the RSPB reserve at low tide and set off for our first target, Dwarf Eelgrass *Zostera noltei*. Eelgrasses are the only flowering plants that grow entirely submerged by the sea, with the stamens emerging just before the tide comes in, and there was plenty of it around in the shallow pools. From there, Ian took us on a long walk around the bay to find Heslop-Harrison's Eyebright *Euphrasia heslop-harrisonii*. En route we found a large number of Scots Lovage *Ligusticum scoticum*, to my surprise, as I've only associated it with cliff sides, leaning over edges rather precariously to try for a decent photo. Another find to bring joy to one of the group was Baltic Rush *Juncus balticus*, very much a northern species, distinguished from Hard Rush *J. inflexus*, by growing in quite obvious rows. But in due course, we found our first Eyebright, recognised by its lop-sided fruit and, having found one, many others emerged. It was determined first by J.W. Heslop-Harrison in the days when he was behaving himself properly, as a professor of botany should. Only later did he tell fibs, especially when he 'discovered' rare plants on the Isle of Rum, entirely to support his pet theories. Normally, I would add 'allegedly' in case lawyers acting for his estate are reading this, but I was told it was all laid bare in a book, *A Rum Affair*. To catch up, I ordered a copy from Ebay as soon as I returned to the car park. Apparently even the hyphen in his name is faked, added to make him sound more distinguished.

And thence into the coastal village itself. Small Adder's-tongue *Ophioglossum azoricum* is found scattered around the UK coastline, but is surprisingly difficult to spot. The wonderful thing about a WFS field trip is that you can wax lyrical about the joy of *Rumex* without causing eyes to roll or glaze over. (In this instance, *R. x hybridus*, the cross between Northern Dock *R. longifolius* and Broad-leaved Dock *R. obtusifolius*, seen that morning near Alves church, with its delightful variety of tepals.) But, in addition, many eyes make sight work: it was in the vicinity of the ladies' toilets that Sue Grayston managed to spot a single Moonwort *Botrychium lunaria*. Soon we were all loitering around the toilets and before long Jane Lowe espied the Adder's-tongue. A group effort disentangled five of them from the grasses. Ian Green did a great job over the four days and fittingly the last two plants have special meaning for him. Back in 2004 he was invited to survey a piece of sand dune before the erection of beach huts. Nothing of botanical worth was in the way, but nearby he found Dune Fescue *Vulpia fasciculata*, at its most northerly point, not just in the UK, but in the whole world. Could it be seen again? The short answer, because you must be tired of reading by now, is yes. And the other find, again after a seven year gap, was its hybrid with Red Fescue *Festuca rubra*, x *Festulpia hubbardii*. According to Ian's app., the nearest such hybrid was 380Km away. The Red Fescue elements in the cross are the narrow leaves and for the Dune Fescue the one-sided seed head. Altogether an excellent meeting, due in no small part to our leader Ian; our special thanks for all the effort he put into the planning and the way he shepherded a rather wayward flock of botanists around each day.

DAVID HENRI-CAALS