

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

It was good to meet many of you at the AGM of the Society in Port Talbot in September. I think we had a good and successful meeting. I was sorry not to get out into the field on Saturday morning through not finding a place in time to charge my electric car. I know that talking to some of you that you were disappointed not to see Glasswort *Salicornia* spp. or only to see a very poor sample. I spent the weekend on the Gower Peninsular and there was a huge amount of it in the salt marsh just opposite the B & B where we were staying. Glasswort, also known as Marsh Samphire, is a most useful plant and a great addition to meals with fish. It is called glasswort because the ashes used to be used

Photo: Peter Llewellyn



to make soap and glass because of its silica content. The name Samphire comes from its original name *sampiere*, derived from the French Saint Pierre, named after the patron saint of fishermen in France. Samphire is a halophytic or salt-tolerant plant.

I have long been interested in halophytic plants since collecting them around the Tuz Gölü or Great Salt Lake in central Turkey on my expedition there in 1960.

Salicornia now belongs to the Amaranthaceae, a plant family with many salt-tolerant species such as Sea Beet *Beta vulgaris* ssp. *maritima* and Annual Sea-blite *Suaeda maritima* and the halophytic plants I collected in Turkey were mainly in the same family, such as species of *Chenopodium* and *Suaeda*. The family name I grew up with, Chenopodiaceae or Goosefoot family, has now been submerged within the Amaranthaceae. The Annual Sea-blite *Suaeda maritima* was also common on the salt marsh on the Gower.

I have been sad to read recently how Tuz Gölü is shrinking due to climate change and this has seriously affected the flamingos there. I hope that the great variety of halophytic plants around the edges are still surviving.

GHILLEAN PRANCE

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EDITORIAL

Another year over, just where does the time go to? However, with our bumper crop of field visits planned for 2022 my diary is already filling up and I'm dreaming of flower-filled meadows and brilliant sunny days of the future. Do look through the Yearbook and start to make your plans. If 2021 is anything to go by, then many of these field meetings will get booked up quite early so, if you are interested, do send your name to Janet John as early as possible to ensure a place on one of the many trips.

If you haven't joined us on a field meeting yet then there are several reports in this issue to give you a flavour of what we get up to. There is generally something to suit everyone, with plenty of help on hand for those who are less experienced and want to learn more about plant

identification. Janet John has tried to give as wide a coverage of the country as possible so there should be at least one meeting in the year that's not too far from your home.

I am now in my sixth year as editor of the magazine and throughout that time I have been very fortunate to have three excellent proof-readers to pick up on all the little points that I have missed while compiling the magazine. I can't tell you how much my command of the English language and the correct usage of English and Latin names for plants has improved over that time. My thanks must go to all three proof-readers but I would like to take this opportunity to thank Rodney Burton, in particular, who is standing down from this role, for all the help he has given me.

ANNE KELL

NOTICES

2022 SUBSCRIPTIONS AND CONTACT DETAILS

With this mailing you should find a form for the renewal of your subscription. If you do not already pay by Standing Order please complete this form and return it to the membership secretary, Sue Poyser, at your earliest opportunity, to ensure the continuity of your membership and future mailings of the Wild Flower Magazine.

If you have changed your email address in the past few years or acquired a new email address that you didn't have at the time of joining the Society, it would be appreciated if you could let both Sue and your Branch Secretary have a copy of your updated address so they can easily get in contact.

Wild Flower Society website

Our brand new, bespoke website is expected to launch at the beginning of 2022, with a modern design, better events listing and searching. This site will be much easier to update and post new content than our current website, and will allow Peter Llewellyn, our chair, to step back from the onerous coding required for the existing site. Do make a point of investigating the website sometime in the New Year to see the changes for yourself.

Photos

I hope you enjoy the wide variety of photos in this and previous magazines. Nearly all of these photos have been taken by our members and I am very grateful to all those who have submitted photos either directly to myself, as the editor, or posted them in our new photo library. A big plea, if you do submit a photo please can you make sure that it is labelled with the name of the plant and/or place and your name as the photographer.

If you would like to share some of your photos, please contact either Sheila Wynn (wfs.gensec@gmail.com) or Helen Dignum (wfs.instagrams@gmail.com).

If you have just a few photos, they can be sent directly by email, but they must be full size files. If you have more, let Sheila know and she will send you a link so that you can upload them directly to the library. (It's a very simple process.) Alternatively, if you prefer, you could send your photos to Sheila on a memory stick/flash drive. For address, see inside back cover.

Change to Parnassus 2 Branch Secretary

At the beginning of 2021, Ted Pratt retired from the position of Parnassus 2 Secretary. The new Branch Secretary is Paul Harmes. Please send your 2021 list to Paul at pharmes@btinternet.com

Paul is also organizing a field trip to Scotland in late July 2022 entitled 'Wildflowers of Ben Lawers and Perthshire'. This is a Naturetrek holiday and, if you are interested, further details can be found on their website.

Greece 2022. A message from Terry Rodbard

Terry is a member of WFS but has lived a total of nine years on the Greek mainland and then spent some time in Crete. He has now returned to the U.K. but plans to visit all the areas he knew next spring. As things stand at the moment, he plans to be in Eastern Crete from the 16th March till the end of the month and in the northern Peloponnese from the beginning of April. He writes, 'I would be most pleased to introduce some wonderful areas to any members who may be interested.' If you would like to join Terry then contact him directly for further details at t.rodvard@outlook.com

WFS MEMBERS' WEEKEND AND AGM 3th - 6th SEPTEMBER 2021

The 2021 Members' Weekend was based around Swansea, South Wales, with the AGM being held at the Field Studies Council centre at Margam. Many also took advantage of the accommodation offered by the Centre which made for a very sociable weekend.

The Branch Secretaries meeting was held at the Centre on the Friday and, for those arriving early, there was an opportunity for a brief exploration of part of Kenfig Nature Reserve before the meeting in the afternoon. Field meetings were also held on the morning before the AGM and on the following Sunday and Monday. Reports on all these meetings can be found on pages 11 to 15.

AGM

The AGM was attended by 42 members. Only the main points will be covered here, with the full AGM minutes appearing on the website. If you are unable to access these via the website and would like to see a full copy, please contact Sheila Wynn, our General Secretary, sending a stamped, addressed A5 envelope.

The meeting started with an address from our President, Sir Ghillean Prance. Sir Ghillean spoke about the problems of climate change and the damage it is doing to the flora of the world. He said that, although its effects in the UK have so far been relatively mild, it is affecting wild

Photo: Anne Kell



Margam Field Studies Centre

flowers and gardening here too. He stressed the importance of all of us trying to reduce our carbon footprint and mentioned some of the measures he had taken. He went on to thank the Officers and Committee Members for everything they do to ensure the smooth running of the Society.

Each of the officers of the Society presented their reports.

Robin Blades, our **Treasurer**, reported that the 2020 accounts were circulated with the summer magazine. They showed that the pandemic had no obvious effect on income with the exception that there were no receipts from the AGM. In particular, subscription income was similar to the previous two years. We are very grateful for a donation of £2,500 from one of our members, Judy Gosnell.

Expenditure was significantly reduced with no field meeting or AGM costs and reduced travel expenses. The AGM figure in 2019 was exceptionally high as it included deposits for the next two years' AGMs which we have been able to carry forward. Expenditure on the magazine increased, giving members something to enjoy when there were no meetings going on.

Grant expenditure of £4,750 was also lower than normal as the Wildlife Trust training events, which we normally support, and FSC courses, for which we give bursaries to young people, did not go ahead. A new initiative was the first of five annual grants of £1,000 for the trust set up by Dr Margaret Bradshaw to monitor

rare plants in Teesdale. A project coming towards its end is BSBI's Atlas 2020, to which we gave £2,000 to fund validation work, bringing our total contribution to £11,950. We supported the publication of the *Flora of Cornwall* and the BSBI's book on the *Hawkweeds of South-East England*.

Total receipts exceeded payments by £1,317. The value of our investments was 5.4% up on the year.

In 2021 we have received a legacy of £500 from our former General Secretary and long-standing member, Pat Verrall. Subscription income is already a little higher than it has been for several years and the Gift Aid claim has also increased. We have started incurring expenditure on the development of our new website. Grant expenditure is likely to remain at a relatively low level. Support for the Wildlife Trusts has resumed but the only publication supported is one on the wildlife of the North York Moors produced in association with FSC.

At the moment our investments are 7% up during 2021.

Robin thanked Sue Poyser for all her hard work as Membership Secretary and said that membership increased from 633 at 31/12/19 to 659 at 31/12/20.

The meeting approved the adoption of the accounts. Robin thanked Bob Holder for carrying out the independent examination of the 2019 and 2020 accounts and proposed his re-election. This was agreed.

Janet John, our **Meetings Secretary**, was pleased to report that we had been able to run our Field Meeting programme this year, which consisted of eight multi-day meetings and twenty-five one-day meetings. Fitting in with Government guidelines caused us to cancel three one-day meetings early in the botanical season. Some meetings were adjusted to accommodate the "Rule of Six" either by inviting some members to the recce and others to the scheduled meeting, or by having a number of leaders and allocating people to different groups. For the Cookham meeting we had three groups with three leaders. She thanked all the people who stepped up to be leaders at short notice. She said that there has been quite an influx of new members over the last eighteen months and it had been a pleasure to welcome many of them to field meetings and to get encouraging feedback.

Janet reported on the success of this year's innovation: the virtual field meetings held on Zoom. There were seven planned of which four happened in the first months of the year and the last three will be at the end of the year, the idea being to extend the botanical season and give more members the opportunity to 'attend'. These have been very popular and to date there have been 80-90 attendees at each meeting. This initiative has significantly increased our connection with members.

Janet reported that in 2018, from a membership of around 620, we had 140 members who had attended field meetings in the year. Our

membership is now over 680 and, taking both field meetings and on-line meetings into consideration, this year we have had more than 230 participating members. This strong support for our field and on-line meetings brings the challenge of having to produce a wide and interesting programme of meetings next year to accommodate members but provides the satisfaction of positive feedback.

On the virtual side, Janet intends to try to extend our range of on-line talks. There is a possibility of an on-line fern identification course and Janet asked for suggestions or offers of a talk or a workshop.

Janet extended her own and the Society's thanks to the many leaders and speakers who have given their time and expertise over the last year.

Anne Kell, our **Magazine Editor**, expressed a very big 'thank you' to everyone who has contributed to the magazine over the last two years and helped to sustain an interesting and diverse content despite the difficulties encountered in trying to get out in the field. For a while she was worried that, without the meeting reports to fill the pages, she would be short of copy, but she didn't need to worry and was very grateful for the fascinating articles on botanising during lockdown which she received. As 2021 has seen a return of our field meetings, the reports of these are now appearing in the magazine again. It is very encouraging how many new people are attending these meetings and are willing to write up a report. These are all favourable, with members saying how much they

have enjoyed the experience and have felt welcomed and included.

One of the successes of the last two years has been the rising interest in the 1km square study, with many more people concentrating on their home patches and several commenting how much they have found locally that they must have walked past on a regular basis and not really registered.

The field meeting reports, diary records and reports from the different hunts fill the bulk of the magazine but Anne would still like to see more variety to sustain reader interest. Simple articles about specific species, your favourite plant, or areas of botanical interest would be most welcome.

Anne thanked her proof-readers, John Swindells, Rodney Burton and Sheila Wynn, for doing such a thorough job; Sue Poyser for maintaining and furnishing her with an up-to-date membership list every quarter and the printers, Printing for Pleasure, for always being on hand to answer queries.

Nichola Hawkins, our **Publicity Secretary** reported that our Social Media platforms are proving ever more popular, with our Facebook page having over 3200 followers and our Twitter Account having over 2500 followers. In the last year, Helen Dignum has set up a new WFS Instagram Page which is gaining in popularity and now has 86 followers. Peter Llewellyn opened a WFS YouTube Account on which the first three of this year's virtual meetings can be seen. These have had almost

500 viewings so far.

Nichola also said that this year she had updated the Membership Pack and the recommended book list. She plans to make more improvements in the coming year.

Sheila Wynn, our **General Secretary**, first expressed her gratitude to David Rich for the painstaking work he contributed to the planning of the weekend's field meetings. As well as recommending the sites we would visit and doing the recces, he provided information on the location of plants we might see and also gave all the detailed directions and travel advice in the documents she had sent out. She said how sorry she was that he couldn't be with us.

She also thanked everyone who had contributed to the weekend's activities, particularly Stephen Clarkson, Roger Heath-Brown, Gareth Bursnall and John Swindells for agreeing to help to lead the meetings – a difficult task when you don't know the sites. She also thanked John Poland for his offer to run the two evening sessions on plant identification, our speakers David Albon and Steve Little and, as always, Ken Southall and Stephen Clarkson for the provision of our usual afternoon activities – the Shoot and Show Photo Competition and the Plant Quiz. And, last but not least, thanks to Priscilla Nobbs for her Hollyhock Competition.

Moving on to news of the last year, Sheila said that there had been two changes to our Branch Secretaries. Due to ill-health, Ted Pratt had resigned as Secretary of the

Parnassus 2 Branch. She thanked him for all his efforts over the years as Secretary of various branches. Paul Harmes has agreed to take over from him. She also thanked Jill Oakley who, at very short notice, took over as Secretary for the 10km Square (South) Study after we received the very sad news of Pat Verrall's unexpected death at the end of last year. Rodney Burton had also said that he wished this year to be his last as Secretary of Parnassus 1. He will be replaced by Alan Leslie, a former Parnassus 1 Secretary, who has agreed to take up the mantle again.

Sheila thanked Rodney for his many contributions to the running of the Society. Over the last 40 years Rodney has been a major figure in the WFS. As well as being an outstanding botanist, he has held numerous roles in the Society, including Secretary of Branch V (Greater London) for 23 years from 1972 until 1994 and the Foreign Records Secretary for 17 years until 2012. He was Chairman for 9 years in two spells between 1995 and 2007, President for the year 2002-3 and for the last 8 years has been a Parnassus Secretary, as well as helping to proof-read the magazine.

She gave thanks, as always, to all our Branch and Competition Secretaries who are at the heart of our Society maintaining contact with members and helping them to improve their botanical skills, as well as leading meetings and writing reports for the magazine.

Sheila reported that, on the administration front, the great step

forward that has been achieved in the last twelve months, is the development of a new website. She particularly thanked Helen Dignum for offering to take on the role of manager of the new website and said that we were also grateful to the other members of the website sub-committee, Janet John, Roger Heath-Brown and Nichola Hawkins for all the work that they had put into this and particularly to Peter Llewellyn, who after setting up and running the present website for more than 15 years had also made a huge contribution to the development of ideas for the new website.

This year the Society's *Field Botanist's Record Book* had been updated so that both scientific and common names of plants are in line with the most recent BSBI guidelines and those used in the 4th edition of Clive Stace's *New Flora of the British Isles*.

Acting on a suggestion by former Chair, Gill Read, we produced a WFS Gift Card. If you buy a year's WFS subscription as a gift for someone, you will receive the gift card to send to them. We also produced blank cards for greetings or messages, with the WFS Logo on the front, which can be bought from our Membership Secretary, Sue Poyser.

Recently we set up an online WFS Photo Library. The purpose of this is to build up a store of Members' images for use in the magazine, for publicity and on the new website. Sheila gave thanks to those people who have already responded to requests for photos, saying that we have received some wonderful

images, but would like even more, particularly eye-catching images of plants in flower. Common plants are fine, they don't have to be rare or unusual. We would also like more images showing people botanising.

If you would like to share some of your photos, please contact either Sheila or Helen Dignum. If you have just a few, you can send them directly by email, but they must be full size files. If you have more, contact Sheila and she will send you a link so that you can upload them directly to the library. Or, if you prefer, you could send your photos to her on a memory stick.

Ken Southall, our **Photographic Secretary**, said that he regretted that, for the second year in succession, we had been unable to hold the Photographic Competition. He hoped there would be a large number of entries next year. It will still be possible to send entries by post but Ken expected that most would be sent as full-resolution files by email. The usual top three winners and any highly-commended entries in each class will be displayed at the AGM and the overall winner will receive the new Violet Schwerdt trophy to keep for one year.

Ken asked members to give him their entries for the 'Shoot and Show' Competition and to vote for their favourite. He also said he hoped they would enjoy the display of his photographs of the wonderful flora he and Sue Grayston had seen while on holiday in Australia.

Helen Dignum, our **Website Manager**, said that she had

volunteered to take on the Website Manager role and development of the new website, being keen on tech and having some experience as website editor for her local Natural History Society.

She reported that the website sub-committee had decided on the required content and key features required of the new website which crucially includes the ability for more than one person to add content to the website, allowing Peter to step down after his single-handed achievement and burden of running the website by himself for more than fifteen years. Acting on the sub-committee's specifications, she had obtained quotes from several website developers, focusing on those that had a track record in nature and wildlife and small charity sites, rather than the business and very commercial developers which tend to have a very different approach.

The Committee reviewed these quotes in May 2021 and chose Red Paint, based in Glasgow, which has developed and hosts sites for the Scottish Wildlife Trusts, National Biodiversity Network, British Dragonfly Society and the Natural History Society of Northumbria.

Helen said that we wanted a fresh, modern and visually appealing site, easy to navigate, attractive and useful to current and potential members. Now all websites must be equally accessible on computers, tablets and smart phones which has implications for page size, design and type of images. She explained that developing a website has several stages. First is the visual design, then

the background coding and, finally, loading up the text and other content. She has created the strapline: Britain's society for wild flower lovers. Find, enjoy, learn.

The major sections of the website are:-

- **About** will include various pages describing the society, its branch structure, history, committee and description of the magazine.
- **Events** will have options to filter by month or area and see the dates on the calendar. We will be able to have the functionality of adding booking by Eventbrite, which many societies use, and is cost-free for no-charge events. It may be particularly useful for our Zoom talks.
- **Activities** will include the spring and autumn plant hunts, diaries, surveys, photo competition and juniors, and allows us to emphasise all the year-round activities available in addition to the field trips.
- **News** is self explanatory.
- **Resources** will include our downloads, such as the Field Botanist's Diary; resources for juniors and other reference material. There is also an image gallery and this section could include links to other photo resources such as our Google drive images.
- Finally, we will have a section headed **Join Us** which will lead to information on how to join our society, with appropriate links and contact details.

The Website Sub-committee has had to take some difficult decisions. We

decided to omit the List of all Plants as similar content is covered by other sites and it would require significant revision to be in line with the Stage 4 changes. Also, the Illustrated Diary will not feature in its present form on the new website, because it would have required a disproportionate amount of coding and image handling, and therefore cost, to translate to a new site. It could remain accessible elsewhere.

Helen finished by saying that the next step is to proceed with the coding to translate the design into a working website which we will run behind the scenes while testing until we are ready to switch over. The new website will be based on Wordpress which is easy to use. She, and other members of the team, will be trained in how to upload new content to the website so that as well as Helen keeping the site up-to-date, for example, Janet can add new events, Peter could add news and gallery content and Anne could add sample magazine content.

Post Meeting

The meeting was followed by a fascinating talk from Steve Little and David Albon on their adventurous botanising trip to the exceptionally remote island of Tristan da Cunha.

The winners of the 'Shoot and Show' photo competition, Ken Southall, and the plant quiz, Sue Denness, each received a copy of one of Jonathan Drori's books, which he had generously donated.

SHEILA WYNN

WFS AGM and MEMBERS' WEEKEND FIELD MEETINGS, SEPTEMBER 2021

Many thanks to David Rich for planning this programme of meetings, doing the recces and providing detailed information and maps of the sites and their plants. We were very sorry that he was unable to join us. Thanks also to Gareth Bursnall, Stephen Clarkson, Roger Heath-Brown and John Swindells for agreeing, at short notice, to lead the meetings.

SHEILA WYNN

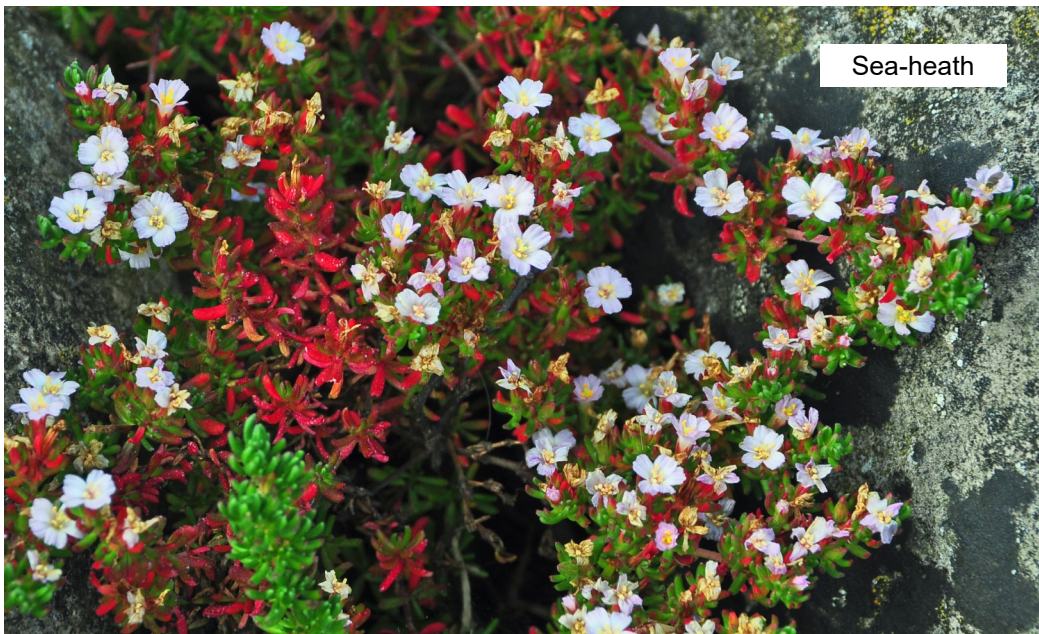
SATURDAY 6TH SEPTEMBER: OGMORE ESTUARY

Clear blue skies and sunshine were a bonus for our short morning meeting at picturesque Ogmores Estuary, near Bridgend. On the rocky, upper parts of the saltmarsh, the outstanding

feature was the extensive linear strip of abundant Sea-heath *Frankenia laevis* which we very much admired. Further up the estuary, we eventually located a few flowers on the patches of naturalised Buttonweed *Cotula coronopifolia*. Other shore species seen included Sea-milkwort *Lysimachia maritima*, Annual Sea-blite *Suaeda maritima* and Prickly Saltwort *Salsola kali*. By the path on the sand dunes were a couple of nice thistles, Slender Thistle *Carduus tenuiflorus* and Musk Thistle *C. nutans*, White Horehound *Marrubium vulgare* and Sticky Stork's-bill *Erodium aethiopicum*, which is densely covered in sticky glandular hairs and has paler flowers than Common Stork's-bill *E. cicutarium*.

RUTH DAWES

Photo: Ken Southall



**SUNDAY 7TH 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).

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

Photo: Dennis Kell



Dutch Helleborine

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.

(This was also found on Friday morning at Kenfig Nature Reserve by the eagle-eyed Stella Taylor. Stella recalls that she found the plant over 40 years ago on a previous field meeting. The warden at the time, Steve Moon, gave an introduction to the reserve, its history and management. His greatest achievement had been to stop the motorbikes from being ridden over the dunes causing damage to the habitat. However, he was thinking of asking them back because the Helleborine grew along the trails that they made. Stella used this clue to guide us to the plants she found.)

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 Carline 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.

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

Photo: Ken Southall

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. I thought it was a new one for me but sadly, I discovered later that it had been pointed out to me by the county recorder back near to where I used to live.

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. At this point I have to apologise to a couple of people who asked me about one when I was so excited having just read in Blamey that Sand Spurrey has a bristle. Sadly, I had not read the general description that points out that all the Sea-spurreys have a bristle at the end of their leaves. Serves me right for not reading the whole description properly. Always best to get the book out!

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 6TH SEPTEMBER: NASH POINT, MARCROSS, LLANTWIT MAJOR AND LIMPURT 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 semidecurrrens*, 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

Photo: Ken Southall

SPRING WEEK HUNT 2021

		Total
Ian Green	Highlands / Moray	32
Helen Jackson	Scotland	35
Barbara Allen	Merseyside	31
Julie Clarke	Lancashire	18
Rita & Anthony Grainger	Leeds	53
Christina White	Northamptonshire	17
Susan Grimshaw	Berkshire	31
Sue Knightly & Diana Stroud	Berkshire	62
Barbara Matthews	Suffolk	47
Anne & Dennis Kell	Suffolk	69
Steve Clarkson	Norfolk / Suffolk	59
Ron Parker	Surrey/E. London	50
Pippa Hyde	Surrey	53
Sue Poyser / Doug Grant	Kent	59
John Swindells	London	32
Jackie Hardy	Worcestershire	47
Nicki Mottram	Warwickshire	31
Heather Colls	Monmouthshire	31
Sally Thomson	S. Wiltshire	19
Sarah Beetham	Bristol area	28
Pauline & Richard Wilson	Bristol area	27
Ro FitzGerald	Somerset	87
Caroline Bateman	South Devon	47
Sally Maller	South Devon	66
Anne Haden	Jersey	84
Total number of different species seen		262
Only found by one person		86
Species new to Spring Hunt:		1

Welcome to the people who have joined in the Spring Hunt for the first time and have helped to spread the results into more regions. Just about everyone has reported fewer flowers this year which probably reflects the cold weather in January and February. Restrictions on travel also meant that most finds were not far from home. People often reported

only being able to find a single flower of a number of species. There is quite a drop in the number of species found this year - 262 in contrast to 305 last year. I guess much of this can be attributed to the cold weather we had in January and February which, although not remarkably bad, was much colder than recent winters.

Purple Toothwort

What we noticed was that plants that might have been hanging on, like Sowthistles, *Sonchus* spp., yellow daisies of various sorts and species of Brassicaceae, were just not there this year. This was very much reflected in your reports. In previous years some of these species have survived the winter. This year there were no docks and far fewer members of the *Salix* and *Geranium* genera. There were also markedly fewer reports of typical spring flowers like Wood Anemones *Anemone nemorosa*, Marsh-marigolds *Caltha palustris* and no Ramsons *Allium ursinum* at all.

Taking a leaf out of Heather Coll's Autumn Hunt report I have zoned the records by region to see if there was a correlation, but numbers vary so much depending on what people report. Some stick strictly to native plants and some include garden escapes and naturalised plants which makes for some big differences.

So, a few notes on this year's findings:

Ian was delighted to find Northern Dead-nettle *Lamium confertum*.

Helen found Purple Toothwort *Lathraea clandestina*. It was on the bank of the River Esk, Musselburgh where she has seen it for several years. The first date Helen has found for it growing wild in her area is 1956. I was shown it in Bristol in April, what an amazing looking plant, and I did a bit of investigation work because it is obviously spreading these days. It seems it likes to be near water, so maybe that is how it spreads. Of course its favoured hosts are Willows and Poplars so there is an immediate association with damp habitats. It



Photo: Pauline Wilson

was first recorded in the 1880's when it appeared to have come from Belgium. It seems to have been deliberately planted in various places in Suffolk and Cambridgeshire and was introduced to Kew Gardens and RHS Wisley. Who knows how it reached a small, tidal river in Bristol.

Barbara alone found Grey Willow *Salix cinerea*.

Julie was incapacitated and restricted to Beetham but managed to see Green Hellebore *Helleborus viridis*.

Rita and Anthony found both Yellow Star-of-Bethlehem *Gagea lutea* and Sweet Violet *Viola odorata* with only one flower.

Christina couldn't even find a Dandelion *Taraxacum* agg. in flower but found large numbers of Sweet Violet *Viola odorata* all around her local area.

Susan joined us for her first Spring hunt and was one of only two to find Smooth Sowthistle *Sonchus oleraceus*. In recent years plants like this have over-wintered but this spring very few have been recorded, presumably having been killed by persistent frosts.

Sue and Diana saw Cleavers *Galium aparine* unusually early.

Barbara reported Creeping Bent *Agrostis stolonifera*; maybe a first for Spring Hunts.

Anne and Dennis found Water Bent *Polypogon viridis* growing in Ipswich around the docks.

Steve reported that Cowslips *Primula veris* had been flowering since January.

Ron did well to find Red Fescue *Festuca rubra*.

Pippa managed to find Bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*.

Sue and Doug found Rough Chervil *Chaerophyllum temulum* flowering early.

John said it was his shortest list ever. He was pleased to see Italian Alder *Alnus cordata* growing on top of a wall.

Jackie joined the hunt for the first time. In addition to Jackie, only one other person found Marsh-marigold *Caltha palustris*.

Nicki also joined the hunt for the first time. She was delighted to discover Wild Daffodils *Narcissus pseudonarcissus* growing truly wild.

Heather searched all week and was rewarded on 7th with Shepherd's-purse *Capsella bursa-pastoris*.

Sally Thomson joined The Wild Flower Society recently and sent her first Spring Hunt list. She found the

only flowering Common Water-crowfoot *Ranunculus aquatilis*.

Sarah found Wood Anemone *Anemone nemorosa* very early, reported by only one other person.

Richard and Pauline somehow managed to find two flowers in an arable field full of Field Pansy *Viola arvensis*.

Ro found Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* in flower. Generally Ash is only just coming into flower in May.

Caroline hunted along the pavements and local cemeteries and found English Elm *Ulmus procera* in flower.

Sally Maller found a whole list of plants flowering early including Oxeye Daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*.

Anne had another long list of sole finds including Wild Thyme *Thymus drucei*.

Thank you to those who wrote about your spring hunt week. It is interesting to receive your accounts of how you got on. Most people commented that because of lockdown, they had only gone out on foot or bike or driven a short distance, but that's fine and reflects your own area. I expect we all closely inspected the nooks and crannies and bits of wasteland to see what we could find.

PAULINE WILSON

SPRING WEEK HUNT DATA

Professor Tim Sparkes is an advisor to the UK Phenology Network and has an interest in the effects of climate change on the flowering times of plants. The WFS has provided him with data from the last

100 years of the Spring Week Hunt which one of his students has been analysing and looking for patterns. He has provided us with two graphs showing these patterns.

The first graph shows how the mean number of species in flower recorded per person in the first week of March has changed over the years. Although the methods of recording over this time haven't always been consistent, there does seem to be a step up in the 1990s which fits in with other findings relating to possible climate change.

The second graph shows the number of species in flower recorded in the first week of March plotted against

the average temperature over the preceding three months. This reveals a strong relationship and suggests that there are a greater number of plant species in flower following milder winters.

It's good to know that some of the data we gather purely for interest and enjoyment can provide scientists with evidence of the impacts of climate change.

ANNE KELL

ONE DAY MEETING - PAGHAM 3rd JULY

WFS meetings tend to start in car parks. From there two types diverge. In the first, troops are briskly assembled and then marched off to some botanical hotspot. The second adopts a more laissez faire approach which usually takes a good three quarters of an hour to botanise the car park itself. Our expert leaders Jill Oakley and Helen Dignum happily adopted the latter approach. Pagham beach is a neighbourhood contiguous with, but distinct from Pagham village itself. The latter has been going for a while as the 7th century Saxon remains in the more recent Norman and Early English church attest. Pagham Beach was the response to an earlier housing crisis when the original settlers were accommodated in railway carriages along the sea front. Some of the carriages are still visible within more modern constructions. The area has happily retained a vaguely anarchic untidy, makeshift air which always bodes well for enterprising incoming plants.

Within the car park a flowerless bedraggled Black Horehound *Ballota nigra*, not particularly smelly and with rather bright green leaves prompted a mild difference of opinion. Scentless Mayweed *Tripleurospermum inodorum* with a solid receptacle proved slightly scented but not as scented as Scented Mayweed *Matricaria chamomilla*, with its hollow odoriferous receptacle. Always something to learn. We sampled the delights of Goat's-beard *Tragopogon pratensis*, Wild Onion *Allium vineale*, and Musk-mallow *Malva moschata*. We drifted our way across the road to

the surrounds of the Co-op car park where a further eclectic set of ruderals awaited us, Eastern Rocket *Sisymbrium orientale* and Lesser Swine-cress *Lepidium didymum* among them.

Refreshingly, there were a number of self-declared beginners whose first WFS meeting this was; there were those of us who had been around for a while and then there was Stephen Clarkson, furnished with a wide experience of European plants plus a retentive mind, coming armed with Stace and Poland. It was he who was responsible for determining a number of aliens and subspecies the existence of which most of us had hitherto been unaware. Icing on cake already amply furnished by Jill and Helen.

We then repaired to the shingle beach turning westwards. The rain did no more than threaten and then gave way to sunshine. In the distance the SSSI saltmarsh of Pagham harbour beckoned. There was no hope of reaching it as there was so much fun to be had at hand. The gardens of the improved railway carriages tended to spill onto the beach which was thus colonised by a mix of native plants and escapes. Undoubtedly among the former was Sea-kale *Crambe maritima*, the root of which was an important source of carbohydrate for Neolithic peoples, the leaves being shipped up to Covent Garden for the Victorians (try it with Hollandaise sauce). One of our few home grown vegetables, it is in some decline possibly from over-

collection. Some plant groups charmingly posed together for comparison. Common or Corn Poppy *Papaver rhoeas* and Yellow-juiced Poppy *P. lecoqii* made friends with Yellow Horned-poppy from another genus *Glaucium flavum*. Honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum* grew alongside Japanese Honeysuckle *Lonicera japonica*. An unfamiliar bush turned out to be Baby's-breath *Gypsophila paniculata*. Childing Pink *Petrorhagia nanteuilii* made its first appearance of the day but then turned up elsewhere along the shingle as well as in the colonised dunes in the afternoon. Although one might have been forgiven for thinking



Photo: Peter Llewellyn

it a common plant, it is now confined to three colonies in Sussex, these being the most northerly in Europe. The plants we were looking at belonged to the first colony to be described, mentioned by John Ray (1724). Coastal sub-species of note included that of Red Fescue *Festuca rubra* ssp. *juncea* and that of Curled Dock *Rumex crispus* ssp. *littoreus* with three equal sized tubercles. Fern-grass *Catapodium rigidum* could

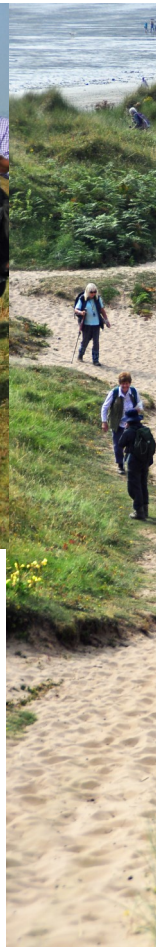
have been Sea Fern-grass *C. marinum* had its spikelets been unstaked – both colonise coastal shingle. Hair's-tail *Lagurus ovatus* accompanied us throughout the morning, too attractive to be native but now well naturalised. Hare's-foot Clover *Trifolium arvense*, on the other hand a native, grew alongside Rough Clover *T. scabrum* another predominantly coastal plant.

Lunch was attended by Black-headed Gulls *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* and a single, not dissimilar, Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus* seeking crumbs, after which we walked back to the car park along a parallel well colonised road. Single plants of Moth Mullein *Verbascum blattaria* and Orange Mullein *V. phlomoides* turned up, the latter, as usual more yellow than orange.

The well-colonised dunes to the East furnished us with our first *Spergularia* which after some debate was determined as Sand Spurrey *S. rubra*. Another rarity, Lesser Mexican-stonecrop *Sedum kimnachii* grew among White Stonecrop *S. album*. Other garden escapes included Blue Eryngo *Eryngium planum* and Pale Yellow-eyed-grass *Sisyrinchium striatum*. Sea Bindweed *Calystegia soldanella* provided a nice contrast to the Field Bindweed *Convolvulus arvensis* of the morning.

Fewer than half the plants seen have been mentioned. It is a splendid site well worth a return visit at a different time of the year. Many thanks to Jill and Helen for having introduced us to it.

RICHARD ROBINSON



**WILD FLOWER
SOCIETY AGM
2021
FIELD VISITS**

Photos:
Ken Southall
Dennis Kell





FIELD MEETINGS 2021

SEFTON COAST 17th - 18th JUNE

Thursday 17th June - Ainsdale

Our aim for the morning was to look at the coastal flora of the roadside verges in Ainsdale before meeting Phil Smith in the afternoon to look at the flora of the 'Green Beach'. We were joined by local botanists Joyce Jarvis and Ann Anderson and also, in the afternoon, by Natalie Hunt and Margaret Connor.

In the area next to the car Monika Walton immediately spotted Eastern Rocket *Sisymbrium orientale*. Here there were also a number of plants of Blue Fleabane *Erigeron acris* and both Bee Orchid *Ophrys apifera* and Pyramidal Orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis*.

At the edge of the dunes on Shore Road there were several Wall-rocket plants. Most of these were Annual Wall-rocket *Diplotaxis muralis* but one of them was a perennial plant. This was the perennial form of Annual Wall-rocket *D. muralis* var. *babingtonii* rather than Perennial Wall-rocket *D. tenuifolia* as the bases of the fruits were immediately above the sepal-scars rather than being separated from them by a short stalk.

As we arrived at Sands Lake, Joyce took the group on a diversion to see Blunt-flowered Rush *Juncus subnodulosus* and Lesser Water-plantain *Baldellia ranunculoides*.

Several members of the party spent some time examining the thrift plants growing on the verge adjacent to the former Sands Hotel. These were

identified as garden forms of Jersey Thrift *Armenia arenaria* and Thrift *A. maritima*, together with some plants which appeared to be intermediate. There was speculation that these could be a hybrid but this couldn't be confirmed by Eric Clement who reminded me about the uncertainty of the true identity of the plants on Jersey, formerly identified as the hybrid *A. maritima* x *A. arenaria*. Clive Stace suggests that these could be *A. maritima* ssp. *miscella*, a SW European endemic.

After lunch we met Phil on the beach and several members of the party took the opportunity to buy copies of his recently published book, *Wildflowers of the Sefton Coast*. Phil then explained that the 'Green Beaches' are an area of the coast between Birkdale and Ainsdale in which active dune building has been happening since 1986. We were going to visit the two newest areas called the 'Newest Green Beach' and the 'Even Newer Green Beach' which started to develop in 2008 and 2016 respectively. As sand eroded from further down the coast is deposited, the increase in height reduces the power of the waves so that plants which become established don't later get washed away. The first coloniser is Common Saltmarsh-grass *Puccinellia maritima*. As sand accumulates around it, this allows Sand Couch *Elymus junceiformis* and Lyme-grass *Leymus arenarius* to also become established. As the sand level rises further, other plants soon



Common Broomrape parasitising Sea Holly

start to move in and Phil Smith and Pat Lockwood have been recording the succession of plants as they appear in each of the new dune systems. Already 127 species have been recorded on the Even Newer Green Beach and 213 on the Newest Green Beach, of which 40 are notable either regionally or nationally and only 9% are non-native.

Of these, we saw, in an area of fresh water outflow, Pink Water-speedwell *Veronica catenata*, Gypsywort *Lycopus europaeus*, Water Forget-me-not *Myosotis scorpioides* and, in the more saline areas, were Brookweed *Samolus valerandi*, Sea Aster *Tripolium pannonicum*, Sea Club-rush *Bolboschoenus maritimus* and Long-bracted Sedge *Carex extensa*, as well as a lovely display of Early Marsh-orchids *Dactylorhiza incarnata* both ssp. *incarnata* and the deeper-red ssp. *coccinea* which is common on the Sefton Coast.

A few garden escapes have also

appeared, the most notable of these being Yellow-eyed-grass *Sisyrinchium californicum* and a Four-leaved Pink-sorrel with distinctive dark markings on its leaves *Oxalis tetraphylla* 'Iron Cross'.

After thanking Phil for a most enjoyable and informative afternoon, some of the group finished off the day by driving the short distance towards the centre of Ainsdale to see the Smooth Rupturewort *Herniaria glabra*. This is a nationally rare species which is more commonly found in East Anglia but it has been thriving here in the grassy roadside verges of a housing estate for over thirty years along with other Spring ephemerals.

SHEILA WYNN

Friday 18th June - Crosby Coastal Park

Crosby is only ten miles from Ainsdale, but feels far more like part of Merseyside. There are clear views to the Wirral and North Wales. It is

Photo: Ken Southall



Photo: Sheila Wynn

overlooked by a huge wind farm on Burbo Bank, a large sandbank that was once a notorious hazard to shipping exploited by wreckers. The area has been put on the cultural map by Antony Gormley's "Another Place" whose statues are visible from the promenade. We assembled at the Leisure Centre car park on a sunny morning. Our leaders, Julie Clarke, Barbara Allen and Sheila Wynn, took us on a loop over the dunes, to the Marine Lake and then along the inland edge of the Coastal Park.

Our first plant of interest was the dune subspecies of Common Broomrape *Orobanche minor* ssp. *minor* var. *pseudoamethystea* which parasitises Sea Holly *Eryngium maritimum*. We diverted from our route to look at a large stand of Sea Holly, almost in flower, with a few spikes of the Broomrape. On returning to the path, we found far more Broomrape spikes and the first garden escape of the day, a bright blue Virginia Spiderwort *Tradescantia*

Oriental Poppy

virginiana. Seaside Daisy *Erigeron glaucus* was also in evidence. After a short distance, we came to a fine Tree Lupin *Lupinus arboreus* and, just behind, Isle of Man Cabbage *Coincya monensis*, one of our target plants for the day, which was flowering and fruiting. A few plants still had leaf rosettes. Kidney Vetch *Anthyllis vulneraria* was present in large quantities.

Continuing into an area of grassland with impressive Southern Marsh-orchids *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*, we diverted from the path to admire a patch of the dune subspecies of Field Wormwood, *Artemisia campestris* ssp. *maritima*. Stephen Clarkson had brought samples of the Breckland Field Wormwood *Artemisia campestris* ssp. *campestris* so that we could compare the two. Those of us who had seen the Breckland plants at the Weeting Heath field meeting noted that they had old flowering stems which the Crosby plants did not. Field Wormwood supports a rare ground beetle, the Wormwood Moonshiner *Amara fusca*, which feeds on the seeds at night, when it can be found by shining a torch on the plants. That beetle is known to be present in Breckland and there have been a few records from South Wales where the other population of the maritime subspecies grows and there was some discussion about whether it might be worth checking the Crosby population. Given the lack of obvious flowering stems, however, there might not be enough seeds for the beetles.

We then continued to the edge of the lake to find Slender Spike-rush

Eleocharis uniglumis, with its single glume and truncate leaf sheath. A flock of Mute swans *Cygnus olor* came over towards us, probably in the hope of food. We had similar ideas, so headed back inland to a wall which provided an excellent lunch spot complete with a patch of Slender Trefoil *Trifolium micranthum*. We continued along the inland edge of the Coastal Park looking mainly at garden escapes, including a spectacular Greater Sea-kale *Crambe cordifolia* and an Orange-ball-tree *Buddleja globosa*. Others included Pink-sorrel *Oxalis articulata*, Sweet-William *Dianthus barbatus*, the form of Garden Rocket *Eruca vesicaria* ssp. *vesicaria*, grown for salad leaves, and Corncockle *Agrostemma githago*. There were numerous and varied poppies – Californian Poppy *Eschscholzia californica*, Opium Poppy *Papaver somniferum*, Oriental Poppy *P. orientale* and several different varieties of Corn Poppy *P. rhoeas*.

In the middle of those garden escapes were Shining Crane's-bill *Geranium lucidum*, Hare's-foot Clover *Trifolium arvense*, Hoary Mustard *Hirschfeldia incana*, Wild Carrot *Daucus carota* and Pellitory-of-the-Wall *Parietaria judaica*. The escapes were not only from the gardens - tall grey swords of Sand Couch *Elymus junceiformis* were invading the area from the dune direction. More garden escapes followed, including a Treasureflower *Gazania rigens* growing out of a wall and a huge New Zealand Cabbage-palm *Cordyline australis* in a field. At the end, close to the leisure centre, and hidden amongst taller vegetation, we found some Bee Orchids *Ophrys apifera*,

which made a very satisfying end to the day. Thanks to Julie, Barbara and Sheila for leading us, Stephen for bringing the Breckland Field Wormwood sample and to all who shared their knowledge.

JANE LOWE

STORTH, CUMBRIA SATURDAY 19TH JUNE

Twenty of us met at Sandside on the Kent Estuary with good views of the Cumbrian mountains. We were soon bent over, yes, you have guessed it, bottoms in the air, studying the flora much to the amusement of strangers who asked us what we were doing. They seemed genuinely interested when we told them.

Sheila and Julie gave us an exciting start with two unusual Hawkweeds, *Hieracium cravoniense* and *H. subaequialtum* distinguished from each other by their leaf shape and hairiness. On the rough ground, we saw the attractive Sea Arrow-grass *Triglochin maritima*, with the fleshy, un-furrowed leaves. The slope down to the estuary was dotted with the attractive Mouse-ear-hawkweed *Pilosella officinarum*, Sea Campion *Silene uniflora* and the Thyme-leaved Sandwort *Arenaria serpyllifolia* where the fruits with the distinctive curved sides were evident. We spent a while keying out the beautiful Fox-and-cubs *Pilosella aurantiaca* ssp. *carpathicola* which spreads by stolons rather than rhizomes. Just before our lunch stop, we found the attractive purple-leaved form of Sycamore, *Acer pseudoplatanus* 'Atropurpureum'.

After lunch, for which the reserve manager had kindly put out chairs for us to sit on, we had a peaceful and relaxing walk round Guard Hill Nature Reserve which had a range of grassland and marsh plants as part of it had, many years ago, been a lake. To name just a few, we found Marsh Fern *Thelypteris palustris* with its soft, pale-green leaves, the striking, whorled spikes of Water Violet *Hottonia palustris*, Branched Bur-reed *Sparganium erectum* and beautiful rich-purple spikes of the Northern Marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza purpurella*.

As we walked towards the village of Storth, there were several highlights, including Knotted Crane's-bill *Geranium nodosum* with purplish-pink petals and darker veins, Great Forget-me-not *Brunnera macrophylla*, one with blue flowers and plain leaves, and a white cultivar of it, 'Betty Bowring'. Outside a stone wall,

were many self-sown plants of Sweet Spurge *Euphorbia dulcis* 'Chameleon'. The resident of the house was fascinated by what we were doing. Who knows, we might have a new member.

We then walked through Storth village and along the lanes on the way back to the cars, where we saw Lamb's-tail *Chiastophyllum oppositifolium* with its wonderful, arched spikes of yellow flowers and the inflated capsules of Bladdernut *Staphylea pinnata*.

A huge thank you to both Sheila and Julie for a brilliant day, in fact a fabulous three days as they had organised and led, with Marion and Barbara, the two days previously in the Southport area.

JAN ARMISHAW



BREAN DOWN AND MENDIPS, SOMERSET 19th - 20th JUNE

Saturday 19th June - Priddy Mineries

On a dry and overcast morning we were welcomed by no less than three lovely ladies to lead us. One of the BSBI vice-county recorders for North Somerset, Helena Crouch, was joined by herbalists Barbara Lewis and Nicky Wesson. Barbara and Nicky explained that they would show us common plants and explain their usage and that Helena would show us the specialities of the area.

On this highest part of the Mendips, the overlying Carboniferous Limestone had worn away exposing Old Red Sandstone below. Lead mining, mainly for galena from veins in what is now Stockhill Forest, had taken place here since Roman times resulting in a pockmarked landscape with a diverse range of habitats, including acidic valley mire, oligotrophic settling pools, lead rich spoil heaps with black slag plus grassland intertwined with heather-clad heath. The slag heaps had been stabilised by mosses and lichens, including the rare moss *Ditrichum plumbicola*. The site was not usually grazed due to contamination. It was our pleasure to see and hear about metallophytes (plants that can tolerate lead and sometimes utilise the minerals from toxic sources) today.

We were rapidly shown our first lead tolerant plants on dry grassy banks beside the path; the dainty Sea Campion *Silene uniflora*, Spring Sandwort *Sabulina verna* and, with a

bit of search, Moonwort *Botrychium lunaria*. Recent rains after a dry May served us well for plant hunting. Helena explained that the only places Sea Campion grows inland in Somerset are on the old lead workings of the Mendips. Crested Hair-grass *Koeleria macrantha* was admired.

Nearby wetter ground had very fine patches of Narrow Buckler-fern *Dryopteris carthusiana* without dark stripes in the scales, which we later compared with Broad Buckler-fern *Dryopteris dilatata* with dark stripes in the scales. Open water species included Water Horsetail *Equisetum fluviatile* and (oh dear!) introduced Parrott's Feather *Myriophyllum aquaticum*. There was Lesser Bulrush *Typha angustifolia* amongst the emergent plants. A fine, healthy-looking leech was admired in a stream and flying Chimney Sweeper *Odezia* moths were common.

The Alpine Penny-cress *Noccaea caerulescens* was mainly in fruit, with just a few flowers, on a slag heap. Lunch was taken amongst some industrial archaeology and then we studied a particularly Spleenwort-rich wall with Wall-rue *Asplenium ruta-muraria*, Maidenhair Spleenwort *A. trichomanes*, Rustyback *A. ceterach* and Black Spleenwort *A. adiantum-nigrum* all growing together. Brittle Bladder-fern *Cystopteris fragilis* grew nearby in a tunnel to a Victorian smelting chamber where boys from the workhouse had to collect the re-smelted slag from the roof.



Our herbalists had been attentive to us throughout, explaining the plant uses:- Plantains *Plantago* species are anti-inflammatory; Red Clover *Trifolium pratense* for menopausal symptoms; Thyme *Thymus* as an antiseptic “so powerfully antibacterial it can be used to clean the toilet”; and Horsetails *Equisetum* species. (Now we know that Field Horsetail *Equisetum arvense* (aka Pewterwort) was used for its silica to scour pewter but is also good for cystitis and thinning hair and that it is better at certain stages of maturity e.g. before the branches form). Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* was such a powerful heart restorative that “everyone over 50 should take it”; Common Valerian *Valeriana officinalis* is a non-addictive sleep aid; Stitchworts *Silene* species, for itching and eczema and Bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* was rich in Vitamin C.

We were given samples of tinctures to smell and there were very mixed responses to Valerian. A firm favourite was Bilberry tincture; we were given a spot of this liquid in our palm to taste and it was delicious and a wonderfully deep colour. “Excellent for your vision too and a good astringent.” The main message we took on board from Barbara and Nicky was to buy good quality products from a reputable, inspected, preferably organic supplier.

RUTH DAWES

Sunday 20th June - Brean Down
Heavy overnight rain had cleared to give us a dull and misty start to our visit to the western end of this botanically famous promontory. Our leader, Stephen Parker, met us with

the news that five Great White Egrets *Ardea alba* were flying overhead and a recommendation for the delicious local botanically flavoured ice cream, which some of us did enjoy later.

There was a number of introduced species around the car park area including Water Bent *Polypogon viridis* in planters and very fine specimens of Lesser Water-parsnip *Berula erecta*, with its saw edged teeth, in the rhine. The choice of a gentle stroll up a hard track past ubiquitous Ivy Broomrape *Orobanche hederæ* or a climb up 225 concrete steps was a non-starter. Amongst the broomrapes was Pale St-John's-Wort *Hypericum montanum* and some beautifully flowering Hound's-tongue *Cynoglossum officinale*.

When we eventually arrived at the top we examined the bare but colourful rock ‘gardens’ and found very fine specimens of Somerset Hair-grass *Koeleria vallesiana*, together with associated plant species of NVC CG1 – *Festuca ovina*-*Carlina vulgaris* grassland. Sometimes White Rock-rose *Helianthemum apenninum* (confined to two sites in Somerset and Devon) was present in these communities with the best flowering specimens remaining out in the more exposed spots. We saw examples of the Dwarf Sedge *Carex humilis* NVC sub-community, another south-western speciality. The sedge plants had finished flowering but it was good to see them flourishing vegetatively. Despite the cloud cover, we had good views of Flat Holm and Steep Holm islands to the north of us and the longest sandy beach and biggest caravan park in Europe to the south of us. On our way to the fort at the

Sea Fern-grass

very western tip of the site we inspected more herb-rich and colourful rock-ledges. Sea Fern-grass *Catapodium marinum* was getting very dried out but it was a real treat to see this miniature grass. In contrast, there was a group of fine big Bee Orchids *Ophrys apifera*. Stephen also pointed out patches of limestone heath where calcifuges, like Heather *Calluna vulgaris*, were able to grow due to the deposition of windblown loess (sand and silt dust) which had covered the limestone bedrock after the last ice age.



Our grateful thanks to Helena, Barbara, Nicky and Stephen for providing us with such a super weekend and to Janet John for

organising it. Happy retirement to Stephen.

RUTH DAWES

Photo: Peter Llewellyn

NORTH WALES 22nd - 23rd JUNE

Tuesday 22nd June - Pensarn Beach

A beautiful sunny day. The sea, the shore, the poppies – and memories. The last time I was here was as a six year old on a family caravan holiday. Would the place live up to my recollections? I have always remembered climbing the sea wall, making my way across pebbles studded here and there with poppies and then reaching the sandy beach. It was just as I had remembered. Leading the meeting was Delyth Williams, VC Recorder for Denbighshire, assisted by WFS Chairman Peter Llewellyn. The location was ideal for a stroll along the strip on one side of the sea wall and then a hop over the wall and a

return path along the strand. We saw lots of good plants, some expected, such as Sea Radish *Raphanus raphanistrum* ssp. *maritimus*, Alexanders *Smyrniololus atrum*, Sea Fern-grass *Catapodium marinum*, Thyme-leaved Sandwort *Arenaria serpyllifolia*, Yellow Horned-poppay *Glaucium flavum*, Corn Poppy *Papaver rhoeas*, Lyme-grass *Leymus arenarius*, Pale Flax *Linum bienne*, Fragrant Evening-primrose *Oenothera stricta* and some opportunists, Great Lettuce *Lactuca virosa*, Hare's-foot Clover *Trifolium arvense*, Black Horehound *Ballota nigra*, Ploughman's-spikenard *Inula conyzae* and Wild Onion *Allium vineale*. A thoroughly enjoyable morning with lunch eaten looking out over the sea – and the impressively



Photo: Janet John

large wind farm which is just off-shore. The trip down memory lane was perfect.

Then into our cars and a ten minute drive to the village of Rhyd-y-Foel. Just through the village and up through a small wood we came upon a wonderful limestone hillside just buzzing with bees, butterflies and brilliant flowers. Just stunning. On the way through the wood we came across Small-flowered Sweet-briar *Rosa micrantha*, Early-purple Orchids *Orchis mascula* and Common Spotted-orchids *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* and then on to the splendid limestone hill-side. Small blue butterflies were everywhere, the views were stunning – we could even see Snowdon in the distance and the flowers and grasses were a joy. Crested Hair-grass *Koeleria macrantha*, Downy Oat-grass *Avenula pubescens*, Heath-grass *Danthonia decumbens*, Creeping Bent *Agrostis stolonifera*, False Brome *Brachypodium sylvaticum* to name but a few! Marsh Cudweed *Gnaphalium uliginosum* was a bit of a surprise, but nice to see, as well as the Pyramidal Orchids *Anacamptis pyramidalis* and many

typical limestone hillside plants.

The locations, the weather and the plants were all on top form. Thank you to Delyth for sharing such lovely locations and flora with us.

JANET JOHN

Wednesday 23rd June - West Shore, Llandudno and The Vardre, Deganwy

The morning started with a walk among mature sand dunes along the beach and the shore. Amongst the stabilised grass-covered dunes we saw Pale Flax *Linum bienne*, Bee Orchid *Ophrys apifera* and abundant Common Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* var. *sativus*, an introduced variety of the species which has a hollow stem. There was also an abundance of Bloody Crane's-bill *Geranium sanguineum* and Sand Sedge *Carex arenaria* was growing through the dunes with its rhizomatous habit. Sea-buckthorn *Hippophae rhamnoides*, an introduced shrub, is now dominant on parts of the dune system and restricting native species to small

areas. Lucerne *Medicago sativa* ssp. *sativa*, with purple flowers and Sickie Medick ssp. *falcata* with yellow flowers were growing together on the edge of the dunes. Wendy demonstrated two willows growing along the path edge. First, with its serrated leaves and pruinose twigs, was Siberian Violet-willow *Salix acutifolia* and, slightly further along, there was Sharp-stipuled Willow *S. x mollissima* which had formed a large patch. Next, we were shown Tall Ramping-fumitory *Fumaria bastardii*, which has pale-edged petals, and Purple Ramping-fumitory *F. purpurea*, with its big sepals with large teeth, growing on the edge of the golf course.

We were shown two long-established alien shrubs, one a Hedge Hebe, now renamed *Veronica x franciscana* and New Zealand Holly *Olearia macrodonta*. Sadly, despite it being mentioned in Stace's, *New Flora of the British Isles* 4th edition as occurring here, Monro's Ragwort *Brachyglottis monroi* is now believed lost from this site.

After a short walk to the other end of the bay we saw a garden escape Silver Ragwort *Jacobaea maritima* and Common Ragwort *J. vulgaris*, growing with the hybrid between them *J. x albescens*. Growing close by was a naturalised patch of Sea-heath *Frankenia laevis*.

In the afternoon we took a short drive to The Vardre, Deganwy Nature Reserve.

Ivy Broomrape *Orobanche hederæ* was growing in the hedge of the car park. We took the entrance from the

top of the car park, following a path with tall vegetation on both sides, where we saw plants of Small-leaved Sweet-briar *Rosa agrestis*, Sweet-briar *R. rubiginosa* and Sherard's Downy-rose *R. sherardii*. In a small quarry area, we were shown Nottingham Catchfly *Silene nutans*. On the rock surface were two cotoneaster species Kangting Cotoneaster *C. pseudoambiguus* and Stern's Cotoneaster *C. sternianus*. After retracing our steps almost to the entrance to the reserve we took a path which led us to an open area of short grassland which had a huge population of Maiden Pink *Dianthus deltoides* in its only site in the county. Amongst the pink flowers were some that were white-flowered.

Heading towards the two peaks of the castle we found Squirreltail Fescue *Vulpia bromoides* and Plicate Sweet-grass *Glyceria notata*. In a small stream, and over the steep slopes, there were many Milk Thistle *Silybum marianum*, and Slender Thistle *Carduus tenuiflorus* plants. A few plants of the endemic and rare Deganwy Hawkweed *Hieracium deganwyense* were observed clinging to the steepest slopes of the castle. We finished with Red Jasmine *Jasminum beesianum*, a garden escape, on the enclosed footpath on the way back to the car park. All in all it was an interesting and very successful day. Many thanks to Wendy McCarthy and Ted Phenna for showing us around and sharing their knowledge.

CLARE KITCHEN

ONE DAY MEETINGS 2021

STANNER ROCKS, RADNORSHIRE 8th JUNE

“There it is: through the arches into the Garden of Eden!”

These were the words of our guide, Andy Shaw, as he welcomed us to the famous Stanner Rocks National Nature Reserve. We had just crossed the busy A44 road and walked beneath the boundary trees whose topmost branches met above our heads.

Earlier, we gathered in warm sunshine beside the old Stanner Station building on the other side of the road where, in times past, trains regularly discharged groups of excited botanists looking forward to a day exploring the floral delights of the dolerite & gabbro rocks opposite. Our day focused on the amazing suite of floral rarities at Stanner Rocks, which is reflected in this report, particularly with regard to the importance of annual weather patterns, soil conditions and viable seedbanks.

Andy has spent many years passionately studying the flora and fauna of Stanner Rocks and his energy and passionate enthusiasm was contagious. Following a general introduction to the site focusing on the importance of geology and aspect which are key to the special plants that grow here, Andy vividly demonstrated the effect that optimal growing conditions can make when he introduced us to the most amazing selection of plants that he had

brought along from his Rare British Plants Nursery, all of them in superb condition: Meadow Clary *Salvia pratensis*, Isle of Man Cabbage *Coincya monensis* ssp. *monensis*, Strapwort *Corrigiola litoralis*, Grass-poly *Lythrum hyssopifolia*, Adder’s-tongue *Ophioglossum vulgatum*, Red-tipped Cudweed *Filago lutescens*, Stinking Hawk’s-beard *Crepis foetida* and a wonderful array of clovers including Twin-headed *Trifolium bocconeii*, Long-headed *T. incarnatum* ssp. *molinerii*, Clustered *T. glomeratum* and Starry *T. stellatum*all in one place!

The rock floor was a riot of colour with an array of flowerheads everywhere we looked and we began by making our way over to a beautiful flowering patch of Sticky Catchfly *Silene viscaria* which was thriving following the recent rains, its brightly-coloured flower-clusters lighting up the areas of the Rocks where it grew. We were fortunate to see it in such good condition as it would normally have gone over at this time of year, but the cold Spring meant that it was flowering a little later than usual. We were able to see and feel the sticky glandular hairs on the stem, preventing ants from climbing up to the flower-heads and making a hole in them in order to steal the nectar. Andy remarked that he sometimes finds a number of dead ants stuck to the stem!

We then made our way over to "...the Scleranthus Spur, the most hallowed piece of botanical turf in Wales!" This spur of rock is home to populations of both the upright subspecies of Perennial Knawel *Scleranthus perennis* ssp. *perennis* and Upright Clover *Trifolium strictum*. The former grows only here (ssp. *prostratus* being found at a couple of sites in the Brecks) and the latter only here and on The Lizard Peninsula.

Unfortunately, there wasn't any flowering Upright Clover following a very dry April for the third year in a row. Even in a good year it rarely reaches double figures so it really does have a precarious foothold. There must be a good seedbank for it to keep returning in more suitable years. Andy had included a healthy specimen with his collection from the Nursery which demonstrated how this species can potentially thrive in perfect, but artificial, conditions. It's impossible to recreate these conditions at Stanner Rocks, of course, but some years ago, Andy had removed just three seeds under licence from this population and grown flourishing plants producing seed from which he had managed to start a new population at a site higher up the cliff. This produced nearly one hundred plants a few years ago, though there were none present this year. A little gentle micro-management with the removal of encroaching *Festuca* has also encouraged plants to grow in the past.

We did get to see the Perennial Knawel, about thirty plants being present on the spur this year. Like the Upright Clover, this species likes a

warm, wet Spring. This is a plant that grows well from tiny cuttings and Andy has worked his magic again, growing cuttings at the Nursery, "...providing a polytunnel, good soil, no slugs and talking to them!" resulting



Sticky Catchfly

in ten thousand seeds! These seeds were scattered higher up the cliff and now give rise to three thousand plants in a good year, spreading up and down the cliff from the replanted site.

Another plant that we missed out on was the famous Radnor Lily/Early Star-of-Bethlehem *Gagea bohemica*

Photo: Charles Whitworth

which occurs on most rock outcrops here and nowhere else in Britain. Its presence was only confirmed in the 1970s, flowering as it does in the winter, but then withering away and leaving no trace of its presence apart from hundreds of tiny bulbils in the shallow soil! The entire population is a clone with no genetic variation and it is very flower shy with only a few plants flowering each year. They are growing in a very nutrient-poor environment and probably cannot produce enough energy, which appeared to be confirmed when Andy noted that he had managed up to five flowers per stem in cultivation!

Stanner Rocks is home to a number of rare bryophytes, too, and a few of us examined a patch of Rigid Apple Moss *Bartramia stricta* at its only British site.

We wandered over the site noting some of the other plants. There was a nice patch of Hare's-foot Clover *Trifolium arvense* on the spur, notable because it is a rarity in this part of the country. Rock Stonecrop *Petrosedum forsterianum* and Common Rock-rose *Helianthemum nummularium* were flourishing and there were also a few plants of Smith's Pepperwort *Lepidium heterophyllum* scattered around.

We made a steep ascent up the face of the Rocks along a narrow path, passing a single Sticky Catchfly plant that had, unusually, appeared in a wooded area, together with a small patch of Pale St John's-wort *Hypericum montanum*. This species had disappeared from the site for a number of years before the path was widened and it appeared once more,

another example of the importance of the seed bank!

We stopped for a leisurely lunch on a high eastern rock outcrop looking over the border into the rolling hills and patchwork fields of Herefordshire. It was here that we found another speciality, Spiked Speedwell *Veronica spicata*, with examples of both last year's flowering spikes and this year's developing stems.

We then made our way up to the summit which had been covered in Pine trees until twenty or so years ago, the ground deep in needles. After being cleared the area has gradually been recolonised with an array of plants, including a nice Bird's-foot *Ornithopus perpusillus* next to the summit stone.

From there we made our way back down to the foot of the Rocks, pausing to examine nest boxes with both Pied Flycatcher and Common Redstart nestlings, species whose numbers have grown markedly since Andy introduced these nesting sites.

So this Garden of Eden had exceeded our expectations on what turned out to be a wonderful day. Thanks so much to Andy, not only for his fascinating tour, but also for his dedication to making a real difference for good regarding the fortunes of some of our rarest plants, both here and across the UK. You can find out more about his Rare British Plants Nursery at <https://www.rarebritishplants.com/>

STEPHEN PLUMMER

EAST END OF LONDON 15th JUNE



After a hot sticky day in central London, what a relief to step out of Mudchute DLR station into a golden late afternoon with a cooling breeze blowing from the river. John Swindells was there to greet a small group of us with a map of his proposed route. We were going to explore an area which was once part of London's famous docks but is now a sort of garden city tangent to the nearby business and financial centre. It's an area of fairly dense but

attractive housing where enough of the old dock walls and satisfyingly rough corners have been left for wild things to thrive.

John explained that the grassed area outside the station had very poor soil, it being just a skim following work for the southward extension of the DLR a few years ago. Plants soon burn off here and we saw the crisped remains of Spotted Medick *Medicago arabica*. But even in these conditions the

Photo: Maureen Parry

lovely yellow flowers of Creeping Cinquefoil *Potentilla reptans* shone through; not for nothing is this a successful 'weed'. One special plant to notice here was Wild Clary *Salvia verbenaca*, uncommon in London. We rubbed the leaves in our fingers and caught the distinctive pungent odour. Other plants surviving these poor conditions were Common and Dwarf Mallows *Malva sylvestris* and *M. neglecta* and a large Dock. One of our party, Ron, noticed the one large wart on its tepals which suggested Greek Dock *Rumex cristatus*, confirmed by reference to the illustration in Stage 4.

We set off towards the southern side of Millwall Outer Dock. At the side of the flight of steps down to the dock a Large-flowered Nipplewort *Lapsana communis* ssp. *intermedia* was doing well. In a rough area at the bottom of these steps a great mixture of plants had established: Goat's-beard *Tragopogon pratensis*, Knotted Hedge-parsley *Torilis nodosa* with longer bristles on one side of the seed capsule, Perforate St John's-wort *Hypericum perforatum*, Hart's-tongue *Asplenium scolopendrium*, Male-fern *Dryopteris filix-mas* and Hawkweed Oxtongue *Picris hieracioides*. The profusion and variety of plants in this location was surprising.

We walked alongside what had been the Millwall Graving Dock; here water was drained away to allow the hulls of ships to be scraped clean, repaired and re-painted. This has been developed into an attractive housing area now known as Clippers Quay – the Cutty Sark was one of the ships repaired here in the nineteenth

century. Associated structures covered by grilles and enclosed by railings provided sheltered conditions, for several garden escapes. A big, self-seeded Passionflower *Passiflora caerulea* dominated one; in another was a mixture of Yellow Corydalis *Pseudofumaria lutea*, Trailing Bellflower *Campanula poscharskyana* and Mind-your-own-business *Soleirolia soleirolii*. On the actual dock walls we saw the more-to-be-expected waterside plants like Common Skullcap *Scutellaria galericulata* and Water Mint *Mentha aquatica*.

Round the corner we came to a railing looking over the Millwall Outer Dock. There was a wonderful view across the water in the evening light and it was also a good place for plants. Just over the railing was a nice mixture of Black Nightshade *Solanum nigrum*, Oxford Ragwort *Senecio squalidus*, Bittersweet *Solanum dulcamara* and an interesting *Hieracium* species. This last we keyed out using Mike Shaw's *Hawkweeds of SE England*; it was Dappled Hawkweed *Hieracium scotostictum*.

Walking along the south side of the dock we saw Eastern Rocket *Sisymbrium orientale* with its very long seedpods and Wall Lettuce *Mycelis muralis*. To less experienced members of the group, John showed that each 'flower' is comprised of five florets and that the four notches at the end of each floret ligule (the petal-like structure) are vestiges of five petals, now merged into one. Everywhere underfoot were little greyish clumps of Jersey Cudweed *Laphangium luteoalbum* and we

Fennel

wondered whether it may no longer require its protected status.

At the end of the dock a wide, paved slope led down to the Thames - site of the original entrance to the dock. By the side of this was another satisfyingly rough patch with huge plants of Hemlock *Conium maculatum*, Prickly Lettuce *Lactuca serriola*, Beet *Beta vulgaris*, Perennial Wall-rocket *Diplotaxis tenuifolia* and Hoary Mustard *Hirschfeldia incana*. Amongst these bigger plants, we saw Narrow-leaved Ragwort *Senecio inaequidens*, Henbit Dead-nettle *Lamium amplexicaule* and, through all this mixture, Fodder Vetch *Vicia villosa* was scrambling. When we saw a Scarlet Pimpernel *Lysimachia arvensis*, John told us that because the flower closes in bad weather, it has acquired a number of popular names such as Poor Man's Weather Glass. It also closes up in the early afternoon accounting for another local name - Shepherd's Clock.

On the slope itself, smaller plants were growing between the paving stones and around the bollards. Jersey Cudweed was popping out everywhere along with Toad Rush *Juncus bufonius*, Fern-grass *Catapodium rigidum* and Pineappleweed *Matricaria discoidea*. At the foot of an old winding gear a big Fennel *Foeniculum vulgare* had found itself a happy home. At the river end of this slope and near a wall was a plant of Wild Celery *Apium graveolens*, rare this far upstream by the Thames. John again advised us not just to look, so we rubbed the leaves in our fingers, sniffed and were rewarded with the lovely savoury smell of celery.



Yet another edible plant could only be admired through the railings of a building site. It was a huge and very healthy-looking Wild Parsnip *Pastinaca sativa* known for several years here but perhaps not to survive completion of the site's redevelopment.

It was time to make our way back to Mudchute. We'd only walked a portion of John's proposed route, which was planned to continue along the Thames Path south-eastwards. But as botanists only walk very slowly, we all urged John to offer this walk again as a whole day meeting so we can further explore this wonderful area. The historic remains of the docks and the views across the water make this a very special place and we all thanked John for sharing his knowledge both of the history and the plants we had seen.

MAUREEN PARRY

Photo: Maureen Parry

WIRRAL COUNTRY PARK 17th JULY

On a hot day 16 members from Branch N3 and Bradford Botany Group, led by Robert Freeth of Liverpool Botanical Society, set out to, first of all, explore the station area of the old railway line. Finds here included Maidenhair Fern *Adiantum capillus-veneris*, Hart's-tongue Fern *Asplenium scolopendrium* and False Brome *Brachypodium sylvaticum*.



Photo: Anne Kell

Further along the railway line there was a lovely display of Creeping Thistle *Cirsium arvense*, Great Willowherb *Epilobium hirsutum* and Oxeye Daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*. We also saw Perforate St John's-wort *Hypericum perforatum*.

On a bank leading from the field car-park there were many plants of Common Centaury *Centaureum erythraea*, some very tall Yellow-worts *Blackstonia perfoliata* and diminutive Trailing St John's-wort *Hypericum humifusum*.

We next visited the cafe facilities where there was a raised bed with various "weeds" including Field Penny-cress *Thlaspi arvense* and Cut-leaved Dead-nettle *Lamium hybridum*.

After walking round the large pond, which had dragonflies as well as some good pond-edge plants, including Water Forget-me-not *Myosotis scorpioides*, Branched Bur-reed *Sparganium erectum* and Clustered Dock *Rumex conglomeratus*, we found some seats and shade for lunch. The lunch spot yielded Field Pansy *Viola arvensis*, Marsh Cudweed *Gnaphalium uliginosum* and Slender Pearlwort *Sagina filicaulis*, amongst others.

After lunch we headed for more ponds and a number of meadows nearer the cliffs. The ponds and edges included Nuttall's Waterweed *Elodea nuttallii*, Marsh Bedstraw *Galium palustre*, Cyperus Sedge *Carex pseudocyperus*, Hard Rush *Juncus inflexus* and Bristly Oxtongue *Helminthotheca echioides*.

The meadow nearest the cliff had a wealth of flowers such as Common Knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, Wild Carrot *Daucus carota* and two less

common plants Dyer's Greenweed *Genista tinctoria* and Pepper-saxifrage *Silaum silaus* (not a saxifrage but an umbellifer).

We then made our way down a fairly steep path to the beach. Amongst the grasses and sedges were Sea Radish *Raphanus raphanistrum* ssp. *maritimus*, Sea Holly *Eryngium maritimum* and Grass-leaved Orache *Atriplex littoralis* (quite a rarity). We

then went back up the cliff path, which fortunately was in the shade. A few of us had ice-creams from the cafe to finish the day.

Though we didn't walk very far, the total number of species was well over 200. Thanks were given to Robert who led a well-planned and varied walk.

KAY BANKIER

BOOK REVIEWS

Richards, A.J. *Field Handbook to British and Irish Dandelions*. BSBI Handbook 23 (2021). ISBN 9780901158604. £19.50

I know that Dandelions seem one of the narrowest of niche interests to most of us. Some people give in to their inner nerd and become involved with an apomictic genus – I've had flirtations verging on affairs with both Dandelions and Hawkweeds and have friends who are passionate about whitebeams and brambles – but these plants are admittedly a challenge to identify and I failed in the past to develop a proper relationship. Now though there is hope! The late Mike Shaw's wonderful *Hawkweeds of southeast England* (2020) BSBI Handbook 20 has revived interest in those tantalising plants and I now feel energy and inspiration for the Dandelion world again. The author John Richards was a university lecturer in botany and has been a notable figure in dandelion studies for more than 30 years – who better to be one's guide?

Dandelions get prominent bad press as aggressive garden weeds and sadly this often overshadows their good qualities but a field of golden flowers turning to follow the sun must be one of the most heartening of spring sights and these flowers make the best (and easiest) of home-made

wines. In English folk tradition they should be picked for this on St George's Day, 23rd April. Fortune-telling games involve blowing off the seed-head 'clocks'. Plants can be blanched under a flowerpot for use in early salads. Roots can be ground for a (marginally tolerable!) coffee substitute in times of want and if you find yourself in need of a diuretic just chew down some leaves – the old French name of *pis en lit* confirms their effectiveness!

So what's actually not to like? Well, a great many species are recognised now, 239 in this present book, and a large percentage of these are rather (or very) similar. The critical characters which separate them are often *what characters to look for*. These details have never been available in our usual field guides, making this fascinating group pretty inaccessible as WFS Diary material. However this publication, a complete reworking of the 1997 BSBI Handbook, offers the chance of greatly improving our relationship with *Taraxacum* agg.

It does a wonderful job of explaining how to approach a Dandelion, showing which of many characters matter – it's not just the way the leaves are divided or the shape of the heads but lots of details down to the colour of the base of the leaf petioles can be important. The genus is divided into 9 Sections – *Erythrosperma* (dainty plants of nice habitats like grassy dunes or thin limestone grassland); *Spectabilia* ('upland plants of wet places'); *Naevisa* (giving a clue by dark spots

on their leaves); *Taraxacum* (formerly *Ruderalia*, a huge section and very widespread); *Hamata* (a common group often found in gardens); *Celtica* (as the name suggests, usually found in the west and Ireland). *Obliqua* (a rare north Britain group); *Palustria* (another rare group with unusual un-toothed leaves) and *Crocea* (found on base-rich Scottish mountain cliffs) are unlikely to be found by most of us, but it would be lovely to be able to identify them if one did!

For new bugs in the Dandelion game just learning to put finds in the right section is a great step and this book can provide the teaching. There's a glossary; a line diagram of the parts of the plant which one needs to be aware of; an explanation of the odd life-style of apomicts; a key to the sections and then a key to species within each section. Each species has a description, a distribution map and several photographs (some by our members Graham Lavender and Simon Leach!). Flipping through the photographs can still be bewildering – the brain says 'OK - it's a Dandelion' and can't at first see differences, but the book does provide the best tools yet for getting past this block.

As the bright cover photo suggests the book's subject really is more attractive than forbidding and after working on this review I'm definitely inspired to renew my love affair with the genus. I'm even telling myself that with its help 'DANDELIONS CAN BE FUN'!

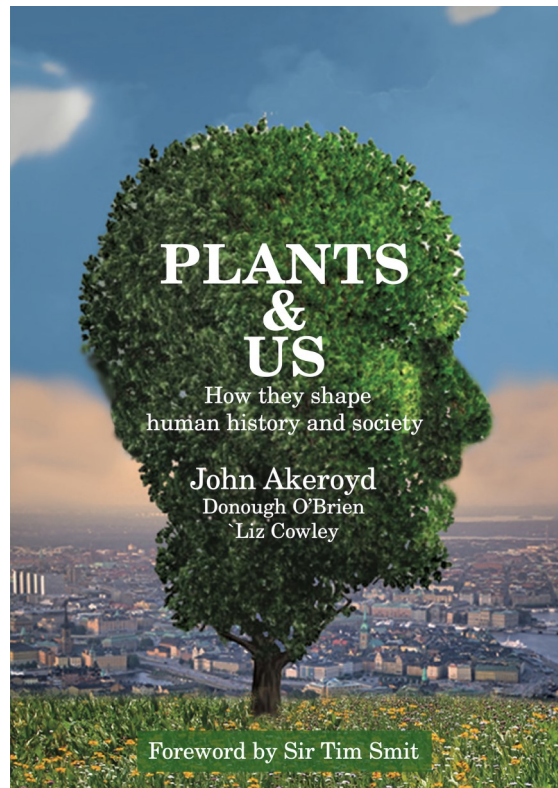
RO FITZGERALD

Akeroyd, J., O'Brien, D. and Cowley, L. *Plants & Us*. GB Publishing (2021).

ISBN 978-1-912576-75-3 (hardback); 978-1-912576-76-0 (paperback); 978-1-912576-77-7 (eBook); 978-1-912576-78-4 (Kindle). Hardback £21.67, Paperback £14.99

The books I review for the WFS are of course usually identification guides and floras which are relevant to our needs as field botanists. I love doing this and hope to keep on with such a privileged and welcome task, but 'now for something completely different!' I am finding real joy in a most unusual book and want everyone to be aware of it.

The lead author, John Akeroyd, will be known to many of us. He is an important figure in British botany, author of the BSBI Handbook *Docks and Knotweeds* and currently the BSBI Referee for *Persicaria*, *Polygonum*, *Chenopodium*, *Atriplex* and (with Geoffrey Kitchener) for *Docks*. The really keen can consult him on subspecies of Kidney Vetch *Anthyllis vulneraria* and Greater Plantain *Plantago major*! However *Plants & Us* is indeed something completely different. His co-authors are a historical writer, Donough O'Brien, and a poet, Liz Cowley, and between them they have made an amazing sort of collage of words and images which give a challenging and fascinating view of plants. The book is superlatively entertaining – I love obscure factoids with the 'not a lot of people know that' tag, and here is the best source ever. It's quirky, well-researched, brilliantly illustrated, informative about unexpected things



and enlightening about more familiar ones – a perfect dip-in book which it would be impossible ever to find boring. Quite apart from its high entertainment value it's important because it looks at the serious issues of climate change, sustainability, our reckless use of the resource (plants) which support all life, the damage to biodiversity from wars and intensive farming and more, in a way which charms us into paying attention.

It is difficult to describe so here are the section headings as a taster, with brief samples of the astonishing number of topics. First comes *Plants as Heroes* – I was delighted as an Irish person to read that bigoted Oliver Cromwell, the bane of that country, died because he refused Quinine for his malaria saying it had 'the power of the devil' after being

processed by Jesuits! On the opposite page is the Russian Dandelion *Taraxacum koksaghyz* whose latex may save the current habitat ravages of rubber plantations. Next comes *Plants as Villains* – not just Giant Hogweed but a lovely piece for crime fiction fans like myself on ‘Plants and murder’; there’s also an examination of Palm Oil production which is *terrifying*; and some disturbing questions about chocolate being ‘food of the gods or product of exploitation’. *Plants in War* ranges from the Wooden Horse of Troy, through ‘Pomegranates, pineapples and grenades’ to conkers being needed to produce acetone to make cordite for WW2 munitions! *Plants in Peril* has heart-breaking descriptions of diseases caused by fungi (we may lose our supermarket staple – bananas), nematodes, spittlebugs, moths and, unfortunately, us. *Plants and Money* looks at the 17C Tulipmania in Holland, ‘India and its evil hedge’ (a vile product of a savage colonial salt tax) and the strange part of Nutmeg in the history of New York. *Plants and Places* gives a new look, but fairly sedate, at our national flowers, but goes on to ‘The Big Apple and its naughty roots’. *Eating and Drinking* is of course a most enjoyable section with the rather dark facts of ‘Drink and drugs in battle’ balanced by ‘Buck’s Fizz and its secret’. *Plants and Societies* has coffee as a social bond, Constance Spry arranging flowers, ‘Plants and children’s names’ (a hilarious list, specially the boys’) and ‘Plants as insults’ which I intend to use as often as possible. *Plants on Parade* is really good on both botanic gardens and famous private gardens, with a section on ‘Flowery meadows

old and new’ which is a subject close to all of us. *Plants and the Arts* features Shakespeare, Thoreau, Enid Blyton, Rachel Carson and Ovid, among others, and is followed by *Art, Architecture and Decoration*. This contains a wonderful composite plate where a Green Man seems to look down on an Iznik tile showing Ottoman tulips and the Canterbury Bell Fairy smiles shyly beside a priceless jade carving of a chrysanthemum. *Screen, Stage and Sound Studios* has a treasure for every taste – the great Spaghetti Harvest joke, TV gardening, telly cooks and vegetables. ‘Plants in Music’ mentions Robbie Burns, the Carter family, Harry Belafonte, Dolly Parton, Tom Jones, Little Richard and W.B. Yeats – my kind of mix! Finally, there is an inspiring look forward – scary but hopeful, titled *What of the Future?*

This book is marvellously entertaining – one can dip in at any time and always find a plum, but also profoundly thought-provoking. Today I started the Autumn Week hunt before settling to write this, and found I was looking at every flower and field and hedge with more attention, wondering about their meaning and history. A local scrap of old common which always has late-flowering Devil’s-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis* seemed to have added magic and meaning as I dodged the dog messes! This is a wonderful book to go to the top of your ‘presents to self’ list or to give to anyone else. I have the soft-back which is quite fat, but is affordable, has a strong cover and is very nice to handle.

RO FITZGERALD