

## Tara Hill, Gorey, Co. Wexford (H12), Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> November

A group of twelve BSBI members gathered at the base of Tara Hill on a bright and exceptionally mild day in November. Paul Green, Vice-county Recorder for Wexford, led the walk for this enthusiastic group. It was particularly nice to have the presence of the BSBI Irish Officer Maria Long. Catriona Brady, Vice-county Recorder for Co. Wicklow, Zoe Devlin, author of *Wildflowers of Ireland*, and Dominic Berridge, Conservation Ranger for south Wexford, were also present.

The purpose of the day was to look for *Hymenophyllum tunbrigense* (Tunbridge Filmy-fern) a small patch of which was last recorded from the western side of Tara Hill by H.G. Cuthbert in 1892 (*Irish Naturalist Journal*, Vol. I, 1892).

Tara Hill is an isolated hill near the Irish Sea coast in North Co. Wexford. Although only 253 metres high, it is prominent in the otherwise flat coastal landscape. Tara Hill is over 400 million years old and was formed from molten rock. The soil on the upper parts is shallow and acidic. The hillside is mostly forested with small areas of heath remaining which is encroached by dense bracken and gorse scrub.

We approached the hill through a small laneway bordered by an old stone wall. As we progressed, Paul Green explained how to distinguish between *Hedera helix* (Common Ivy) and *Hedera hibernica* (Atlantic Ivy). Paula O'Meara gave us the benefit of her expertise in distinguishing ferns particularly *Dryopteris filix-mas* (Male-fern) and *Dryopteris affinis* (Scaly Male-fern) which was recorded as a new record for this hectad.

Continuing our ascent up the hill through an area of felled forestry, the abundance of *Carex binervis* (Green-ribbed Sedge) was noted. Other sedges recorded on the day included *C. demissa* (Common Yellow-sedge), *C. pilulifera* (Pill Sedge), *C. remota* (Remote Sedge) and the occurrence of *C. divulsa* subsp. *divulsa* (Grey Sedge) was noted as being the 4th record for the hectad. Self-sown forestry species recorded included *Abies procera* (Noble Fir), *Picea sitchensis* (Sitka Spruce) and *Pinus contorta* (Lodgepole Pine). Several new records for the hectad were recorded on the day including *Sagina filicaulis* (Upright Pearlwort), *Hedera helix* (Common Ivy) and the introduced species *Anemanthele lessoniana* (New Zealand Wind-grass), *Juncus tenuis* (Slender Rush) and *Lunaria annua* (Honesty). Also notable was the occurrence of *Arenaria leptoclados* (Slender Sandwort) being the second record for the hectad. Two clumps of *Dryopteris aemula* (Hay-scented Buckler Fern), which is generally scarce in the county, were spotted on the edge of the forest track. *Deschampsia flexuosa* (Wavy Hair-grass) was recorded as the only monad in the hectad. This species is recorded from just 18 tetrads in the county.

Both *Ulex gallii* (Western Gorse) and *Ulex europaeus* (Gorse) occur on Tara Hill and distinguishing these two species was a topic for discussion as we made our way up the hill. Rocky outcrops with potential for *H. tunbrigense* were a target and a lot of scrambling high and low was undertaken throughout the day in search of the elusive species.

We stopped for lunch by the side of the forest track with a nice view of Annagh Hill and Croghan Mountain in the distance. Continuing on, we were graced with another fantastic view south down the coast towards Cahore Point. Here on the rocky crags, *Sedum anglicum* (English Stonecrop) was recorded as the only monad in the hectad.

On our descent back towards the car park, we stopped to admire two specimens of *Malus sylvestris* (Crab Apple) in fruit, by a small car park. Cuttings were taken by Faith Wilson to send to the Seed Savers Association of this valuable heritage species.

In all, 174 records were recorded for the day but despite the best efforts of members, braving the reaches of brambles, bracken and gorse to reach those tempting rocky outcrops in search for *H. tunbrigense*, we did not re-locate it. However, this disappointment did not deter from a most enjoyable and informative day being had by all.

Deborah D'Arcy