

Caoimhe Muldoon (1973 – 2014)

The botanical community was shocked and saddened to learn of the death of Caoimhe Muldoon, who passed away in her sleep on 27th October 2014. Caoimhe had just recently joined the BSBI Committee for Ireland, and had taken on the role of Irish Field Meetings Secretary. She was a conservation biologist with expertise in both conservation genetics and field ecology. She had a particular interest in rare and endangered species. In recent years she had branched out into the worlds of birds, environmental policy and science communication.

Caoimhe studied at the University of Ulster, Coleraine (1994-1999), where she was awarded a BSc (Hons.) in Biological Science (Applied Ecology), and a Masters of Research. After a period working mainly in consultancy (during which time she also earned a Diploma in Environmental Impact Assessment), she came to Trinity College Dublin in 2004 to study for a PhD under the supervision of Professor Steve Waldren and Dr Deirdre Lynn. Her topic was the conservation biology of *Saxifraga hirculus* (Marsh Saxifrage). This rare species is considered threatened at a Europe-wide level and is protected by law. It is one of Ireland's rarest vascular plants. Caoimhe threw herself into her studies, squelching through the bogs and flushes of Connaught and Ulster in search of this elusive but beautiful plant. She gathered and analysed ecological, phenological and pollination data, and she also elucidated the genetic relationships between *S. hirculus* populations. She was working towards publications from her PhD work and had produced both a Monitoring Protocol and a Species Action Plan for the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

In the course of her PhD study, Caoimhe took a maternity break from research, and for a while her little son Oscar was a familiar visitor to the Botany Department, as well as to the bogs of Mayo, where she brought him along on fieldwork trips. Sadly, Oscar passed

away whilst still a toddler, a most traumatic experience for his loving parents. Later, she and her husband courageously spoke about their loss, notably in an *Irish Times* article 'Living with the grief of sudden infant death'.

Caoimhe pluckily returned to work on her PhD, which was completed in 2011. After that, she began to branch out. She worked as a mediator in science communication in the Science Gallery, and on environmental policy with An Taisce, the National Trust for Ireland, during which time she wrote an innovative and colourful information booklet *Nature's way – pollinators in Ireland*. She contributed to studies on the Lycopodiaceae at the National Botanic Gardens and developed a 'Biodiversity Audiotour' for Dublin at the Trinity Centre for Biodiversity Research (<http://www.tcd.ie/tcbr/biodiversity-audiotour/>), something which saw her featured on the Six One News.

She indulged two of her passions, nature and hiking, when she worked as a field ecologist surveying upland habitats with BEC Consultants. It was during this time that she made one of her most exciting finds, the discovery of *Saxifraga hirculus* in Co. Sligo, at three sites in the Ox Mountains, chronicled in the latest issue of the *Irish Naturalists' Journal* (Muldoon *et al.*, 2014). Also of note was her involvement in the re-discovery in Ireland of the relict moss *Meesia triquetra*. This is among the most significant bryophyte discoveries in Ireland of recent decades (Hodd *et al.*, in prep.). In June 2013 she began work with BirdWatch Ireland. She greatly enjoyed her work with BirdWatch, illustrating the breadth of her commitment to natural history and conservation, and her ability to contribute across a broad spectrum. Caoimhe had, just weeks before her death, accepted a permanent job as Ecologist with the Forest Service, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, a position in which she would, no doubt, have excelled and flourished.

In the BSBI, she had only begun in her role as the Field Meetings Secretary, but she had previously had significant input to the Irish scene through being an active member, through supporting the Irish Officer, and through her involvement with the Irish Facebook page. Her enthusiasm for nature was infectious, and her skills as a presenter and scientist were acknowledged by all who saw her address to the Irish BSBI Members Conference in March 2014 (for copy of presentation see: <http://www.bsbi.org.uk/ireland.html>).

Caoimhe was beautiful, with a classical west-of-Ireland face that called to mind a gentler version of Granuaile or Queen Maeve, and a lilting voice to match. She was a free spirit and a breath of fresh air. She was a friend to many; she was much loved, and will be fondly remembered.

We extend our sympathies to Caoimhe's family and friends, and in particular to her parents Pat and Damhnait, her sister Triona, and her brothers Ros and Brian.

DR MARIA P. LONG AND PROF DANIEL L. KELLY

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Caoimhe Muldoon with unidentified grass on BSBI outing, Co. Antrim, July 2014.

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Caoimhe Muldoon. Photo J. Stout © 2010