

## Co. Down recording in 2014

Monthly field meetings were organised in support of the proposed flora of Co. Down and to make records under the new date-class. Thanks go to John Wann, Ian McNeill and David McCormick who sent records to me.

Several visits were made to the coast at Tyrella, Ballykinler and Inner Dundrum Bay in March, April and early May to record *Cochlearia* taxa. Unfortunately, winter storms had done a lot of damage to the upper shore, particularly along the Ballykinler dunes where erosion was severe. More positively, *Vicia lathroides* and *Erodium lebelli* were re-found at Ballykinler.

The first of the monthly field meetings took place at the end of April at Tyrella. Species recorded included *Vicia lathroides* and *Thalictrum minus*. Paul Hackney also found *Taraxacum oxoniense* and *Equisetum variegatum*. Also in April, *Soleirolia soleirolii* was found in Dundrum village, *Erysimum cheiri* was seen in full flower on a demesne wall by Warrenpoint and *Crassula tillaea* was found by the entrance to Murlough House. The latter species is now spread widely along tracks and paths within the Murlough reserve.

Recorded within the Murlough NNR in early May were *Vicia lathroides*, *Teesdalia nudicaulis*, *Filago minima*, *Cynoglossum officinale* and *Erodium lebelli*. Killard NNR was visited in late May. *Urtica urens* was found on the upper shore at the entrance to the reserve and *Blysmus rufus* and *Oenanthe lachenalii* by rock pools to the east. A new location, containing at least a hundred spikes, was found for *Ophioglossum vulgatum*. This was particularly pleasing as the plants had been missing from the previously known locations within the reserve for some years despite repeated searches. Healthy populations of *Orchis morio*, *Dactylorhiza incarnata coccinea* and *Neottia ovata* were also seen.

In early June, an attempt was made to find *Vaccinium oxycoccos* at Cluntagh Bog, its last station in Co. Down and last recorded by Ian Rippey in 2010. This was frustrated by a new, deep, wide water channel dug on three sides of the site with apparent intention of draining the bog. It would be most unfortunate if *V. oxycoccos* were to disappear from Down, but it is not a protected species and subsequently an email to NIEA produced no response. While trying to gain access, I recorded *Dryopteris borreeri*, *Ulmus plotii*, and *Alchemilla xanthochlora*.

In mid-June, an invitation to record at Castle Espie with the Belfast Naturalists Field Club (BNFC) produced *Atriplex littoralis* and *Geranium lucidum* from the salt marsh and adjoining bank to the west. Within the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) grounds were *Silene dioica*, *Malva moschata*, *Dactylorhiza purpurella* and *Primula veris*. Several *Bromus erectus* plants were recorded growing on the sea-bank outside the grounds on the following day. Part of the site was landscaped three years ago, and overlies possibly the only chalk exposure in Down. Native species have been reintroduced, and landscaping has produced some anomalies, for example *Bolboschoenus maritimus* growing at some distance from the shore in a field dominated by *Holcus lanatus*. Work remains to be done on the conifer plantation and wet woodland. The WWT have undertaken a very positive conservation initiative, and it will be most interesting to see how the site matures.

In early August, I walked along the Carrick Little track into the Annalong valley in the south Mourne. Fields on both sides of the track were suffering intensive agricultural development and sub-soil slurry injections were in progress. This development was taking place in the fields below Slieve

Binnian, within the Mourne AONB, and the contrast between brilliant green rye-grass and the muted native flora was unpleasant and by implication, appalling in its effects on wild plants and animals. Subsequently I wrote to the responsible government minister, supplying photographs of the damage, and the response revealed that the designation provides absolutely no protection for the natural environment. Further on, the part of the Annalong valley I was walking through suffered a major fire two years ago and at the time there were reports that the fire had penetrated the peat. As I walked past this area, I noted that on the drier ground, only the heathers were recovering, and other plants appeared diminished. At Blue Lough I saw that someone had apparently attempted to widen the drainage channel, but seemed to have given up due to the depth of Sphagnum. On climbing Slievelamagan, I noted considerable erosion of the peat, probably due to sheep grazing. However, the walk did produce *Campanula rotundifolia* at 610m, *Selaginella selaginoides* and *Agrostis vinealis*. Several days later, walking on the Brandy Pad, past the Castles to the south of Slieve Commedagh, I found several plants of *Juniperus communis nana* and on Cove Mountain, *Salix herbacea*.

Also in early August, a walk by the shore at Cunningburn in the north of Strangford Lough produced *Atriplex littoralis* and *Veronica agrestis* and in the middle of the month, *Bromus secalinus* was found by Simmy Island.

A meeting with the BNFC at Kearney in mid-August produced much *Polygonum oxyspermum* and there was some speculation this was increasing. Also found were *Lycium barbarum*, *Saponaria officinalis*, *Juncus ranarius*, *Glaucium flavum*, *Papaver dubium dubium*, *Crambe maritima*, *Crithmum maritimum* and *Mertensia maritima*.

*Selaginella selaginoides*, *Pinguicula lusitanica*, *Achillea ptarmica* and *Equisetum palustre* were found on Slieve Roosley, north of Rostrevor, which was visited in late August.

An overdue visit to Lackan Bog in late August confirmed reports of *Cicuta virosa*, and also produced *Lemna minuta*, *Bidens cernua*, *Hypericum humifusum* and *Utricularia vulgaris* sensu lato.

In early September, Ian McNeill delivered a sample of *Polypogon viridis* he had found growing in plant pot at Ballywalter.

After the BSBI Ireland AGM in mid-September, Jo Whatmough kindly led an excellent meeting at Murlough NNR. *Spergularia rubra* and *Crassula tillaea* were noted growing along the boardwalk from the car park. Flowering *Gentianella campestris* was widespread and a few flowering plants of *Teesdalia nudicaulis* were seen as were dead *Filago minima* stems. A search of the *Botrychium lunaria* site was unproductive, but many typical coastal plants were seen including *Euphorbia portlandica*, *E. paralias* and *Thalictrum minus*. On the following day north of Greencastle, *Atriplex littoralis* was in abundance, there were a few *Urtica urens* plants and a single *Lamium amplexicaule*.

In early October part of the Mount Stewart estate that is not normally open to visitors, produced *Heracleum mantegazzianum*, *Erinus alpinus*, *Oxalis corniculata*, *Ruscus aculeatus* and *Lemna minuta*.