

## Wigtownshire (Vice-county 74) Botany Newsletter May 2021

I moved to Newton Stewart with my wife early in 2019. We had visited Wigtownshire a few times over the years, but I certainly did not consider myself an expert on its flora. So, when the BSBI Recorder for the area, Dr Alan Silverside, stood down from the role in 2020, I was surprised that it was suggested that I might take over. Due to my limited local knowledge I waited to see whether anyone else put themselves forward before I made a decision. No-one did and I therefore volunteered, feeling that Wigtownshire needed someone acting as BSBI Recorder, however new to the area.

I do, however, have experience of being a BSBI Recorder, having filled the role for 23 years in Leicestershire and Rutland (VC55). So at least I should know what to do. I am not a trained botanist though. I first became interested in plants and other wildlife as a boy and later worked in nature conservation for almost 30 years. I tried hard during that time to use plant records to further conservation work, for example through nature reserve and other site management plans, as well as planning applications, biodiversity action plans and such like.

### Plants in gardens

Of course, Covid-19 restrictions made it difficult at times to explore and record plants in 2020. In the spring I walked from our house in Newton Stewart into the surrounding hills and woods and I also surveyed the wild plants in our garden, contributing to surveys carried out by both the BSBI and the South West Scotland Local Records Centre. At one time recording plants in gardens was frowned upon by some and maybe it still is. You do have to be careful, because it is not always easy to distinguish between those species that found their way there naturally from those that were introduced by people. Gardens clearly are wildlife habitats though, so they cannot be ignored.

We have a large garden and in it I found 81 species of wild plant. That might sound like a lot, but many of them are species that most gardeners would consider unwelcome weeds. So, which wild plants are a particular problem in our garden? Procumbent Pearlwort *Sagina procumbens*, Creeping Buttercup *Ranunculus repens*, Welsh Poppy *Meconopsis cambrica* and Lesser Celandine *Ficaria verna* are a real pain, with Ivy *Hedera helix*, Hairy Bitter-cress *Cardamine hirsuta*, Thale Cress *Arabidopsis thaliana*, dandelion *Taraxacum* species, Annual Meadow-grass *Poa annua*, Ivy-leaved Speedwell *Veronica hederifolia*, Sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* and Bramble *Rubus fruticosus* aggregate also causing us a lot of work. This is a bit subjective though. When we moved in two years ago there was only one wild Foxglove *Digitalis purpurea* plant and one Lady's-smock *Cardamine pratensis*, now there are dozens of both. If I didn't like these plants I would call them weeds and dig them up, but I cannot bring myself to do that unless it is essential. The increase in Lady's-smock is a consequence of our much reduced grass mowing regime, also leading to a big increase in other grassland plants, such as Common Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, Lesser Stitchwort *Stellaria graminea* and Ox-eye Daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*. It looks as though we may be over-run!

In addition to the wild plants, we have about 300 different varieties of plants that we or the previous owners planted. Almost all of these behave themselves, but there are one or two that are a problem, seeding themselves around in a way that makes them difficult to control. Top of the list is the hybrid between our native Bluebell and Spanish Bluebell *Hyacinthoides x massartiana*. This plant is so vigorous that elimination may be necessary. This is easier said than done though. We did manage to eradicate the other major problem here, the attractive, but extremely invasive garden variety of Yellow Archangel *Lamiastrum galeobdolon* subsp.

*argentatum*. Both of these plants are unfortunately established in the woods in and around Newton Stewart, forming dense patches that threaten native species.

Very few of the wild plants in our garden are unusual ones. I discovered one specimen of Swine-cress *Lepidium coronopus*, an archaeophyte (ancient introduction) included on the Scottish Biodiversity List, in a border and a few individuals of Rat's-tail Fescue *Vulpia myuros* (Locally Scarce in VC74) and Field Madder *Sherardia arvensis* (Locally Scarce in VC74 and also included on the Scottish Biodiversity List) on a steep-sloping and free-draining gravel area.

In addition to the flowering plants and ferns, I have found 25 species of mosses and liverworts in our garden. The previous owner told us that he had 'given up' on controlling moss. Despite that there was not much to see when we moved in, apart from abundant Springy Turf-moss *Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus* in our front lawn. Quite soon, though, we started to see a change. For example, I only found one patch of the Common Smoothcap *Atrichum undulatum* to start with, but it rapidly spread. The boundary walls were colonised by various mosses including the distinctive Woolly Fringe-moss *Racomitrium lanuginosum*, which also covers the megalithic tomb in nearby Knockman Wood.

One of the features of our new property that we disliked most was a huge expanse of dazzlingly bright granite chippings in the front garden. It soon became clear that someone had probably been spraying the chippings, because within a few months mosses started to appear and now there are substantial patches of Juniper Haircap *Polytrichum juniperinum* and Bank Haircap *Polytrichastrum formosum* present. Mosses also grow on the house and garage roofs. I have lost track of the number of salesmen who have knocked on our door, even in lockdown, offering to get rid of the moss, at a considerable price. I am hoping for more though, not less, courtesy of the generous number of days a year that rain falls in this area.

Elsewhere, Alan Wake found Navelwort *Umbilicus rupestris* in his garden at Port William (see photo). This is a remarkable record, being only the second for VC74, with the first way back in 1836. Navelwort is a striking fleshy looking plant of rocks and walls that does occur elsewhere on the west coast of Scotland. The mild climate of the Wigtownshire coast would seem ideal for it, so it is surprising that we had to wait such a long time for another record



Navelwort *Umbilicus rupestris* at Port William © Alan Wake

## Away from the gardens

Port William is located on the coastline of Luce Bay, home to a number of notable plants. While looking, successfully, for the beautiful and Nationally Scarce Oysterplant *Mertensia maritima* on vegetated coastal shingle at Port William, I was surprised to find large clumps of the equally attractive Wood Vetch *Vicia sylvatica* in the same habitat, not to mention a basking Adder. Where I used to live in the English East Midlands Wood Vetch was a rare plant confined to ancient coppiced woodland. This is an example of how difficult it can be to determine which flowering plants and ferns are good ancient woodland indicator species. They vary from place to place and, in my experience, few are totally reliable.

The Monreith Estate, behind Luce Bay, holds a number of naturalized non-native plants. Amongst those that Alan Wake found in 2020 was Purple Toothwort *Lathraea clandestina*. All but one of the six first records for VC74, listed below, are of plants that are not native to the area. About 23% of the plant species recorded in VC74 are non-natives and this number will inevitably increase. The proportion of non-natives is still much less than in Leicestershire and Rutland, however, where I considered about 43% to be of this status.

The only new record in 2020 of a native species was Elongated Sedge *Carex elongata*, found by Jim McCleary at Glenhapple, close to the River Cree. This Nationally Scarce plant has long been known from the other side of the river, in VC73. Both populations are within the RSPB Wood of Cree nature reserve.

## First records for VC74

**Mexican Fleabane** *Erigeron karvinskianus* - Port William NX3443, 8/4/20 (AW).

**Dark Mullein** *Verbascum nigrum* – Newton Stewart NX4164, 25/7/20, one plant in flower on rough ground by river, MJ.

**Hedgerow Crane's-bill** *Geranium pyrenaicum* – West Barr NX3245, 6/5/20, several plants in 2 places on a scruffy verge off the A747, perhaps arising from tipped garden waste, AW.

**Rauli** *Nothofagus alpina* (*N. nervosa*) – Glenrazie Wood NX3769, 8/8/20, 3 apparently naturally regenerated 1-2m high saplings near burn, MJ.

**Thorow-wax** *Bupleurum rotundifolium* – Newton Stewart NX41256508, 12/10/20, 2 plants in flower next to a wooden seat by the riverside path, with Honesty *Lunaria annua* and other non-natives, presumably introduced, MJ.

**Elongated Sedge** *Carex elongata* – Glenhapple NX3771, 2020, close to west bank of River Cree, near to known population on east bank in RSPB Wood of Cree reserve, JMc.

## Other selected records

**Pyramidal Orchid** *Anacamptis pyramidalis* – Auchenmalg NX254513, 25/7/20, 3 spikes in sandy grassland at back of beach, threatened by car parking, AW (LS).

**Bur Chervil** *Anthriscus caucalis* – Port of Cunan and track down to it NX418367, 6/6/20, 25-50 plants at least over 50m at edge of cereal field (probably barley, AW (LR).

**Sea Wormwood** *Artemisia maritima* – Dunahaskel NX119314, 2020, NC; Sliddery Point NX48544400, 3/11/20, ca 14 plants/clumps in small area on rocks close to high tide line, MJ (LS).

**Purple Milk-vetch** *Astragalus danicus* – Burrow Head area NX4434, 9/7/20 (AW); Isle of Whithorn NX481366, 13/6/20, AW; Mull of Galloway NX15553035, 9/7/20, locally frequent in cliff top grassland in one area, MJ (Sco/GB: EN/LS).



Purple Milk-vetch *Astragalus danicus* at Burrow Head © Alan Wake

**Lesser Water-plantain** *Baldellia ranunculoides* – Corsewall Point NW98297269, 14/8/20, several plants in flush with *Parnassia palustris*, MJ (GB: NT/LS).

**Hybrid St. John's-wort** *Hypericum x desetangsii* – Port William NX3443, 8/7/20, AW.

**Golden-samphire** *Limbarda crithmoides (Inula crithmoides)* – Lagnagatchie, Mull of Galloway NX144303, 15/6/20, on cliffs, AW (Sco/NS/LS).

**Lax-flowered Sea-lavender** *Limonium humile* – Innerwell NX4749, NX4649 & NX4650, 9/9/20, saltmarsh, MJ; Isle of Whithorn, Stinking Port NX4736, 15/9/20, AW; Luce Sands, Piltanton Burn area NX1855, 1/10/20, AW; Port of COUNAN NX41033638, 14/7/20, several plants in saltmarsh, MJ; Rigg Bay NX4844 & NX4744, 16/7/20, frequent in saltmarsh on N side of bay, several plants on S side, MJ (NS).

**Irish Sea-lavender** *Limonium recurvum subsp. humile* – Lagnagatchie, Mull of Galloway SSSI NX144303, 15/6/20, on cliff, AW; Mull of Galloway NX15503035, 9/7/20, locally frequent on cliffs, MJ (NR; GB: VU; LR).

**Oysterplant** *Mertensia maritima* – Auchenmalg shore NX250514, 2/6/20, 7 plants, AW; Clone Burn area near Port William NX3344, 3/5/20, AW; Garheugh Port & Rocks NX267501, 31/5/20, AW; Logan Fishpond NX091413, 2020, NC; Philip & Mary near Port William NX3245, 6/5/20, AW; Port William beach NX335445, 2/7/20, several large patches, MJ; St. Helena Island NX190556, 25/6/20, AW (NS; GB: NT; LS).

**Spiny Restharrow** *Ononis spinosa* – Isle of Whithorn NX480365, 13/6/20, AW (Sco; LR).

**Ivy Broomrape** *Orobanche hederæ* – Port Castle Bay NX424359, 24/6/20, 2 spikes on cliffs, AW (Sco/LR).



Ivy Broomrape *Orobancha hederæ* at Port Castle Bay © Alan Wake

**Purple Oxytropis** *Oxytropis halleri* – Lagnagatchie, Mull of Galloway NX1436030410, 15/6/20, one possibly 2 plants on cliffs, within 6 feet of being grazed by marauding sheep, AW (Sco/NR/LR).

**Common Millet** *Panicum miliaceum* – Port William NX3443, 6/9/20, 2 plants, one in High Street and the other in a garden; 2<sup>nd</sup> VC74 record, AW.

**Hairy Buttercup** *Ranunculus sardous* – Baldoon Airfield NX4253, 26/6/20, locally abundant in bare areas within wheat and rape crop at side of old concrete runway; a rare plant in Scotland, AW (Sco/LR).

**Knotted Pearlwort** *Sagina nodosa* – Carsenestock NX441619, 26/8/20, frequent to abundant on bare ground on forest track, DH (LR).

**Common Glasswort** *Salicornia europaea* – Innerwell NX4749 & NX4649, 9/9/20, saltmarsh, MJ; Rigg Bay NX4844, 16/7/20, saltmarsh, MJ (LR).

**Glasswort sp.** *Salicornia* sp. – Luce Sands, Piltanton Burn area, NX1855, 1/10/20, AW.

**Grey Club-rush** *Schoenoplectus tabernaemontani* – Wigtown, Martyr's Stake area NX4355, 26/8/20, freshwater marsh at top of saltmarsh, DH & MJ (LR).

**Annual Knawel** *Scleranthus annuus* – Craignarget near Auchenmalg NX255518, NX256520 & NX257526, 18/7/20, AW; New Luce NX192649, 29/7/20, one plant on track, MJ (Sco/GB: EN).

**Lesser Skullcap** *Scutellaria minor* – Glenrazie Wood NX36516897, 28/7/20, several plants in ditch next to forest road, MJ (LR).

**Hybrid Woundwort** *Stachys x ambigua* – Wigtown riverside circuit NX4354, 26/8/20, on grassy bank, DH & MJ.

**Bladderwort** *Utricularia* sp. – Dernaglar Loch NX2658, 7/8/20, MJ; Loch Derry NX2573, 24/7/20, MJ.

**Bithynian Vetch** *Vicia bithynica* – Port of Counan and track down to it NX414364 & NX413363, 6/6/20, AW (Sco/NS/GB: VU/LR).

**Yellow-vetch** *Vicia lutea* – Auchenmalg NX254513, 25/7/20, several plants on raised area at back of beach, threatened by car parking. Population much reduced since 2019, AW (Sco/NS/GB: NT/LR).

**Wild Pansy *Viola tricolor*** – Torrs Warren area NX142560, 3/8/20, AW; The Bents – head of Luce Bay NX1955, 11/7/20, AW; Torrs Warren NX163556, 18/6/20, AW (Sco/GB: NT/LS).  
**Eelgrass *Zostera marina*** – Loch Ryan, The Wig NX0367, 3/9/20, frequent amongst large quantities of recently washed-up seaweed along several hundred metres of shore, MJ (GB: NT/ LR).

***Zostera marina* var. *stenophylla*** – Loch Ryan, The Wig NX0367, 3/9/20, several plants amongst large quantities of recently washed-up seaweed along several hundred metres of shore, MJ.

### **Key to contributors**

Nic Coombey (NC), David Hawker (DH), Michael Jeeves (MJ), Jim McCleary (JMc), Alan Wake (AW).

### **Key to plant status**

Sco – Scottish Biodiversity List

NR – Nationally Rare

NS – Nationally Scarce

GB: EN – GB Red List (Endangered)

GB: VU – GB Red List (Vulnerable)

GB: NT – GB Red List (Near Threatened)

LR – Locally Rare in Wigtownshire (1-3 sites)

LS – Locally Scarce in Wigtownshire (4-10 sites)

I have written the text of a Wigtownshire page for the BSBI website, briefly describing the vice-county and its flora. It can be found at [www.bsbi.org.uk/Wigtownshire](http://www.bsbi.org.uk/Wigtownshire). I would be happy to try and answer any queries on this or other matters related to Wigtownshire's flora and especially glad to receive any records that readers might consider of interest. My thanks to those who contributed records in 2020.

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