

Dumfries Botany Group meeting at Caerlaverock 17 June 2021

A maximum of 6 people from 6 households were allowed to meet due to covid restrictions. A small group of us met up with a couple of the NNR Reserve staff at the Castle Corner car park in the morning. The weather was dry. High tide was after 17:00 and was very low and not covering the merse.

Caerlaverock NNR is a large 8000ha area mostly of mud and merse that supports the large flocks of wintering wildfowl and waders in the Autumn and Winter. The Solway probably has the largest extent of merse in Scotland and a good part of it is in the NNR. The merse here is grazed by cattle and sheep which helps keep it in a condition that supports geese grazing in the winter.

We walked along the path from the car park recording all plants found in NY0265 which includes the old woodland south of Caerlaverock Castle, the back of the merse and the flooders, an area formerly enclosed by sea wall and 50 years ago growing cereal crops but now subject to tidal inundation on the highest tides and a brackish swamp.

The mornings target species was to find **Holy Grass**, *Hierochloe odorata*, known to grow at the back of the merse. There was plenty else to see as the path meanders along the line of transition from fresh to marine and open merse to woodland.



Holy Grass Caerlaverock

In the woodland there are some venerable **Pedunculate oaks**, *Quercus robur* that have developed since the Castle ceased to be the strategic fortress guarding the Nith. There were also plants indicative of long stable woodland conditions such as: **Remote Sedge**, *Carex remota*; **Smooth-stalked sedge**, *Carex laevigata*; **Common Cow-wheat**, *Melampyrum pratense*; **Enchanters Nightshade**, *Circaea lutitiana*; **Wood Millet**, *Milium effusum*; **Wild Hyacinth**, *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*.

Where the path meets the edge of the merse it runs along a fence that keeps the stock on the merse. Here is a chance to see **Holy Grass** from the path. The bottle green colour of the leaves stand out once you have your eye in and the shiny flower heads stand out when fresh. Once on the merse the stand was measured extending over an area 50m x 30m.

At the Flooders we tried to find the Tubular Water-dropwort without success. But we did see **Lesser Water-parsnip**, *Berula erecta*; **Gypsywort**, *Lycopus europaeus*; **Northern Marsh Orchid**, *Dactylorhiza purpurea*; **Fat Duckweed**, *Lemna gibba*; **False Fox Sedge**, *Carex otrubae*; **Celery-leaved Buttercup**, *Ranunculus sceleratus*; The two latter are coastal plants in Dumfriesshire.

After lunch we met up with Adam Murphy, NNR manager and a colleague from WWT who accompanied us in the afternoon walk out across the merse. Crossing the merse is always tricky as you need to circumnavigate the creeks so it was good to have Adams knowledge of the site. The merse is dominated by the same few specialised plants seen around most of the UK coast; **Red Fescue**, *Festuca rubra* and **Common Saltmarsh-grass** *Puccinellia maritima*; **Thrift**, *Armeria maritima*; **Sea Club-rush**, *Bolboschoenus maritimus*; **Sea Arrow-grass**, *Triglochin maritima*; **Parsley Water-dropwort**, *Oenanthe lachenalia*; Out on the bare mud there was early growth of pioneering plants of **Common Glasswort**, *Salicornia europaea* agg and **Annual Sea-blite**, *Suaeda maritima* alongside **Common -Cord-grass**, *Spartina anglica*. The latter appears to be spreading in the lower parts of the merse. One more localised plant was found in the old natterjack pond on the way back. **Beaked Tasselweed**, *Ruppia maritima*.



Early season growth of Glasswort and Annual Sea-blite Caerlaverock