

Dumfriesshire Botany Group at Carnshalloch 8 August 2021



The group met at the listed Carnshalloch House built in 1759 for Alexander Jonhstone a chemist then working in London. It is now a ruin in bad need of care. However the current owners have not been able to agree a planned redevelopment as yet. We parked in the fishermens car park also used by local walkers. It rained for the first hour and then was dry for the rest of the day.

There were 8 of us. Our main objective was to look at the riverside, oxbows and islands in this part the river Nith where it has a broad floodplain. This has been substantially altered by flood banks and drainage and is quite heavily stocked with cattle. However it is still subject to winter flooding and shifts in gravel banks leaving suitable habitat for an interesting flora.

Once we crossed the lake Burn, the main drainage channel for the Kirkton area and now deeply incised we were able to follow an oxbow out to the riverside. We crossed the Lake Burn by a bridge. We could see a substantial population of **Unbranched Bur-reed** *Sparganium emersum* in the channel. The first oxbow like many was largely dried out and much cattle trampled. It was typically though lined by willows and these proved to be **Hybrid Crack-willow** *Salix x fragilis var fragilis*. Our understanding of Crack-willow has changed in recent years and we now know this willow is a hybrid between the **White Willow**, *Salix alba* which we saw later on the riverside and **Eastern Crack Willow** *Salix euxina*. We did not see *Salix euxina* but it is present not far down river just north of Dumfries.

When we got to the riverside the recent rain had meant the river was more swollen than we might have expected after the long dry spell. However there was still much shingle exposed and that had lots of willow seedlings and **Creeping Yellow-cress** *Rorippa sylvestris*. **Wood Club-rush** *Scirpus sylvaticus* was amongst the taller vegetation with things like **Keeled Garlic** *Allium carinatum* and the widely naturalised **Dame's-violet** *Hesperis matronalis*. We walked north along the bank and then onto one of the islands. The channel separating the island was shallow so easily crossed.

In the channel there was a small stand of **Grey Club-rush** *Schoenoplectus tabernaemontani*. This is distinguished from **Common Club-rush** given its blue green colour and having widely papillose glumes and two styles sticking out of the glumes. Both are rare in the County. Grey Club-rush being

found in a few places along the coast and Common Club-rush at Lochmaben and Loch Urr only. So it was a surprise to find the former here.

The Island is fairly stable and has a mature collection of willows including **White Willow** *Salix alba*, **Purple Willow** *Salix purpurea* and **Grey Willow** *Salix cinerea ssp. oleifolia* and several that look like hybrids. On the open shingle were a few plants of **Lesser Swine-cress** *Lepidium didymium* and in wet pools **Fat Duckweed** *Lemna gibba* which is now being seen more frequently. We had lunch here before walking back to the river bank and going further up river. There was a deep channel between the bank and the second island so we instead explored an area fenced off from stock. Here while calves could get in the cattle were kept out and so the vegetation in the oxbow was mostly intact. The best things here were the sedges. There were tussocks of a green leaved species that turned out to be **Water Sedge** *Carex aquatilis*, both **Bottle Sedge** *Carex rostrata* and **Bladder Sedge** *Carex vesicaria* and what looks like the hybrid between these two (not appearing to have set seed). This awaits formal confirmation. There was also **Nodding Bur-marigold** *Bidens cernua*.



Grey Club-rush Carnshalloch

Overall a good selection of things with 173 taxa seen in the one monad with a few additional things seen around Carnshalloch House.

Chris Miles