

## Montgomeryshire (vc47) - Flora Group Outings in 2021

We had six outings in 2021 but numbers were limited on the first couple due to Covid restrictions.

**Derwenlas 17 May** – the plan was three-fold: to look at some semi-improved acid grassland to see what we could find, to visit a small boggy area but most of all to refresh our botanical brains after a long break. We found Early Hair-grass (*Aira praecox*), English Stonecrop (*Sedum anglicum*), Parsley-piert (*Aphanes arvensis* agg.), Sheep's sorrel (*Rumex acetosella*) and Common Mouse-ear Hawkweed (*Pilosella officinarum*) on the more thin-soiled areas, all typical of NVC U1 acid grassland but the more interesting winter-annual sub-community requires south-facing slopes and dry, shallow, drought-labile soils and rock outcrops mostly found further east in the County. The plant of the day was Spring Sedge (*Carex caryophylla*) with its yellow, candle-like male inflorescence – sheets of it on the common land. Although early in the year, a small bog (discovered on a 2012 outing) produced: Water Purslane (*Lythrum portula*), Marsh St John's-wort (*Hypericum elodes*), Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*), Many-stalked Spike-rush (*Eleocharis multicaulis*), and Bog Pimpernel (*Lysimachia tenella*). Thanks to John Poland's vegetative key, the latter could be confidently identified by the small red-black glands along the leaf margins below. On the damper slopes behind the bog we saw the distinctive angular leaves of Ivy-leaved Bellflower (*Wahlenbergia hederacea*) very close to its first recorded sighting near Machynlleth. On the way back, a small, wooded valley filled with Bluebells gave a real sense that Spring had arrived.

**Breiddens/Rodney's Pillar 27 May** – this aimed to look at a variety of species in the Forest, on Rodney's Pillar and in a forest pond. We were unable to refind Narrow Bitter-cress (*Cardamine impatiens*) but did find several good stands of Oak Fern (*Gymnocarpium*

*dryopteris*) on a shady track bank. Despite it being late Spring, we were still (just) able to see many of the U1 Winter Annual sub-community on the grassy slopes and rocky ledges below Rodney's Pillar: Upright Chickweed (*Moenchia erecta*), Little Mouse-ear (*Cerastium semidecandrum*), Changing Forget-me-not (*Myosotis discolor*), Common Whitlowgrass (*Erophila verna* s.s.), Common Stork's-bill (*Erodium cicutarium*) and Shepherd's Cress (*Teesdalia nudicaulis*). Meadow saxifrage (*Saxifraga granulata*) was flowering in short turf on the SE side of the Pillar (the only extant site in the County) and Shaggy Mouse-ear (*Pilosella peletariana* ssp *subpeletariana*) flowering profusely on rocky crags; a speciality of the Breiddens and the only known site in the British Isles. It can be distinguished by shorter stolons ending in a leafy rosette rather than slender elongated ones with lots of spaced-out leaves.



Shepherd's-cress



Shaggy Mouse-ear



Meadow saxifrage

Two previously known hawkweeds were seen: Stiff-haired Hawkweed (*Hieracium lasiophyllum*) on the crags and Long-bracted Hawkweed (*H. cinderella*) on wooded track banks. A patch of Common Rock-rose (*Helianthemum nummularium*) brightened the grassy bank where we had lunch. Our visit to the forest pool to confirm Tubular Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe fistulosa*) and Lesser Marshwort (*Heliosciadium inundatum*) was inconclusive, but two of the party revisited in July (during a Field Society outing) and were able to confirm *O. fistulosa*.

**Staylittle 9 June** -the intention was to find Mountain Pansy (*Viola lutea*) in flower and to record along tracks and in wetter areas of a plantation to the NE of Staylittle. Corn Spurrey (*Spergula arvensis*) was growing well by a farm track where hay bales had been stored as we walked to the monad. Reaching higher ground and rougher grazing, Mountain Pansy was scattered across the damper slopes showing a mix of colours. This lovely little plant is characteristic of unimproved hill country in the west of the County and is usually found in NVC U4 in Montgomeryshire but is easily lost to pasture improvement. In the boggy areas there was a good range of sedges as well Common Butterwort (*Pinguicula vulgaris*) and Round-leaved Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*) while a healthy colony of Stag's-horn Clubmoss (*Lycopodium clavatum*) extended along a heathy bank at the plantation's edge. The forestry tracks provided some interest including: Silver Hair-grass (*Aira caryophylla*), Fairy Flax (*Linum catharticum*), Common Centaury (*Centaureum erythraea*) appearing both as juvenile plants and as seed heads, and Intermediate Lady's-mantle (*Alchemilla xanthochlora*) in a damp ditch. A newly emerged Golden-ringed Dragonfly was seen at close quarters pumping up its body and wings. Although good for dragonflies, the wetter (apparently man-made) areas within the plantation did not prove as interesting botanically. Road banks on the return produced Bitter Vetch (*Lathyrus linifolius*), Betony (*Betonica officinalis*), Smith's Pepperwort (*Lepidium heterophyllum*), and Spreading Meadow-grass (*Poa humilis*). Overall, the outing provided a good range of habitats and we heard (and some of us saw) a cuckoo.

**Lake Vyrnwy/Pistyll Rhyd-y-meinciau, Eiddew valley 14 July** -the Vyrnwy visit was not intended as a detailed recording session but was specifically to look at two less familiar sedges close to the lake and to visit a waterfall on the Afon Eiddew. Slender Tufted-sedge (*Carex acuta*) and Elongate sedge (*C. elongata*) were both seen growing in Alder carr at the N end of the lake but unfortunately in a rather midgey location. Moving to the shore the group found Water-purslane (*Lythrum portula*), Alternate-leaved Water-milfoil (*Myriophyllum alternifolium*) and Shoreweed (*Littorella uniflora*) on

the lake margin; all new post-2000 hectad records. Marsh Hawkbeard (*Crepis paludosa*) seems to favour the area and was seen growing close to the lake as well as along the Afon Nadroedd. A small stand of Starry saxifrage (*Micranthus stellaris*) was recorded on the waterfall and two clubmosses close by: Fir Clubmoss (*Huperzia selago*) and Lesser Clubmoss (*Selaginella selaginoides*). A splinter group recording along the Afon Nadroedd found a few scattered plants of Marsh Arrow-grass (*Triglochin palustris*), plus *Selaginella* (as seen in 2020) in a nice flush. Ragged Robin (*Silene flos-cuculi*), three spikes of Northern Marsh Orchid (*Dactylorhiza purpurella*) and Pale sedge (*Carex pallescens*) were nice finds in a Molinia-dominated riverside meadow. The highlight of the day for the more intrepid was climbing the waterfall, Pistyll Rhyd-y-meinciau.



Marsh Hawk's-beard

**Hafren Forest and Nant yr Eira Mine 4 August** – the aim was to record a monad within a conifer plantation and then take a look at a range of ferns growing at an old mine. Following a quiet track on the south side of the Afon Hore “the birders” present were soon hearing Crossbills (those of us unable to distinguish bird-calls were very impressed). The first unusual plant spot was Large-leaved Avens (*Geum macrophyllum*) at the side of the track. This native of N America and NE Asia not only has larger leaves but many achenes (>150) in an ovoid seed head while our native *G. urbanum* has fewer (<150) achenes in a globose head. Over the past few years this species has spread out of Ceredigion and is becoming naturalised on road verges and forest tracks. Every forest track visited this year seems to support Sand Spurrey (*Spergularia rubra*), Colt's-foot (*Tussilago farfara*), New Zealand Willowherb (*Epilobium brunnescens*) and Trailing St John's Wort (*Hypericum humifusum*) and this was no exception. Old mine buildings at Nant yr Eira provided a good “outdoor classroom” for ferns with Green Spleenwort (*Asplenium viride*) a distinctly calcicole species only present here because of the lime mortar on old mine

buildings. Black Spleenwort (*Asplenium adiantum-nigrum*), Wall Rue (*Asplenium ruta-muraria*), Polypody (*Polypodium vulgare*) and Hard Shield-fern (*Polystichium aculeatum*) were also seen. We were unable to re-find Brittle Bladder Fern (*Cystopteris fragilis*) probably due to the recent hot, dry spell but one sharp-eyed member of the group spotted the only clump of Fir Clubmoss (*Huperzia selago*). The route back along the north side of the Afon Hore was pleasant with Sneezewort (*Achillea ptarmica*) and Devils-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*) both flowering. It's been suggested that the scattered Alder Buckthorn (*Frangula alnus*) bushes were probably introduced by a keen lepidopterist who worked for the Forestry Commission (Brimstone butterflies feed on Alder Buckthorn). It's pleasing to see how the riparian corridor in this part of Hafren Forest has been improved by the removal of conifers and the judicious planting of native deciduous trees over recent years.

**Yr Allt Boeth (NW of Pont Llogel) 7 September** - the final outing of 2021 was aimed at monad-recording and took place on one of the hottest days of the year (28°C). Following the Cross-Britain Way we passed some magnificent veteran oaks before meeting the plantation track. This revealed some of the "usual suspects"; Sand Spurrey (*Spergularia rubra*), Trailing St John's Wort (*Hypericum humifusum*), Squirrel-tail Fescue (*Vulpia bromoides*) and Bristle Club-rush (*Isolepis setacea*). A map-reading error took us along the wrong forestry track. However, we were rewarded with a small stream that led to a nice bog with sheets of Cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccus*), abundant Marsh St John's Wort (*Hypericum elodes*) with its peppery-smelling yellow flowers, a small area of Many-stalked Spike-rush (*Eleocharis multicaulis*), and some beautiful orange seed heads of Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*) contrasting with the mauvey-blue of the Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*).



*Devil's-bit Scabious and Bog Asphodel in the bog*

Lunch was taken amongst pillow mounds (old rabbit warrens) at Beddau'r Cewri (Giants' Graves). Some of the keener botanists spent lunch puzzling over an Epilobium found enroute and agreed it was Square-stalked Epilobium (*Epilobium tetragonum*). The route back was botanically less rewarding but had glorious views of the Arans. On such a fine autumn day we also saw a good number of butterflies including Small Copper, Small Heath, Peacock, and Speckled Wood. One of the group was "adopted" by a cute young squirrel that seemed determined to join us even climbing up her leg! The botanical finale was Brittle Bladder fern (*Cystopteris fragilis*) on churchyard steps and a house wall close to our parking (both "old friends"). Botanically, the bog was the highlight of a splendid day finished off by cold, orange ice lollies from the small shop at Llwydiarth (thank you Sue & Lizzie).

*Thanks to everyone who joined us on these outings, spotting plants, birds and wildlife in general. We're already looking forward to the next recording season. If you have any suggestions or requests for 2022 do let Kate and Gill know.*

20 October 2021



*Cranberry, bearing both flowers and fruit, growing on a Sphagnum hummock in the bog*