**A new inland population of *Hierochloe odorata*, (Holy-grass) and other interesting species found along a stretch of the Black Esk in Dumfriesshire in 2018.**

Exhibited. *Hierochloe odorata*, Holy-grass; *Equisetum variegatum* , Variegated Horsetail; *Eleocharis mamillata ssp. austriaca*, Northern Spike Rush; *Salix x laurina* (*Salix cinerea x S. phylicifolia*).

While recording a square including the Castle O’er hill fort (NY2492) on 25th August I noticed that a small corner of the square included part of the Black Esk river. There was an overgrown track that gave access through otherwise dense conifer plantations. This opened onto a steep unstable river bluff and a narrow edge of river bank and flood plain on a bend in the river. The bank had escaped forestry planting while the floodplain had had deciduous species planted which had struggled to thrive. On the floodplain I was attracted by a bright green patch which I expected to be *Carex disticha* (see Fig. 1). Much to my surprise closer inspection showed this to be Holy-grass. It was also present in other patches immediately below the steep slope in total extending for 400m.

During September I made further searches along the river between the Sandyford Bridge and the Black and White Esk confluence a distance of 9km. Three kilometres further up river from the first population, also in an area where plantations have left a narrow strip of river bank and floodplain and grazing has been excluded, further populations of Holy grass were found. Two of these were extensive and paced out at 15m x 40m and 17m x 60m (Fig. 2). The extent of Holy-grass populations mapped to date is shown on Map 1. They are found between 180 and 210m altitude.

Holy-grass has one previously known population in Dumfriesshire, at the back of the merse at Caerlaverock NNR where I found in in 1993. This is in a similar coastal habitat to some of the sites in Kircudbrightshire. This is 35 kilometres from the new population. It is known from only 18 hectads in Britain and 1 in Ireland.

These new inland populations are in a similar situation to those in Selkirkshire where Rod Corner found it on the Ale Water in 1965 and the site on the North Tyne where it was found by Michael Braithwaite in 2004 (Watsonia 25.4 p 423). On the Black Esk the Holy-grass tended to be dominant in patches and not present where taller herbs like *Filipendula* or *Carex actutiformis* were growing.

The lower end of this stretch of the Black Esk and adjacent hill ground was already known to support interesting species. Rod Corner had found *Juncus alpinoarticulatus*, Alpine Rush in 1996 in a small mire 2.5km downstream of the Holy-grass site in Fig 1. This remains its only site in Dumfriesshire. The same site also has *Equisetum variegatum* , Variegated Horsetail at one of only two known sites in the VC.

When the population of Holy-grass in and around Fig. 1 was found a further and larger population of *Equisetum variegatum* , Variegated Horsetail was found on the steep river bluff beside it. While searching the length of the river in September to establish the extent of the Holy-grass two small populations of *Eleocharis mamillata ssp. austriaca*, Northern Spike Rush were found in old oxbows or ditches and two populations of the hybrid willow *Salix x laurina (Salix cinerea x S. phylicifoli*a) forming small copses beside the river.

A more detailed note of the Holy-grass populations found on the Black Esk is in preparation.