

Lanarkshire Botany

Newsletter update, July 2020



2020 - a year no-one could have imagined

Even as late as February this year, when our previous Newsletter was circulated, we had no idea how all-pervasive the impact of COVID-19 would be.

So - first of all, I'm sure I speak for all members of 'Team 77' in wishing everyone continuing safety and good health, and the inner resources to deal with the challenges each of us may have to face. Lockdown, shielding, social distancing, face covering - these are all-too-familiar terms now, each depriving us of social behaviours which used to be as natural as breathing.

The BSBI took the decision early on to cancel all its organised fieldwork, workshops and conferences, and this has recently been reaffirmed as policy until the end of the year. In keeping with that guidance, we had to scrap our normal Outings Programme and all the plans we had for a year's plant recording together.

However, as you'll read below, this has not prevented lots of individual botanical activity from happening - and has even inspired some new projects and ideas.



Cicerbita macrophylla (Common Blue-sowthistle)

Lockdown and the 'Home Monad'

When faced with isolation, frustration, boredom - what can a field botanist do?

The answer is to recognise a golden opportunity to explore the plants of the immediate vicinity in detail. For some years, we have been inviting people to record the plants which grow 'as wild' in the map square in which they live - their 'home monad'. So, in various locations across the county, both urban and rural, lists are now being compiled throughout the season.

Visiting and revisiting the same places month by month can reveal the extent of change and the true number of species which appear in succession - something a single recording visit could never achieve. Careful observation also reveals what a plant looks like in infancy, in maturity, and in decline, thereby greatly improving identification skills.

Judging by feedback, this exercise is already producing a few surprises, including one or two species new to Lanarkshire! When the lists are all sent in later in the year, it will give a boost to our understanding of local plant distribution.

It's not too late for you to begin compiling a list for your own local map square. Write down everything you can find, making sure every find is clearly dated, and make a note of the exact location of anything unusual. You are welcome to send photos of anything you are uncertain about. There are probably well over 100 species growing within a few hundred yards of your front door!

Detective work in the Clyde Valley

In April, a lady was taking her daily exercise on the Clyde Walkway path at Crossford when she noticed a flower she did not recognise. She took a picture of it and asked around among her friends if anyone knew what it was. One person said she couldn't name it, but had seen it before on a friend's ground near Lanark. Through a colleague, the picture found its way to me and it was quite startling!



Lathraea clandestina (Purple Toothwort) at Crossford

This plant is something of a celebrity in Lanarkshire, established in a single, small colony on a dark, damp, seldom-visited bank at Glasgow Botanic Gardens for many decades. But to find it growing in the wild is truly remarkable. The challenge now was to find out how it may have got there . . .

Through co-operation with several people, I phoned the landowner near Lanark and the story goes like this:

Some 20 years ago, he obtained a packet of seed for Purple Toothwort and scattered it around the roots of a Poplar tree. The plant did very well, and was soon popping up all over their garden and rougher ground.

I asked the key question: "Does your ground flood when the river is high?"
"Oh yes, we flood regularly here." he replied.

So it would appear very possible, or even highly likely, that the Purple Toothwort found at Crossford originated from the colony upstream, in a garden near Lanark. One of the plants, swept away on the Clyde in spate, came rushing past the bridge at Crossford and got snagged in some sturdy Snowberry shrubs, finding a new place to take root when the water subsided.

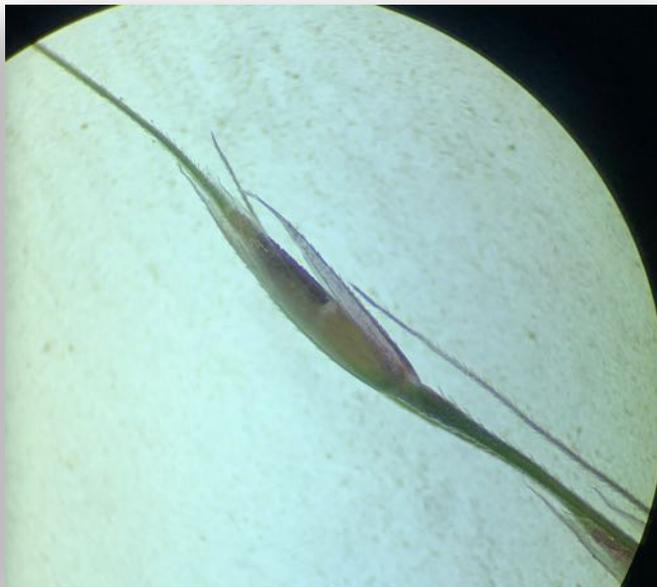
The plant is so uncommon that this natural mechanism seems the most probable way it came to be where it is. And with a ready supply of plant material waiting upstream to hitch a ride on future floods, our teams will need to be on the lookout for it now - anywhere along the Clyde from Lanark downstream to Glasgow!



Teamwork at its best

On 7th July, on a walk in Glasgow's West End, Malcolm Macneill noticed an unusual grass growing in a neglected corner of a lane. After some study, he came to the opinion that it was *Anemanthele lessoniana* (Pheasant's-tail or New Zealand Wind Grass), and shared this find in an email.

To work towards confirmation of this, Peter Wiggins followed the 8-figure grid reference and visited the plant to take a series of photos. In addition, he took one specimen home and added further 'lab' photos, both in close-up and through the microscope. These were then emailed to Dr. Oli Pescott, a plant ecologist with specialist knowledge, who corroborated the identification.



Anemanthele lessoniana
(New Zealand Wind Grass)

Although it has been recorded once before in Glasgow (in Garnethill in 2007), this new find is just the 12th location for the species in the whole of Scotland.

Digital communication has thus enabled three individuals, working on their own, to collaborate to produce a significant addition to Scotland's flora.

Team 77 is growing

A number of new people have joined the Lanarkshire Botany network in recent months, and are already making their presence felt. So, whether by volunteering to record plants either in your 'home monads' or previously unrecorded areas; by sending in photos for identification; by reporting interesting finds; or by submitting photos for our growing photo project, your enthusiasm and involvement is much appreciated.

You are very welcome additions to our big Team - even though you may have to wait a while to experience the fun and learning generated when 'Team 77' is let loose in the field!

A local lockdown project

When my wife and I moved to our cottage in the rolling Lanarkshire farmland nine years ago, I decided to embark on assembling a botanical record for the Parish of Dalserf. This is an area of a little over six square miles, with a well-defined boundary, lying between the M74 and the Clyde to the south of Larkhall. With over 2,300 monad records on the books to date (including over 450 species), I chose to use the restrictions of lockdown as a pretext for attempting to refind all known records and to add as many more as possible. Quite apart from the botany, it was a good reason to get out of the house for daily exercise!

It has been an extraordinary project, visiting and revisiting over 20 monads and witnessing the great wheel of nature gradually turn, bringing its succession of plant species. The habitats are varied: from urban environments in the town of Ashgill to remote bogland on Cander Moss; from farm hedgerows to deep, dark gorges - and of course the spectacular banks of the Clyde itself.

At the time of writing, 456 species have been recorded in the Parish since 7th April, with a further 70 yet to hunt for. Over 50 of the species noted so far had not been recorded in this area before, and over 1,500 new monad records have been added. At mid-July, we're almost exactly halfway through the season, so there's plenty of time to keep hunting. However, I'm under no illusions: it will be impossible to refind everything recorded over the last nine years, (a) because some will have been 'one hit wonders' - casuals or opportunists which appeared only once, and (b) because I simply didn't start early enough! For instance, the task of finding all Snowdrops and Daffodils, and discerning exact Bluebell species, will be incomplete.

Nonetheless, this has been a great delight of a project and I have learned more this season than in any previous one - largely due to the process of making multiple visits, as mentioned earlier.

Here are pictures of some of the highlights (so far!):



Tragopogon pratensis subsp. minor (Goat's-beard)



Centaurium erythraea (Common Centaury)



Saxifraga granulata (Meadow Saxifrage)



Trollius europaeus (Globeflower)

“Your mission, should you choose to accept it”

There is a rare Lanarkshire plant for which we have no photos yet. We know precisely where *Epilobium alsinifolium* (Chickweed Willowherb) grew when last reported (with ten-figure grid references), but getting there is an unrealistic physical challenge for those in the Team who are approaching the wrong side of middle age!

So this is an appeal to the fitter and more adventurous among our readership. How would you like to trek several miles across rough country to locate one of our plant celebrities and take some iconic photos of it?

We can provide several exact GPS locations for the plant, all of which are at Hare Cleuch Head, on the Mirk Burn, in the upper reaches of East Water, a tributary of Midlock Water in the hills east of Elvanfoot.

Are you up for some extreme botany?
Get in touch.



Monad NT0218

Keep in touch

Please don't hesitate to contact me by email: the inbox is always busy, and that's just how it should be!

Send in lists, great or small, of the plants you find - and by all means send in photos of plants to identify.

Remember also to continue submitting your brilliant pictures of plants for our website.

For full details, please contact Peter Wiggins: pswiggins@gmail.com

Michael Philip (BSBI recorder, vc77)

email: botany@opus44.co.uk

Picture credits:

<i>Lathraea clandestina</i>	Joan Rankin, Crossford, 26th April 2020 (smaller photos Michael Philip, Crossford, 27th April, 2020)
<i>Anemanthus lessoniana</i>	Peter Wiggins, Glasgow (West End), 11th July, 2020
<i>Tragopogon pratensis subsp. minor</i>	Michael Philip, near Garrion Bridge, 12th July 2020
<i>Centaurea erythraea</i>	(ditto)
<i>Saxifraga granulata</i>	Michael Philip, near Rosebank, 29th April 2020
<i>Trollius europaeus</i>	Michael Philip, south of Rosebank, 11th May 2020