

Lanarkshire Botany

2020 Summary, November 2020



2020 - a year of challenge

Before we do anything else, warmest greetings to all our readers - we trust that you and those closest to you are safe and well, and that you have been able to respond strongly to whatever challenges this extraordinary year has thrown at you.

In view of the bigger picture, field botany pales into insignificance. But, according to your correspondence, such activity has still been playing an important role in terms of physical and mental wellbeing.



Calluna vulgaris (Heather) on Cander Moss

Since we have been unable to hold our usual end-of-term get-together this month, enjoying each others' company and celebrating the year's adventures (and eating cake!), we have instead put together this bumper edition of the 'Team 77' newsletter.

There are some great stories here: so why not pause for a moment, make yourself a cuppa, and take your time to enjoy what follows.

Story 1

For many years, **Malcolm Macneill** has tramped the streets of Glasgow (often several miles a day) keenly noting the urban flora and witnessing the occurrence of all sorts of unexpected species.

FRESH AIR! - URBAN BOTANY IN THE LOCKDOWN

Me, I like botanising early morning, under the Pandemic, in the urban streets and lanes you get to know of as being quieter, when there are just a few joggers and cyclists about, and only the birds to scold your slow, dodgy, inquisitive peering...

In summer it's refreshing just after dawn. In autumn the routine kicks you out of bed, gets the mind oiled and working, in focus.

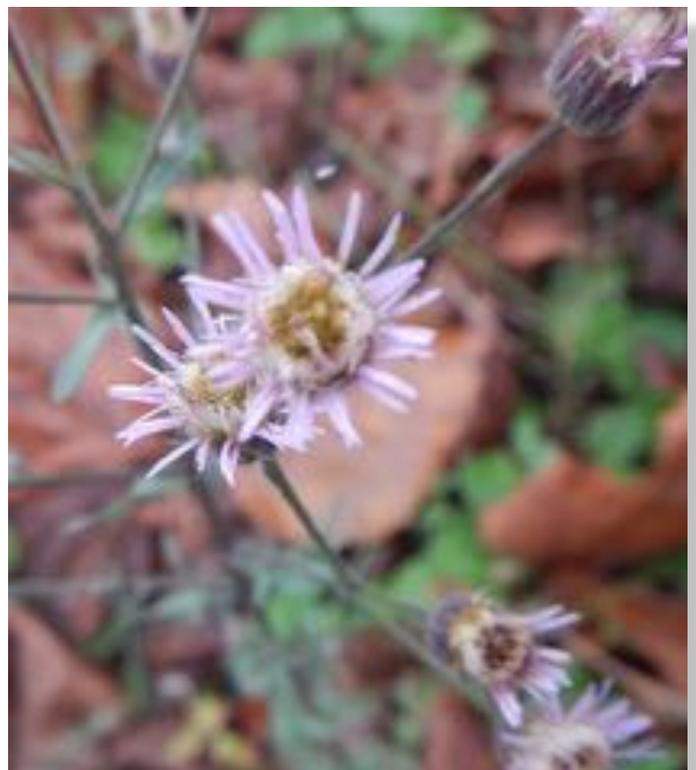
In a way the Pandemic hasn't stopped botanical searching (apart from the busiest streets), and some roads have been allowed to weed over, more than is usual - and as they should be.

A perennial botanical truth: 'everywhere is always under-recorded'. Even if you walked a certain area daily, you'd miss things: things your eyes aren't ready for. And you need multiple eyes, because different people are susceptible to different triggers, interests, knowledge. But the more you stick at it, repeat and repeat, the more you will luck-out.

Don't ignore the most inhospitable or concreted-over area - something will find its niche; the bleakest, barest, most scuzzy corner, usually holds something, occasionally something unusual. Recently a *Chenopodium polyspermum* (Many-seeded Goosefoot) popped up through a solid tarmac walkway in Woodside, and the barest concrete and cobble slope at Glasgow University sprouted 40 *Erigeron acris* (Blue Fleabane) in June.



Chenopodium polyspermum (Many-seeded Goosefoot) as a tarmac 'weed' in Woodside



Erigeron acris (Blue Fleabane) is increasingly common on hard ground in Glasgow

This year, from June, I've concentrated mostly on 11 local 'squares', walking the ground repeatedly for weeks, months.

SOME OBSERVATIONS :-

I began to notice some plants that escape from gardens more readily than previously suspected - that are in fact common - plants such as:

Anemone hybrida (Japanese Anemone), *Briza maxima* (Great Quaking-grass), *Leycesteria formosa* (Himalayan Honeysuckle), *Lobelia erinus* (Garden Lobelia), *Verbena bonariensis* (Argentinian Vervain), *Phacelia tanacetifolia* (Phacelia), *Solanum lycopersicum* (Tomato), *Borago officinalis* (Borage), *Lobularia maritima* (Sweet Alison), *Melissa officinalis* (Balm), *Cymbalaria pallida* (Italian Toadflax), *Lamium hybridum* (Cut-leaved Dead-nettle), *Cortaderia richardii* (Early Pampas-grass).

The unexpected pops up, now and then, to startle:

Datura stramonium (Thorn-apple), *Setaria verticillata* (Rough Bristle-grass).

Which leads on to a few plants, that almost certainly have been in our locale for a few years, but which, until now, the eyes have 'blanked'. Two such plants this year are:



Picris hieracioides (Hawkweed Oxtongue), which Grace Lyons and I bumped into on waste ground by the Tall Ship Museum, and which has been spotted since in a further five places, on both sides of the Clyde.

It is a tall, distinctive plant - yet the eyes were oblivious.



Polypogon viridis (Water Bent) is another plant that has now appeared in many sites on Glasgow streets, and will no doubt be 'noticed' all over the place.

Picris hieracioides (Hawkweed Ox-tongue)

Polypogon viridis (Water Bent)

Autumn is always good for alien grasses (usually from birdseed), that come up late - look at wall bases/pavements, especially in a sunny spot - you might well find : *Panicum miliaceum* (Common Millet), and *Echinochloa crus-galli* (Cockspur). They suddenly open, and can be over 2 feet tall.

Two plants to be aware of, that may be much more frequent than records suggest, are:

Lamium hybridum (Cut-leaved Dead-nettle). It can appear anywhere alongside *Lamium purpureum* (Red Dead-nettle), and is very similar, but with unevenly cut leaves, and cut deeper than 2mm.

Cymbalaria pallida (Italian Toadflax) - usually on walls - has leaves very like Ivy-leaved Toadflax, but the flowers are usually darker, and mostly larger, and crucially, the plant is hairy.

Carry on exercising the feet, brain and eyes through the winter. Why not look for the lovely frequent evergreen shrubs, such as *Lonicera nitida* (Wilson's Honeysuckle), and *Lonicera pileata* (Box-leaved Honeysuckle) - Enjoy!

Malcolm Macneill

Story 2

In the previous edition of this newsletter, a plea was put out for any volunteers to go into remote hill country and attempt to re-find *Epilobium alsinifolium* (Chickweed Willowherb) at its only known Lanarkshire site. **Jan Davidson** and **Grace Lyon** accepted the challenge.

'Your Mission should you choose to accept it' or an obscure Willowherb hunt

Back in July, Grace and I independently spotted a possible adventure when Michael's July newsletter asked for volunteers to look for *Epilobium alsinifolium* at Hare Cleuch Head where it was last sighted 15 years ago by John Hawell and Peter Macpherson. *Epilobium alsinifolium* (Chickweed Willowherb), a native perennial herb of mountain springs and burns, had first been recorded there by David McCosh in the late summer of 2003. John's lovely accounts of 6 subsequent visits to the site by various routes gave us inspiration and some grid references. Michael put us in touch with each other and we finally arranged to meet on August 3 at the end of the road from Crawford along the Midlock water just by the new bridge to the electricity substation. It was an unpromising rainy day which fortunately dried up as we set out past Harecleuch croft and along the East Water valley. It is a pleasant route with numerous fords which might require diversionary tactics in wet weather.



Midlock valley looking south east towards East Water

At the end of the valley by a sheep fold we turned north eastwards to climb up by Martin Cleuch and then eastwards along the top of Mirk Grain to find easier access down steep slopes with *Melampyrum pratense* (Common Cow-wheat) growing amongst the heather. We spent most of the rest of day exploring Mirk Grain, trying to find the elusive *Epilobium* and revisiting the grid references supplied by John. There is a small rivulet in the bottom of the grain with tiny pools and boggy areas and *Epilobium palustre* (Marsh Willowherb) was common.



Typical habitat of unknown *Epilobium* - note upright flower buds. *Epilobium brunnescens* is also visible.

Other lovely plants included *Epilobium brunnescens* (New Zealand Willowherb) and *Sedum villosum* (Hairy Stonecrop) close to the water and *Veronica officinalis* (Heath Speedwell) and *Thymus polytrichus* (Wild Thyme) on grassy banks. However there were also other different looking *Epilobiums* with broader leaves, distantly dentate, and ridges down the stems covered with tiny hairs. There were no obvious stolons and the flower buds were not drooping. None were yet in flower. Grace and I didn't think they fitted the bill exactly but we photographed from as many angles as possible spurred on by Peter Wiggins' advice on which bits were important.



Dentate sessile leaves



Angled stem with tiny non-glandular adpressed hairs

We returned via the summit of Hare Cleuch Head in a landscape of huge wind turbines and descended into East Grain where we found another *Epilobium* similar to those found in Mirk Grain. Photos and grid references were sent to Michael and a flurry of correspondence ensued with help from Luke Gaskell, Chris Miles, and Jeff Waddell. Excitement mounted while we waited for the results and eventually almost a month later word came back - alas not *Epilobium alsinifolium* but an upland variant of the aptly named (for us at least) *Epilobium obscurum* (Short-fruited Willowherb).

It was a great day out and I am hoping we can both return to hunt next year armed with more knowledge of what *Epilobium alsinifolium* doesn't look like!

Thanks to everyone for their encouragement and support.

Jan Davidson and Grace Lyon



View from Hare Cleuch Head looking north west

Story 3

This summer, news came through of an astonishing discovery: a huge population of *Hypopitys monotropa* (Yellow Bird's-nest) on the edge of Kirkintilloch. Unfortunately, the site is now being developed as a Sports Centre. Local artist **Tom Wilson** takes up the story.

How I discovered Yellow Bird's-nest at the former Nickel Works site in Kirkintilloch

Having moved to Kirkintilloch last summer, I came across this site whilst just getting to know the area. One of my projects as an artist is exploring post-industrial landscapes and how, if left alone, nature begins to re-colonize the area - beginning to heal or 're-green' by itself. The image of flourishing natural life in the context of human waste and despoliation is a strong combination.

There is no escaping the fact that the Nickel Works site with its rubble, building debris, abandoned car parts and tons of fly-tipped rubbish is a blight to the eye. However right from the first I suspected it was probably wildlife rich. Indeed over the past year I have had many happy hours watching foxes, roe deer and a whole range of birds including a small community of pheasants, which was great to see, and even more thrilling, a resident family of bullfinches. My trail camera also caught footage of a single hedgehog on the site which I have since managed to catch and successfully relocate to a large old garden near Lenzie Moss.

Having been a Youth Opportunities Habitat Surveyor for a year away back in Cumnock and Doon Valley (now within East Ayrshire) when the coal mines were shutting and unemployment was sky high, and having taken part in a range of other botanical and wildlife surveys, I have retained a little knowledge and an interest in botany. Joyfully, all this influences my work as an artist. Whilst working on a drawing of a small colony of plants growing out from heaps of concrete and iron, I unexpectedly came across a small group of *Hypopitys monotropa*. They caught my eye, seemed vaguely familiar, but I didn't know what they were.



A large group of *Hypopitys monotropa* (Yellow Bird's-nest) quite at home in an old tyre

I suspected I was looking at an orchid. I referred to my orchid book but couldn't see anything - the Common Twayblade and the Bird's-nest Orchid were close but not close enough. Eventually identifying this strange anemic, drooping, asparagus-like plant was the result of a group effort on social media! I posted some images of the plant on a Scottish Badgers Facebook group page with the question "Does anyone know what this is?" With the plant identified, one of the other Scottish Badgers members advised me to contact Michael Philip. I also got in touch with SNH and East Dunbartonshire's planning department. I had already met a planning official by chance when drawing on the site one day: it was from him that I learned the site was soon to be developed.

I am really glad that by the simple coincidence of me exploring this site at this time and having a little knowledge of botany and an interest in nature in general I have been able to raise awareness of this plant, get the relevant people involved and raised the possibility of it perhaps retaining a toe-hold in this location especially as it would almost certainly have been obliterated.* At the same time I am depressed at the thought that somehow the planning process has failed to consider these colonies with individual plants counted in their hundreds. Also, when considering how nationally important this population of plants is, should the case not be that there should be some provision within the planning process to safeguard such an ecologically important site and enable more appropriate development?

When I look around me I understand full well the pressures on the environment. The demands we place on it is the stuff of nightmares. I feel the potential destruction of these *Hypopitys montotropa* colonies serves to warn that us an apocalypse is raging on our doorsteps. It may be raging very quietly and in an orderly, polite fashion, and may even be on a small scale, but it rages all the same - often with negative consequences.



Tom Wilson with one of the six sub-populations he discovered - and one of his superb drawings

* There have now been discussions about relocating some specimens within the development site.

Story 4

Lockdown effectively ruled out any field outings this year. But, having moved out to the Lanarkshire countryside some years ago, **Michael Philip** realised it presented a golden opportunity to try a couple of different approaches.

The Flora of Dalserf Parish

In the previous edition, I described my local project of recording plants within the Parish of Dalserf. Since it is a reasonably small area, all within a radius of about two miles from our house, it has been possible to explore it in detail and make numerous visits to each nook and cranny.



Plantago media (Hoary Plantain)
in Dalserf churchyard



Aster lanceolatus (Narrow-leaved Michaelmas-daisy)
on a stony Clyde riverbank near Rosebank

Recording has now all but ceased, though I did find another ‘new’ species on 7th November: *Phalaris canariensis* (Canary-grass) on a roadside in Ashgill - probably having been scattered as bird seed.

To date, I have recorded 542 species in the Parish this year, and made over 4,700 monad records which are now in the BSBI database. Photos of some of the highlights were shared in the previous newsletter.

‘Drive-by Botany’

Between my own efforts locally, and Malcolm Macneill’s marvellous work in Glasgow, we have done some intensive work in certain small areas.

And records have also been sent in by some other ‘Team 77’ members from their own localities, expanding this year’s Lanarkshire activity. This has been invaluable, adding to our knowledge in some nice places.

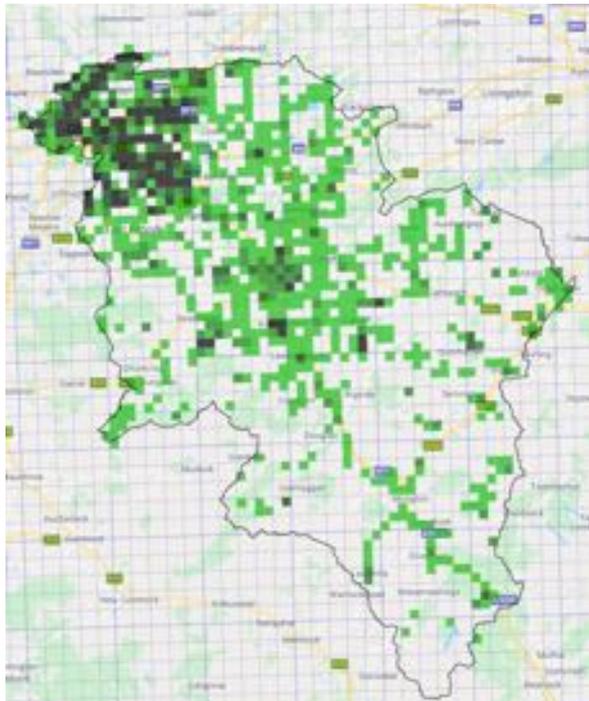
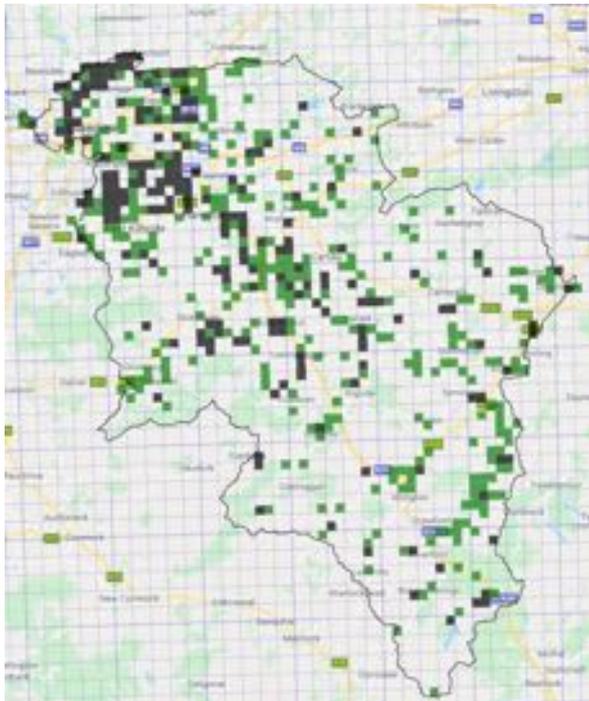
But what of the rest of our big county?

In the course of my work, family connections, and even just the routine shopping trips, I drive quite a bit. The idea occurred that I should simply place my phone on the passenger seat on ‘Voice Memo’ and give a running commentary of my journey - calling out my position on the road relative to things that would show up on the map (e.g. “Left bend, sharp”; “Farm track right”; “Under pylon lines . . . now”; and so on). In addition I called out the names of all plants I could identify with absolute certainty. On my return home, I played back the recording in real time, following my described route on the map and writing a list of plants for each map square (monad). If there was doubt about which square I was in, no plants were recorded.

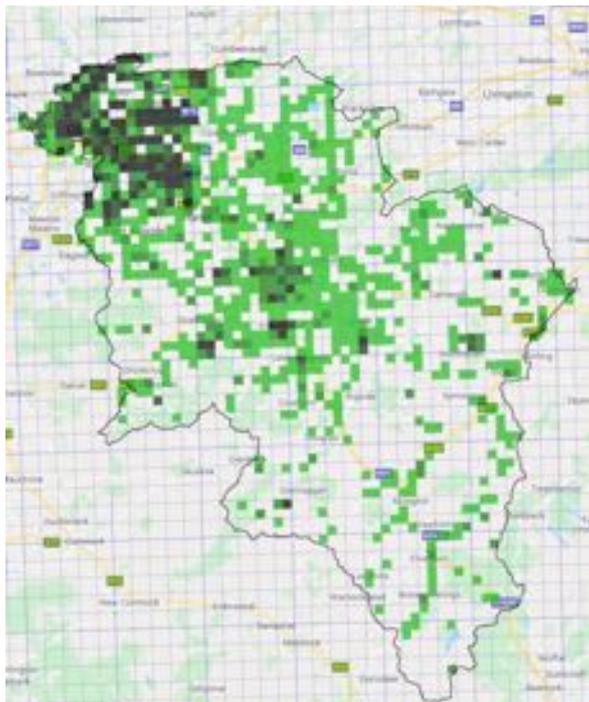
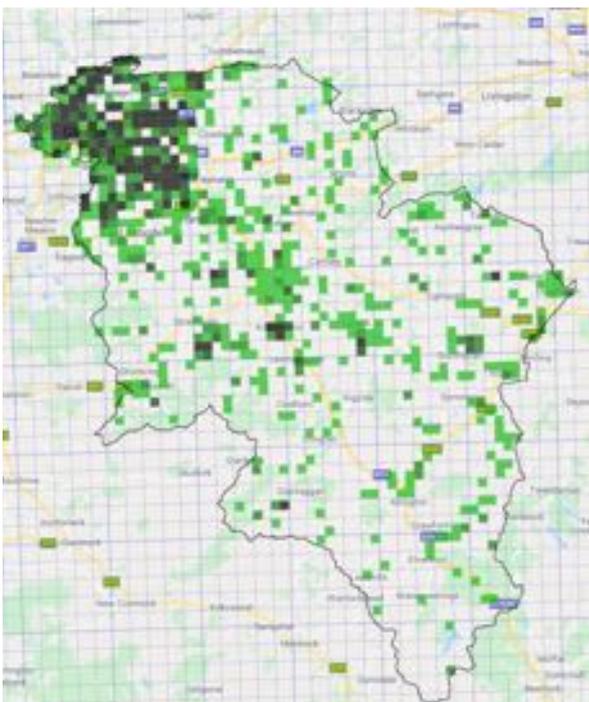
On quick roads, sometimes only two or three plants per monad made it onto the list. However, on the wee roads where I could tootle much more slowly, the monad list could reach over 30 species.

In all, I have driven through some 488 map squares and made several thousand records. By contrast with the thorough, intensive survey of my local area, this approach produced huge numbers of records for very common things: Nettle, Rosebay Willowherb, Beech, Creeping Thistle, Gorse, Meadowsweet, etc, etc. This “broad and shallow” approach has been an interesting complement to the usual “narrow and deep”.

What is interesting is the information this has produced about the distribution of such species across the county. Here are two examples, the left map showing up to 2019, and the right including 2020:



Known Lanarkshire distribution of *Chamerion angustifolium* (Rosebay Willowherb)



Known Lanarkshire distribution of *Cirsium arvense* (Creeping Thistle)

Photo Project:

As ever, we warmly invite you to contribute your very best plant photos to our ongoing photo project. Many thousands of photos have already been gathered, and work is afoot to select the best and add text.

The goal is to unveil our new website officially next year. Its aims are:

- a) to celebrate and enjoy the marvellous botanical diversity to be found in Lanarkshire
- b) to assist us all with developing our plant identification skills

Please get in touch with Peter Wiggins if you have photos to send in, or would like a list of plants for which photos are still required. He can also explain the file format, file-name protocol, and upload options.

Peter can be contacted at: pswiggins@gmail.com



A Clyde Valley treescape panorama

New Year Plant Hunt

Another project you might enjoy is the annual BSBI New Year Plant Hunt. All over the country, folk go hunting for wild plants in flower in the first three days of January.

The publicity for the 2021 event is not yet available, but keep an eye on the excellent BSBI website for details. You can read about what was found in January 2020 here: <https://bsbi.org/new-year-plant-hunt>

Footnote:

Since we received Jan and Grace's story about the hunt for *Epilobium alsinifolium*, an email has come in from another Team 77 correspondent. He is an ecologist, and has previously done survey work on behalf of the Clyde Wind Farm.

He was at a location not far from the site in question a few years ago, but was unaware of the need to hunt for the *Epilobium*. He is therefore interested to join the hunt next summer - and he has permission to drive in on the Wind Farm track network to cut down on the walking involved. The story continues . . . !

Stats update: (for those who like facts and figures)

Although 2020 has been a very different kind of year for botanical fieldwork, we have still been able to make a significant contribution to the BSBI database: (figures correct as at 21/11/20)

12,595	records made and uploaded
869	different species recorded
33	new vice-county records (i.e. species not recorded previously in Lanarkshire)
212	new hectad records
597	monads visited and at least one record made (including 187 previously 'blank' monads)
13,008	total records added to database (including some from previous years and other sources)

Keep in touch

Your emails on any botanical matters are always welcome. I may not be able to answer everything myself, but this is a network so there will be an answer!

Also, if you know anyone who would be interested in receiving these occasional newsletters, or any future programmes of outings and activities, please ask them to get in touch.

I look forward to seeing you in the field when that becomes possible again - you'll be made most welcome. The spring 2021 newsletter will include an update on plans for future field outings.

Michael Philip (BSBI recorder, vc77)

email: botany@opus44.co.uk

Picture credits:

Calluna vulgaris Michael Philip, Cander Moss, 16th August 2020

Story 1

Chenopodium polyspermum Peter Wiggins, Woodside area, Glasgow, 9th October 2020

Erigeron acris Peter Wiggins, central Glasgow, 8th November 2017

Picris hieracioides Peter Wiggins, Yorkhill, Glasgow, 26th August 2020

Polypogon viridis Peter Wiggins, nr Royal Infirmary, Glasgow, 25th September 2020

Story 2

Midlock Valley Jan Davidson, 3rd August 2020

Typical habitat Grace Lyon, 3rd August 2020

Dentate sessile leaves Grace Lyon, 3rd August 2020

Angled stem Jan Davidson, 3rd August 2020

View from Hare Cleuch Head Jan Davidson, 3rd August 2020

Story 3

Hypopitys monotropa Michael Philip, Kirkintilloch, 29th July 2020

Tom Wilson Michael Philip, Kirkintilloch, 29th July 2020

Hypopitys subject and drawing Tom Wilson, August 2020

Story 4

Plantago media Michael Philip, Dalsersf village, 2nd September 2020

Aster lanceolatus Michael Philip, nr Rosebank, 27th September 2020

A Clyde Valley treescape Peter Wiggins, nr Rosebank, 2nd October 2020