**Mersehead 7th August 2021**

We started the meeting in rain and I was almost prepared to call it a day, but fortunately it ceased about 15 minutes in, by which time we’d almost walked out to the western-most merse compartments.

Our first stop was in what is termed middle marsh communities with common species like **sheeps fescue** *Festuca ovina* and **saltmarsh rush** *Juncus gerardii* with a scattering of sedges (“sedges have edges”). These included **false fox sedge** *Carex otrubae* with the florescence in a dense clump at the top of the flower stalk and a short bract at its base; then *C. extensa* **long-bracted sedge**, much as its name sounds;



and *C. distans* **distant sedge** (I mistakenly called it *C. hostiana* Tawny sedge) with one of its inflorescence near the base of the stem. We spent so\me time with rushes (“rushes are round”, referring to the stem) – *Juncus effusus* **soft rush** with a rounded smooth stem supporting either a compact dense head or a spreading loose cluster; **compact rush** *Juncus conglomeratus* with a very dense head and tiny ridges to the stem, only obvious when rolled between the fingers; then clumps of yet another rush, **sea rush** *J. maritimus* with stiff springy stems and a long bract extending way beyond the fruiting heads.

The ground levels varied slightly but sufficiently to influence the species composition. A drop of a few cms. and we encountered masses of the smaller, more delicate **saltmarsh rush** *J. gerardii*. Here too we had the dark green shoots of *Glaux maritima* **sea milkwort** which in spring is a mass of pink flowers and scattered plants of *Plantago maritima* **sea plantain** and *Triglochin maritima* **sea arrowgrass** (also in the above photo). These last two were distinguishable by the first species having a dense flower spike (no space between each flower) and the second sp. by a much wider spacing of the flowers/seeds on the flowering stem and the very flattened base of the stem and leaves at ground level. I pointed out a prostrate grass which was creeping along the mud of a saltpan (a further drop in ground level of a few cm), one with purplish stems, and should have called it *Puccinellia maritima* **common saltmarsh grass**, but somehow managed to label it creeping bent! Apologies…but it was present along the path back to the cars.

A drop of a few more cm in ground level and we came to the low saltmarsh community with *Salicornia* **glasswort** (or samphire as its sold for salads,etc), a very succulent salty-tasting plant with fleshy, bright green cylindrical leaves. Most of us tried it for the taste! Nearby also in the saltpans was *Spergularia marina* **lesser sea-spurrey**, straggly stems – another pink flower earlier in the year; and **annual seablite** *Suaeda maritima*. At this level we also came across *Atriplex portulacoides* **sea purslane**, a greyish leaved plant which has been spreading along the north Solway coast recently and the county’s uncommon *Atriplex littoralis* **grass-leaved orache** – which turned out to be more widespread and scattered over the merse here. In the distance a dark purple band turned out to be masses of *Limonium* sp. **sea lavender** in flower where we spent some considerable time trying to sort out *L. vulgare* **common sea lavender** from *L. humile* **lax-flowered sea lavender**. Best bet was to count the florets on each side branch – more than 8 the common one, 6 or less the lax-flowered one.



Common sea lavender

Lunch after this and a short walk to the low dunes. Here was a very different suite of plants, some scarce both at national and vice-county level. David rapidly found haresfoot clover *Trifolium arvense* in several patches



followed by sea holly *Eryngium maritimum*,



sea spurge *Euphorbia paralias*, sea rocket *Cakile maritima* of pale pink flowers, prickly saltwaort *Salsola kali* and the Solway speciality Isle of Man cabbage *Coinzya monensis* subsp. *monensis,* in size a very small 4-petalled yellow flowered plant with salad rocket-like leaves.

I could go on with more names and more photos, but suffice it to say that we found 104 species in all just in this one monad (1 x 1 Km square). Although I strongly suspect that several species were missed – there’s only so much time and concentration needed for such a rich and varied site. All photos except for the sedge were courtesy of David Foreman to whom thanks for such excellent photography. Hope you all enjoyed the meeting.