

VC86 – Stirlingshire botany update, Spring 2022

Work has begun on a Rare Plant Register for the vice-county, re-visiting known sites for locally rare and scarce plants and combing through the BSBI database to ascertain which species fit the criteria for inclusion (over 400 taxa are currently on the 'short' list).

The winter and early spring can be rather dull for botanists, but some rather lovely over-wintering fern species can be guaranteed to bring a smile to the face! *Asplenium ceterach* (Rustyback) is only known from two sites in VC86 – Killearn Old Kirk, and a drystone wall at Milndavie. The Killearn population numbered 178 plants, scattered around the kirk and graveyard walls, with another four *Asplenium* species also present. Combined with the nearby café, a very pleasant and gentle excursion! This species has been recorded from Blairlogie to Aberfoyle in the adjacent VC87, so it wouldn't surprise if more populations awaited discovery.



Asplenium ceterach
(Rustyback) at Killearn Old
Kirk, February 2022



Another fine fern well worth seeking out is *Hymenophyllum tunbrigense* (Tunbridge Filmy-fern), which is largely restricted to the western edge of the vice-county, growing in the rich bryophyte sward in the oakwoods of Loch Lomond. Sometimes found with its close relative *H. wilsonii* (Wilson's Filmy-fern), look for flatter, drooping fronds, toothed margins to the indusia (cups surrounding the sori), and dark veins not reaching the end of the frond segments. This colony was photographed near Arrochymore in February.

Hymenophyllum tunbrigense (Tunbridge Filmy-fern) near Arrochymore, February 2022

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Finally on the fern front, the *Polypodium* fern group has flown under the radar in Stirlingshire to date, with many records not determined to species. Two species are present – *Polypodium vulgare* (Polypody), the commonest, and *P. interjectum* (Intermediate Polypody), which was known from a handful of locations. Confirmation of identification involves checking the number of annulus cells along the sporangium, easiest under a microscope, although there are several indicative frond and sori characters. Sampling likely looking *Polypodium* populations this spring has doubled the number of known sites for *P. interjectum*, resulting in it dropping off the tentative locally scarce list for the vice-county. It seems more tolerant of lime-rich mortar than *P. vulgare*, so urban walls are a good habitat to start checking.



Polypodium interjectum
(Intermediate Polypody)
growing along a wall below
Stirling Castle mound,
February 2022

Urban habitats are often under-recorded by botanists, despite the ease of accessibility, and some minor diversions during shopping trips and playground visits as things warmed up have revealed a host of interesting local plants. Wasteland and gravel habitats are great places to search for various crucifers early in the season, and highlights so far include several new populations of the nationally scarce *Draba muralis* (Wall Whitlowgrass), including a population numbering in the 1000s on Springkerse Industrial Estate, and the locally scarce *Thlaspi arvense* (Field Penny-cress) growing in bare soil by a recently constructed garage. Best of all was the first modern (post-1970) record of *Teesdalia nudicaulis* (Shepherd's Cress) for Stirlingshire, growing alongside a forestry track on the north side of Carron Valley Reservoir. There are no modern records for *T. nudicaulis* from the surrounding vice-counties, making this find particularly interesting – might it still be lurking undetected elsewhere in Central Scotland?

Other locally rare and scarce species including *Lamium amplexicaule* (Henbit Dead-nettle), *L. hybridum* (Cut-leaved Dead-nettle), *Erodium cicutarium* (Common Stork's-bill), *Erophila glabrescens* (Glabrous Whitlowgrass) and *Logfia minima* (Small Cudweed) have also been found on gravel, wasteland and tracks this spring.

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Teesdalia nudicaulis (Shepherd's Cress) by a track on Cairnoch Hill, showing the asymmetric petals (two large, two small, if you squint hard) and the distinctive basal leaf rosette



A newly discovered colony of *Draba muralis* (Wall Whitlowgrass) growing on Springkerse Industrial Estate, Stirling. The colony numbered in the 1000s, and formed a dense sward along with *Cerastium glomeratum* (Sticky Mouse-ear) and *Cardamine hirsuta* (Hairy Bitter-cress), growing on gravel

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Parietaria judaica (Pellitory-of-the-wall) is only known from Stirling in VC86, where it graces the old town walls and forms large cascading hummocks. A more recent colonist appears to be *Umbilicus rupestris* (Navelwort), first recorded in VC86 in 2019 along the A9 north of Larbert, but the size of the colony here (100s of plants) suggests a longer stay. A second colony was found this spring on walls near Airthrey Castle – a logical location, as it has been recorded nearby in VC87 for nearly 40 years prior to this. Both these species are worth looking out for when visiting historic buildings in the area.



***Umbilicus rupestris* (Navelwort) enlivening a grotty February day alongside the A9 (left), and *Parietaria judaica* (Pellitory-of-the-wall) gracing the walls near Stirling railway station in the April sun (right)**

Lathraea squamaria (Toothwort) is a rather weird (but wonderful) member of our local flora, which can be seen in spring in deciduous woodland habitats and along river banks. It lacks chlorophyll and is parasitic on the roots of a range of woody plants, typically *Corylus avellana* (Hazel), *Ulmus glabra* (Wych Elm) and *Fraxinus excelsior* (Ash). A colony found in 2015 in Callander Park, Falkirk, has taken advantage of two other tree species, with populations present under *Tilia x europaea* (Lime) and *Acer pseudoplatanus* (Sycamore). Two populations were originally identified here, but further searching this spring managed to locate another two clusters, with an impressive total count of just over 700 plants. Another excellent local site for this species is the west bank of the Allan Water, north of the eponymous bridge at Bridge of Allan.

Primula veris (Cowslip) is familiar to all, but has been infrequently recorded in the vice-county previously. However, a focus on early-flowering species this year has led to the discovery of several new sites, many of which are dotted along the motorway network – Cowslip being one of the few herbs easily identifiable at 70 mph! The provenance of some of these commuting communities may be questionable, but colonisation through self-seeding is certainly ongoing, with isolated roadside plants cropping up away from the more decorated verges.

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The ghostly spikes of *Lathraea squamaria* (Toothwort) growing in Callander Park (left), and a newly discovered *Primula veris* (Cowslip) colony brightening up a wooded bank at the edge of Springkerse Industrial Estate (below)



To finish, a couple of curiosities. Firstly, the tiny but striking *Crassula tillaea* (Mossy Stonecrop), first found in Stirlingshire in 2019, growing on the trampled edge of a pavement in Milngavie. A re-visit this spring found this nationally scarce plant much as originally described, sporting a delightful range of green and red hues. This species appears to be expanding its range nationally, so other sites in car parks or along forest rides in VC86 may well be awaiting discovery. Lastly, a potter around the beautiful island of Inchcailloch in Loch Lomond revealed the second vice-county record for *Carex x boenninghausiana*, a distinctive hybrid sedge growing in wet woodland next to the path, along with at least one of its parents, *Carex remota* (Remote Sedge). With Wood Warblers and Redstarts singing and the *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* (Bluebell) display now in full swing, this island is well worth a visit.



Crassula tillaea (Mossy Stonecrop) growing by the kerb in Milngavie (left), *Hypochaeris radicata* (Cat's-ear) leaves for scale, and the spaced inflorescence of *Carex x boenninghausiana* on Inchcailloch (right)