

Wales Annual Meeting and AGM, field visit reports

Treborth Botanic Garden, Bangor, Caernarvonshire (VC49) 10 June 2022

Leaders: Sarah Edgar and Gerry Downing

We are very grateful to Natalie Chivers, Curator of the Botanic Garden for facilitating our visit and to Sarah Edgar and Gerry Downing of the Friends of Treborth Botanic Garden for providing an introductory talk on the history and management of the Garden and its current role in research and to showcase plants both from the UK and around the world. As well as formal beds the Garden includes glasshouses, a laboratory, species rich meadows and woodland on the steep banks of the Menai Straits, part of the Coedydd Afon Menai SSSI. After the introductory talks the party broke into groups to explore the Garden aided by Sarah and Gerry. This was a very enjoyable afternoon and a great start to our weekend.

John Palmer

Great Orme, Llandudno, Caernarvonshire (v.c.49) 11 June 2022

Leaders: Wendy McCarthy (v.c.49 Recorder) and Ted Phenna

We gathered at the summit visitor centre where we were greeted by warden Sion Dafis who introduced us to the Great Orme with an informative talk on the site's various designations, its unique species and current management tasks. Setting off, we made our way down to Maes y Facrell, formerly grazing land but now a National Nature Reserve comprising a mosaic of species-rich grassland with fragments of limestone pavement. One of the six surviving *Cotoneaster cambricus* (Wild Cotoneaster) grows here and as it is now owned and managed by Natural Resources Wales, it was considered an ideal site for the planting out of propagated young plants in an effort to conserve the species future, and several were observed in flower. *Filipendula vulgaris* (Dropwort) was seen nearby, its pink buds opening to creamy-white flowers, and *Euphrasia nemorosa* (an Eyebright) carpeting the ground was not quite in flower. The perennial sub-species of *Lapasa communis ssp. intermedia* (Nipplewort) was of interest, especially to Arthur Chater who inspected several plants for a sac fungus but none was found, perhaps a little too early. Lunch was taken on a grassy ridge with fine views of the town below and the Carneddau mountains across the Conwy estuary. A few early flowers of *Veronica spicata* (Spiked Speedwell) were admired and much photographed. Continuing down, we stopped off a grassy triangle where we saw *Torilis nodosa* (Knotted Hedge-parsley), *Erodium moschatum* (Musk Stork's-bill) and *Geranium pusillum* (Small-flowered Crane's-bill) and some time was spent prostrate on a bank comparing *Trifolium striatum* (Knotted Clover) with *T. scabrum* (Rough Clover). We followed a path through woodland, its banks lined with *Poa nemoralis* (Wood Meadow-grass), *Melica uniflora* (Wood Melick) and *Elymus caninus* (Bearded Couch) and were pleased to see two fine spikes of *Orobancha hederæ* (Ivy Broomrape) growing at the base of a Beech tree. Out on the open hill again, we were able to compare the floral characters of *Rosa rubiginosa* (Sweet-briar) with the rare *Rosa agrestis* (Small-leaved Sweet-briar). *Silene nutans* (Nottingham Catchfly) grew along the path edges while on the bank above, *Hypochaeris maculata* (Spotted Cat's-ear) and the rare *Hieracium pseudoleyi* (Purple-flushed Hawkweed) were in flower together. Invasive shrubs, including six *Cotoneaster* sp., *Arbutus unedo* (Strawberry Tree) and *Berberis wilsonii* (Mrs. Wilson's Barberry) have naturalized here and much clearance work has to be undertaken in an effort to suppress them, while *Rubus* sp. (Bramble) and *Ulex europæus* (Gorse) take every opportunity to step into the cleared space. Continuing uphill, a handful of *Epipactis atrorubens* (Dark-red Helleborine) were flowering by the path and *Clinopodium acinos* (Basil Thyme) was seen among *Helianthemum nummularium* (Common Rock-rose) and a few late-flowering *H.*

oelandicum (Hoary Rock-rose). Some grasses typical of limestone included *Avenula pubescens* (Downy Oat-grass), *Helictochloa pratensis* (Meadow Oat-grass), *Koeleria macrantha* (Crested Hair-grass) and *Briza media* (Quaking- grass). On reaching the top of the path, some of the participants came with me to see *Valerianella eriocarpa* (Hairy-fruited Cornsalad) and although it was well past flowering, its distinctive calyces with unequal teeth were found. Here too were fine flowering plants of *Marrubium vulgare* (White Horehound). The remaining members went into the woodland with Ted to see *Neottia nidus-avis* (Bird's-nest Orchids). Finally, we visited a small clearing to see *Genista tinctoria* (Dyer's Greenweed) at its only known site in the county. This site had also suffered from scrub invasion, with no sightings of the species for some ten years, but after voicing my concerns to the wardens, some clearance work had been carried out and three large healthy plants are now able to flourish.

Wendy McCarthy

Moelyci Environmental Centre and SSSI, Caernarvonshire (v.c.49) 11 June 2022

Leaders: John Bratton and Delyth Williams

Seventeen of us arrived at this interesting site on a breezy, clear day in the hinterland between the Menai Straits and the backdrop of the mountains.

It is a large site with a convoluted history, best described now as one of the first community owned farms in the UK, a kind of management co-operative between various owners and concerns ranging from allotments, sheep farmers to a donkey sanctuary charity. These latter animals are of much interest in their own right, but they provide much needed grazing at appropriate times.

The site is cited for its wetland species over a number of slightly differing types of field, although two notable plants of dry areas are the rare *Asplenium obovatum* (Lanceolate Spleenwort) growing out of a wall and *Ornithopus perpusillus* (Bird's-foot) on a boulder.

One field yielded plenty of *Oenanthe crocata* (Hemlock Water-dropwort), interspersed with the now less common *Silene flos-cuculi* (Ragged-Robin) and a good distribution of the delightful *Wahlenbergia hederacea* (Ivy-leaved Bellflower), not in flower yet and *Comarum palustre* (Marsh Cinquefoil).

The most varied patch of mire was easily accessible without Wellies: the stalk length of the *Hydrocotyle vulgaris* (Marsh Pennywort) a good indicator of how relatively dry it was. Here we found a good range of sedges such as *Carex binervis* (Green-ribbed Sedge), *Carex hostiana* (Tawny Sedge) *Carex muricata* subsp. *pairae* (Prickly Sedge), *Carex pilulifera* (Pill Sedge) and the widely distributed but by no means common in Wales *Hypericum elodes* (Marsh St John's-wort). The buds smell of burnt caramel, or liquorice, on a good day. We also found *Eleogiton fluitans* (Floating Club-rush), not at all common in Wales.

Much else and the cafe was most appreciated!

Delyth Williams

Cwm Idwal, Caernarvonshire (v.c.49) 12 June 2022

Leader: Robbie Blackhall-Miles

A group of 10 of us led by Robbie Blackhall-Miles set off from the Ogwen visitor centre on our way up towards Llyn Idwal. On the way up we discussed the geology of the area and past quarrying activity and considered the viviparous means of reproduction of plants triggered by sighting of *Festuca vivipara*. Other plants of interest on the way to the lake were the spiky leaves of a section Celtica *Taraxacum* (Dandelion) and the fresh green *Cryptogramma crispa* (Parsley Fern) poking out of the sides of the gorge as we walked up. Once up at Llyn Idwal we were lucky enough to see *Isoetes lacustris* (Quillwort) and *Lobelia dortmanna* (Water Lobelia) and spotted *Hammarbya paludosa* (Bog Orchid) just beginning to emerge. After skirting the lake's edge we stopped for a short while to consider the effects of sheep, goat and cattle grazing on the vegetation and noting the effect of cattle grazing on *Narthecium ossifragum* (Bog Asphodel) where it was much reduced compared to areas that were sheep grazed. Robbie talked to us about the link between landscape, culture and land management in influencing vegetation composition. We then set off up the steps to the crags above Llyn Idwal towards Twll Du. The scramble up to 650 metres above sea level was a fairly strenuous exercise though some of the party bounced their way up like mountain goats. But it was worth the effort. We passed the clubmosses *Diphasiastrum alpinum* (Alpine Clubmoss), *Lycopodium clavatum* (Stag's-horn Clubmoss), *Selaginella selaginoides* (Lesser Clubmoss) and *Huperzia selago* (Fir Clubmoss) on the way and then with strict instructions not to touch the boulders were treated to sight of rarities such as *Saxifraga oppositifolia* (Purple Saxifrage), *Saxifraga cespitosa* (Tufted Saxifrage) and *Saxifraga hypnoides* (Mossy Saxifrage). Our final stop at 650m was to marvel at the assemblage of plants growing out of the sheltered wet crevices with *Deschampsia cespitosa* (Tufted Hairgrass), *Trollius europaeus* (Globeflower), *Papaver cambricum* (Welsh Poppy), *Rhodiola rosea* (Roseroot), *Micranthes nivalis* (Alpine Saxifrage) and *Lathyrus linifolius* (Bitter Vetch) all playing their part. We then descended back to the visitor centre having had a very rewarding day.

John Palmer

Morfa Aber, Caernarvonshire (VC49), 12 June 2022

Leaders: Wendy McCarthy (Vc49 Recorder) and Martyn Stead

This RSPB reserve, located on the North Wales coast near Aber Falls, offered fine views across to Anglesey and Puffin Island providing a splendid backdrop for the 25 attendees. The reserve (known for Lapwings and winter waders) is grazed by sheep and popular with dog walkers and so the habitats are quite disturbed.

Juncus gerardii (Saltmarsh Rush) was abundant in the upper saltmarsh with a small amount of *Bolboschoenus maritimus* (Sea Club-rush), *Eleocharis uniglumis* (Slender Spike-rush), and *Carex distans* (Distant Sedge) all flowering and found in a grassier area. *Triglochin maritima* (Sea Arrowgrass), *Puccinellia maritima* (Common Saltmarsh-grass), *Tripolium pannonicum* (was *Aster tripolium*, Sea Aster) and *Armeria maritima* (Thrift) were quite widespread whilst *Lysimachia maritima* (was *Glaux maritima*, Sea Milkwort) with its delicate pink flowers, occurred mainly in drier areas. *Paraphilis strigosa* (Hard Grass) has such an appropriate name! Although widely distributed in the upper zones of saltmarshes this slender grass is very difficult to see within a mass of other grasses, but with the Leader's help we were able to pick out its pale anthers just poking out from the raceme.

Spergularia media and *S. marina* (Greater and Lesser Sea Spurrey) were recorded. The former, found on the lower shore, is larger (flowers 10-12mm) while the latter has smaller flowers (5-8mm). The Lesser Sea Spurrey had noticeably prostrate rosettes on the path along the upper shore (trampling effect).

On the lower saltmarsh, short, bright green fleshy shoots of *Salicornia europaea* agg. (Common Glasswort) and *Suaeda maritima* (Annual Sea-blite) were just emerging from the mud. In a couple of places *Atriplex portulacoides* (Sea Purslane) was present, a small shrub easily identifiable from its pale grey, spoon-shaped leaves whilst *Spartina anglica* (Common Cord-grass), the pioneer species of mud-flats was extensive.

Upper shore colonisers included: *Beta vulgaris* ssp. *maritima* (Sea Beet) growing on the strandline, a few plants of *Eryngium maritimum* (Sea-holly), and on the sandy shingle, many patches of *Honkeya peploides* (Sea Sandwort) with its distinctive yellowish-green leaves and fleshy, pea-like fruits. *Elymus junceiformis* (was *Eltrygia juncea*, Sand Couch) another early coloniser, with a beautiful glaucous colour, was present in a few sandier spots together with *Carex arenaria* (Sand Sedge).

An artificial, brackish pond was full of *Stuckenia pectinata* (was *Potamogeton pectinatus*, Fennel Pondweed). (ID tip from Jonathan Shanklin to separate this from other fine-leaved pondweeds - when you pull the leaf, the sheath and stipule come away easily). A small, wooded area at the back of the shore revealed *Drymochloa sylvatica* (was *Festuca altissima*, Wood Fescue) at its only site in Caernarvonshire. A couple of clumps were growing on/between boulders beside the Afon Aber, believed to have been washed down river from the steep gorge at Aber Falls. This grass (large leafy tufts, flat leafy blades lacking auricles and pale, nodding, open panicles, no awns) is typically found on rocky ledges in wooded ravines/valleys with high humidity.

Dry, disturbed, scrubby grassland between the coast and fields supported a good range of flowering species including *Cynoglossum officinale* (Hound's-tongue), *Ballota nigra* (Black Horehound), *Galium verum* (Lady's Bedstraw), *Erodium cicutarium* Common Storksbill, and several Cranesbills (*G. molle*, *robertianum*, *lucidum*, *pusillum*). *Clematis vitalba* (Traveller's Joy) scrambled across the gorse and there was a small amount of *Hippophae rhamnoides* (Sea Buckthorn); native on the east coast but introduced here. *Avenula pubescens* (also seen at the Great Orme on the previous day) was also present.

For many of us, particularly those who record in counties with no coastline, this was a good opportunity to refresh our botanical knowledge of some seaside plants, while a few people focusing on rusts and mildews, found a powdery mildew on gorse and a new Welsh record. Morfa Aber provided the ideal venue for a relaxing botany field trip on the final day of the BSBI Wales Summer meeting.

Gillian Foulkes