Glamorgan Botany Group

2022 Excursion Report

From coastal cliffs to upland forestry and post-industrial brownfield, our excursions for 2022 covered a wide range of habitats, and generated lots of good records for input into the BSBI's database. Attendance was also up on previous years, proving that, whether beginner or expert, there's 'something for everyone' on our excursions!

As well as recording, a focus of our events is helping each other to improve our plant identification skills – so if you want to get to know Glamorgan's plants better, then we'd be delighted to see you on our 2023 excursions.

David Barden, Karen Wilkinson and Julian Woodman

Ogmore-by-Sea – Sunday 10 April

With over 7 hours in the field, this was our longest excursion ever – and the word 'epic' described not just its duration but the quality of the botanising as well. Fortunately, most of our group of 17 were stalwart enough to see it through to the end, on our somewhat ambitious 4½-mile circuit southward from Ogmore Beach car-park and back round via Southerndown and Pant Mari Flanders.

Just for once, we actually intended to dawdle in the car-park, which has large areas of short, rabbit-grazed sandy turf, and was known to hold several interesting species. The weather had been on the chilly side in the previous couple of weeks, so vegetation was not that advanced, and flowers were few and far between – but enough was visible to make some convincing identifications in most cases. *Cerastium diffusum* (Sea Mouse-ear) was one of the first 'interesting' species to be seen, while *Stellaria pallida* (Lesser Chickweed) was another good find, being only the second recent record for the Ogmore area. Another early flowerer was *Erodium cicutarium* (Common Storksbill).

On the monocot front, some newcomers to the group may have been nonplussed by our obsession with tiny grass-like leaves, but we were able to detect (and demonstrate) *Carex arenaria* (Sand Sedge) and *Elymus junceiformis* (Sand Couch) – the latter previously unknown from Ogmore – along with flowering *Luzula campestris* (Field Woodrush) and *Carex caryophyllea* (Spring Sedge).

Not the greatest of flowering displays – but on a chilly day in April you have to be happy with what you get! Clockwise from top left, *Luzula campestris*, *Montia fontana*, *Carex caryophyllea* and *Stellaria pallida* wow us with their showy blooms (actually, the *Stellaria* had already finished flowering – a characteristic of this species).

We had great trouble with diminutive *Geranium* species, even when flowering, but we eventually concluded that most of what we were seeing was *G. molle* (Dove's-foot Cranesbill). Likewise, distinguishing between *Trifolium scabrum* (Rough Clover) and *T. striatum* (Knotted Clover) proved tricky in the absence of flowers, although in retrospect more careful attention to leaf characteristics may have helped us in most cases.

Something of a surprise for many in the group was the abundance of *Montia fontana* (Blinks) in the dry turf, as it is often associated with damp ground. Later inspection of the seed ornamentation indicated that this was subsp. *chondrosperma*, which is known to have a preference for drier conditions. Shortly after we were pleased to see two colonies of *Trifolium suffocatum* (Suffocated Clover), which over the last century only had records from the Gower, until seen by Paul Green in this location in 2015.

There were not many species that were conspicuously in flower in the short turf, but here are three! Top left: *Erodium cicutarium* was already going to seed. Top right: *Geranium molle* varies in colour a bit, and this specimen is paler-pink than usual. Bottom: Several plants of *Lamium amplexicaule* were seen over a small area, showing their intense magenta flowers.

Annual *Trifolium* species are a speciality of the Ogmore region. *T. suffocatum* (top) is fairly easily distinguished by its combination of very long, hairless leaf-stalks and <10 teeth on the side of each leaflet (inset), while *T. scabrum* has leaf-veins that are thickened near the margins (not visible here), but also reddish-brown blotching along the midrib (inset) .

Next on the target list was another rarity, *Moenchia erecta* (Upright Chickweed), again unknown here before 2015. Thanks to Julian's 'insider knowledge', we were able to locate this with only moderate difficulty – no-one who saw it can doubt the achievement in spotting this plant when not expecting it!

Far easier to see from a distance, and indeed well-known from the Ogmore area, was the very local plant *Marrumbium vulgare* (White Horehound), and a substantial group of plants was admired. Close by we saw *Torilis nodosa* (Knotted Bur-Parsley), another relative rarity in Glamorgan.

It's in there somewhere... *Moenchia erecta* in young bud requires a sharp eye to spot it amongst the abundant *Plantago coronopus* (Buck's-horn Plantain).

A bit easier to locate was the *Marrumbium vulgare*, here being photographed by Kat.

Continuing round the landward side of the coastal access land, we were delighted when Laura spotted a few plants of the tiny annual *Vicia lathyroides* (Spring Sedge), as this had been on our target list (see the photo on page 5). In fact, later comparison with the database showed that this was the exact spot where it had been seven years previously. A little further on was some *Danthonia decumbens* (Heath Grass) – a plant that indicated a more neutral influence in the soil.

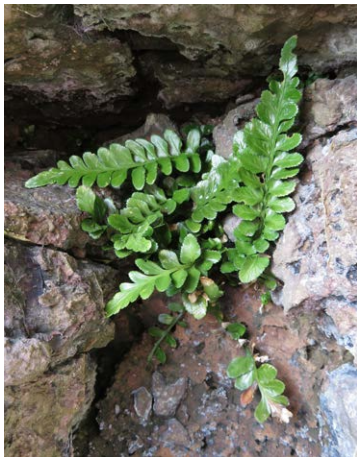
In contrast to *Viola riviniana*, the rarity *V. canina* shown here has thicker, narrower leaves that are more grey–green in colour. It usually flowers in May, so we considered ourselves lucky to find this solitary flower!

Another indicator of some leaching was *Carex pilulifera* (Pill Sedge) amongst patches of *Ulex europaeus* (Common Gorse), and also in the vicinity were *Myosotis discolor* (Changing Forget-me-not), *Erodium maritimum* (Sea Storksbill) and the tiny leaves of *Campanula rotundifolia* (Harebell).

Star of the morning, though, was *Viola canina* (Heath Dog Violet), which until very recently had only historic records from Ogmore. There was also plenty of *V. riviniana* (Common Dog Violet) not far away, and one patch of leaves suggested (to a couple of people in the group) a potential hybrid, but without more mature plants it couldn't be taken any further.

Heading down to the coastline, we stopped to investigate the limestone cliffs, where in 2013 David had seen about 12 scattered plants of *Asplenium marinum* (Sea Spleenwort), in its only known site in the hectad. We were therefore pleased when careful inspection yielded about 30 plants spread over about 40 metres, above the high-tide mark.





Investigation of crevices at the base of the low cliff (left) yielded a good number of tiny plants of *Asplenium marinum* (centre), and a few well-grown ones (right).

Further species of interest as we proceeded along the cliff path were *Cirsium acaule* (Dwarf Thistle), *Sherardia arvensis* (Field Madder) and *Koeleria macrantha* (Crested Hair Grass), with *Trifolium ornithopodioides* (Bird's-foot Clover) found near West Farm. By the roadside here, we were very pleased to see the leaves of *Sison* (*Petroselinum*) *segetum* (Corn Parsley), a very rare plant in the vice-county, and a new hectad record here.

The bridleway to Groes Farm was pleasant but yielded nothing of particular note other than *Moehringia trinervia* (Three-veined Sandwort) and the white-flowered form of *Viola odorata* (Sweet Violet), known as var. *dumetorum*,

Looking N along the coast from near West Farm, with *Ulex europaeus* in full flower on the more leached limestone slopes.

The ladder-like leaves of *Sison segetum* were a surprise find along the roadside near West Farm – about 20 plants were seen over a short stretch. The white flowers visible belong to *Cochlearia danica* (Danish Scurvy-grass).

At the end of the bridleway we found a remarkable *Sambucus nigra* (Elder), which even more remarkably was still growing (note the leaves at the top of the photo)!

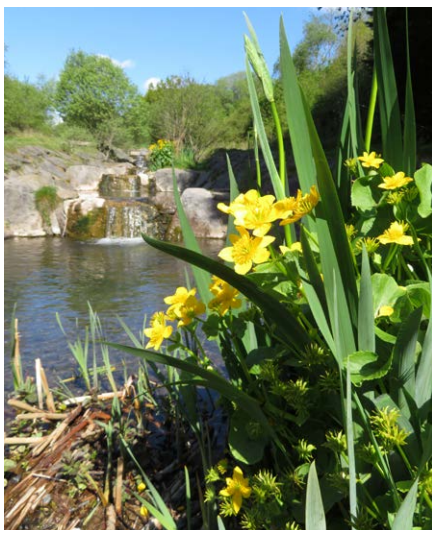
The muted purple colour of the flowers of *Vicia lathyroides* (top), combined with the 1–2 pairs of leaflets, its early flowering and diminutive stature, are useful characteristics to distinguish it from small forms of *V. sativa* subsp. *nigra* (Common Vetch) – see page 6 for a photo. The clincher is the tuberculate seeds, but we were too early for those on this visit. The plants were growing in the same rabbit-grazed patch of sandy, lichen-dominated turf (bottom) where David had seen them back in 2012; about eight plants were seen in total.

which is more common in the Vale than the regular purple-flowered var. *odorata*.

At Heol y Mynydd we headed across the well-grazed green down into Pant Mari Flanders, where we encountered plenty of *Agrostis curtisii* (Bristle Bent), plus more *Moenchia* in tightly-grazed turf by a sand 'chute', and *Vicia lathyroides* not far away. Also in this valley was a single vegetative plant of *Ranunculus parviflorus* (Small-flowered Buttercup), expertly spotted by Julian. Near the bottom of the valley was plenty of *Adoxa moschatellina* (Moschatel) in a sandy substrate under scrub – a habitat that it does very well in.

Finally, with the day drawing to a close, we headed briskly across the dune grassland at Portbello House, and then onto the riverside saltmarsh and shingle, to give ourselves a break from plant-spotting on what was an exhausting but excellent day!

The leaves of *Ranunculus parviflorus* look a bit like those of other buttercups, but the absence of stolons (it's an annual), the small, weakly-lobed leaves, and the absence of pale blotches at the leaf-sinuses are useful pointers.



There were a few clumps of *Caltha palustris* (Marsh Marigold) by the Nant Cothi.

Cwm Cothi – Saturday 7 May

With largely cloudless skies and a light N breeze, this was a spring day to savour, and we did!

Fifteen of us met in the Taff Bargoed Community Park, and started by examining areas of short turf and gravel. There was nothing of particular surprise here, but it was an opportunity for newer members of the group to get acquainted with a range of typical species, including *Veronica* spp. (Speedwells) and *Hypericum* spp. (St John's-worts).

Most of the colliery spoil was well-wooded, but this small area had some open, rather damp ground.

A little further on, the basic features of sedges were demonstrated with a large colony of *Carex hirta* (Hairy Sedge), and nearby a clump of *Vicia tetrasperma* (Smooth Tare) was just coming into flower. *Luzula campestris* (Field Woodrush) and some rather diminutive *L. multiflora* (Heath Woodrush) gave us some difficulty, but the clump-forming nature and relatively short style and anthers of the latter helped us reach a conclusion.

Crossing the Nant Cothi, we headed upstream to an area of thinly vegetated mine spoil, which kept us busy for a good 20 minutes; here too, we were able to compare the leaf characters of *Hypochaeris radicata* (Common Cat's-ear), *Leontodon hispidus* (Rough Hawkbit) and *L. saxatilis* (Lesser Hawkbit).

As demonstrated by this specimen, *Carex hirta* isn't always hairy, which is rather annoying for those learning their sedges! 'Stace 4' doesn't mention this variation, but the *Vegetative Key* names it as 'var. *sublaevis*'.

Although the flower heads of this *Aira caryophyllea* (Silver Hair Grass) hadn't opened, we were able to prise open the sheaths to check that the flowering panicles were spreading and not contracted – the latter being distinctive for *A. praecox* (Early Hair Grass).

The brilliantly-coloured flowers of *Vicia sativa* ssp. *nigra* (Common Vetch) brighten up the turf. Notice the very narrow leaves, which are typical of this subspecies.

In an extended loop, we first headed upstream and then downstream, finding a good selection of woodland species, especially on the E bank. Not far away in dappled shade, we had our lunch, where David demonstrated four common fern species. Here we also compared the leaf-toothing of *Betula pubescens* (Downy Birch) and *B. pendula* (Silver Birch). In retrospect, we should have examined more trees to see if the hybrid was present!

Now in the woodland proper and in a new monad, Karen started a new list for the *third* time, and as well as the species familiar to us earlier in the day, added some species indicative of a more heathy nature to the woodland , and in a couple of damp spots the suggestion that it was formerly more open – scattered *Viola palustris* (Marsh Violet), plenty of *Wahlenbergia hederacea* (Ivy-leaved Bellflower) in one boggy spot, one bush of *Salix aurita* (Eared Willow), and a little *Stellaria alsine* (Bog Stitchwort).



The woodland by the Nant Cothi (left) had plenty of *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* (Bluebell), along with frequent *Veronica montana* (Wood Speedwell, middle) and some *Stellaria holostea* (Greater Stitchwort, right)



Parts of the woodland were wet, as indicated by the presence of *Viola palustris* (left, with a flower at the bottom of the photo), *Stellaria alsine* (middle) and *Wahlenbergia hederacea* (right, amongst *Sphagnum*).

Along a tributary of the main stream, we found a small colony of *Oxalis acetosella* (Wood Sorrel) var. *subpurpurascens*. A tree of *Malus* (Apple) initiated discussion about how to distinguish 'good' *M. sylvatica* (Crab Apple) from *M. pumila* (Cultivated Apple) 'wildings'. Consensus was that hairs on the sepals indicated the latter, even when the leaves were more-or-less glabrous.

Showing their distinguishing feature of being untidily splayed-out, the flowering heads of *Luzula pilosa* were well-scattered in the woodland.

***Carex laevigata* (Smooth-stalked Sedge) was another nice find in the woodland. It's an uncommon species that looks rather like the commoner *C. binervis* (Green-ribbed Sedge), though it's more typical of shadier places.**

The petal-veins of *Oxalis acetosella* are always pink even in typical white-flowered plants, but rarely the background colour can be pink too – an attractive variety spotted by the stream that was new to many in the group.

Further on, the now largely Beech-dominated woodland graded into apparently ungrazed wet heath – a transition characteristic of 'ffridd' habitats. Here there was a fine array of typical plants, including masses of *Genista anglica* (Petty Whin) and *Dactylorhiza maculata* (Heath Spotted Orchid), plus smaller quantities of *Narthecium ossifragum* (Bog Asphodel), *Polygala serpyllifolia* (Heath Milkwort), *Pedicularis sylvatica* (Lousewort) and *Serratula tinctoria* (Saw-wort). At the edge of the large field was a good specimen of *M. sylvatica*, to compare with the *M. pumila* we had seen earlier.

Some of the special species spotted in the wet heath, clockwise from top left – *Polygala serpyllifolia*, *Genista anglica*, *Pedicularis sylvatica* and *Dactylorhiza maculata* (note the small, round spots on the leaves – quite unlike *D. fuchsii* (Common Spotted Orchid).

Dominant *Fagus sylvatica* (Beech) – here growing at the extreme W end of its supposed native range in Britain.

We then retraced our steps back through the woodland, finding close to our starting point some *Salix elaeagnos* (Olive Willow) to finish the day.

***Salix elaeagnos* is an introduced species with very narrow leaves.**

Port Talbot Docks – Saturday 18 June

Following the benign weather for our first two excursions, this one tested our resolve more thoroughly, with spells of not torrential but definitely wettening rain, and a brisk wind to boot.

Meeting at the advertised point after following the painstakingly detailed directions, 10 of us (increasing to 13 following some late arrivals), watched while Tim vaulted a fence to examine something that looked like it could have been *Galium album* (Hedge Bedstraw) × *G. verum* (Ladies Bedstraw). Alas, it

The verge of Harbour Way at West End, Port Talbot, was awash with super-robust seed-mix strains of *Galium*, including *G. verum* (❶), *G. album* (❷), and their hybrid (❸).

Also found on this verge were (left to right) *Centaurea scabiosa* (Greater Knapweed), *Echium vulgare* (Viper's Bugloss) and – highlight of the day – *Orobanche picridis*. The photos show its host plant, *Picris hieracioides* (Hawkweed Oxtongue), and the dark-purple stigmas and pale corollas that help to distinguish this species from the closely related *O. minor* (Common Broomrape).

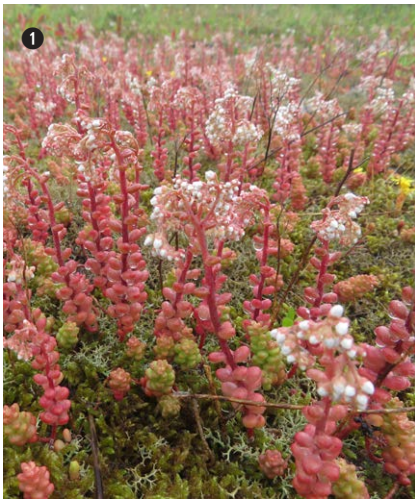
proved to be just *G. album* with immature buds, but we had better luck on the nearby road verge, where we found the hybrid growing with both parents. Like other species on this verge, these were clearly introduced with a seed mix, being far taller than the native strains (and woody at the base).

Also on this verge, to our pleasant surprise, was the species we had been intending to see later in the day – *Orobanche picridis* (Oxtongue Broomrape). Numerous plants were seen even along the 100 m or so of verge we investigated – not bad for Britain's rarest broomrape!

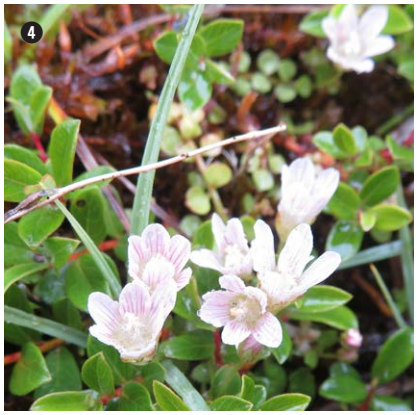
Having ticked-off this highlight ahead of time, our co-leader for this excursion, Barry Stewart, suggested we decamp to a site about 8 minutes' drive away at Baglan, which had more to see and was not subject to contamination by a seed-mix. Driving in tight convoy through a baffling network of roundabouts and industrial estates, we came to the parking spot, and used what might be euphemistically described as an 'informal' entrance to gain access.

This site astounded us all by its size and diversity, and we happily spent the next few hours wandering around it, venturing as far as the dunes towards the S edge at one point. The photos on the following pages tell the story of the colourful plants that we found, although by 2.30pm we'd had enough of the rain!

Parts of the site were reasonably well-vegetated, with a slight calcareous influence on the flora, and here we saw: more *Clinopodium acinos* (Basil Thyme ❶) than you could shake a stick at ❷; a few *Euphrasia tetraquetra* (Western Eyebright ❸), or something close to it; plenty of *Anacamptis pyramidalis* (Pyramidal Orchid ❹) and *Thymus drucei* (Wild Thyme ❺); occasional *Blackstonia perfoliata* (Yellow-wort ❻) and *Ononis repens* (Restharrow ❼); a couple of clumps of *Rosa rubiginosa* (Sweet Briar ❽); and one or two *Ophrys apifera* (Bee Orchid ❾).

Large areas were thinly vegetated, with a lot of gravelly slag. Here there were: large patches of *Sedum album* (White Stonecrop ❶) and *S. acre* (Biting Stonecrop ❷); a scattering of *Trifolium arvense* (Hare's-foot Clover ❸) and *T. scabrum* (Rough Clover ❹); locally frequent *Viola canina* (Heath Dog Violet ❺); vast quantities of *Vulpia* species (Fescues ❻) over large areas; and small amounts of *Verbena officinalis* (Vervain ❼), *Galium parisiense* (Wall Bedstraw ❽), *Cirsium nutans* (Nodding Thistle ❾), *Geranium columbinum* (Long-stalked Cranesbill ❿), *Pilosella prealta* (Tall Mouse-ear Hawkweed ⓫) and ferns including *Asplenium ceterach* (Rustyback ⓬).



A smallish area towards the NE boundary had a dune-slack-like flora, with a few *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* (Southern Marsh Orchid ❶), striking patches of *Salix repens* (Creeping Willow ❷), several fine spikes of *Epipactis palustris* (Marsh Helleborine ❸), and small amounts of *Anagallis tenella* (Bog Pimpernel ❹) and *Carex viridula* (Small-fruited Yellow Sedge ❺).

JW

And finally there was a coastal influence towards the dunes, with small amounts of *Matthiola sinuata* (Sea Stock ❶), *Salsola kali* (Prickly Saltwort ❷) and *Juncus acutus* (Sharp Rush ❸), and plenty of *Eryngium maritimum* (Sea Holly ❹).

...and then it was time to head home!

Cosmeston – Sunday 10 July

On one of the many hot and sunny days in an exceptionally dry summer, 15 botanists visited Cosmeston Lakes Country Park, accompanied by members of the Cosmeston Wildlife Group.

First, we headed south-west along the boardwalk, through reedbeds supporting *Lythrum salicaria* (Purple Loosestrife), *Carex riparia* (Greater Pond Sedge), *Typha latifolia* (Reedmace) and *Phragmites australis* (Common Reed), past the 'dipping' ponds to an area of open grassland. This may have been seeded with a wildflower seed mix, and the species observed, all thought to have been introduced, included *Centaurea nigra* (Black Knapweed), *Galium verum* (Ladies Bedstraw), *Daucus carota* (Wild Carrot) and *Achillea millefolium* (Yarrow). This led to an interesting discussion as to how introduced species should be both recorded and distinguished from natural populations. Roesel's Bush Crickets were heard singing from this tall grassland – and at a number of other locations within the Park. This is becoming an increasingly common summer sound in east Glamorgan.

Julian demonstrates *Lotus corniculatus*...

...and Kerry looks at *Phleum pratense*.

Lost amongst grasses: the meadows along the south-west boundary give us an opportunity to learn some of our Graminae!

From here, we made our way through a series of meadows lying on the south-west boundary of the Country Park. This provided a good opportunity to get to grips with grass identification. We compared *Alopercurus pratensis* (Meadow Foxtail) with *Phleum*, and subsequently identified both *Phleum pratense* (Timothy) and *P. bertolonii* (Smaller Cat's-tail) by measuring the lengths of the spikelets and awns. Other grasses examined included *Hordeum secalinum* (Meadow Barley), *Schedonorus arundinaceus* (Tall Fescue), *Bromus hordeaceus* (Soft Brome) and *Bromus racemosus* (Smooth Brome). We were also able to show key meadow species such as *Centaurea nigra* (Black Knapweed) and *Lotus corniculatus* (Bird's-foot Trefoil) to our hosts from the Country Park.

We continued past a patch of the spiny form of *Ononis repens* (Restharrow), known as var. *horrida*, down through an area of scrubby grassland towards part of the former limestone quarry area, where the thin, limey soils support short, open vegetation. Here, we hoped to find our target species, *Centaurium pulchellum* (Lesser Centaury), which had been reported from this site but had no records in the BSBI database. After a little searching, review of the new 'Gentians of Britain and Ireland' handbook (co-authored by our very own Tim Rich) and close examination of some small specimens of *C. erythraea*

(Common Centaury), we started to observe the diminutive *C. pulchellum*. As well as its much smaller stature, it can be distinguished from *C. erythraea* by the lack of basal rosette at the point of flowering, and the long terminal pedicel. As we continued north, it quickly became apparent that the open limestone grassland supported a very large population, with hundreds of plants scattered over a wide area, making it probably the largest population in the east of the vice-county. We also noticed how the twisted anthers of both species bore a likeness to fusilli pasta (check it out for yourself!). Associated vascular plant species in this area included *Blackstonia perfoliata* (Yellow-wort), *Linum catharticum* (Fairy Flax), *Leontodon saxatilis* (Lesser Hawkbit) and *Carlina vulgaris* (Carline Thistle).

The thin lime-rich soils in the former quarried areas (top left) forced us down onto our hands and knees (top right), with the rewards being *Centaurium erythraea* (bottom left) and *C. pulchellum* (bottom right).

A brief diversion to the 'Dragonfly Pond' resulted in several wetland plant records such as *Schoenoplectus tabernaemontani* (Grey Clubrush) and *Potamogeton natans* (Broad-leaved Pondweed), along with a good number of dragonflies! Back in the open limestone grassland we continued to observe *Centaurium pulchellum* as we moved north, and again as we headed back south towards the western lake, where a few more wetland species were added to our list. Our final stop was the café for a well-earnt cold drink!

In the quarried area, we also noted this beautiful white colour form of *Centaurium erythraea*.

The 'Dragonfly Pond' at Cosmeston Country Park, with *Schoenoplectus tabernaemontani* visible in the foreground.

Bryn y Garn – Sunday 21 August

The forecast proved to be wide of the mark today, as instead of cloud and rain, we had long spells of warm sunshine, with light winds. So it was that, lacking suncream and hats, and burdened by waterproofs, our group of ten worked up a sweat through the N part of Bryn y Garn Common (or 'Coity Wallia Common' according to the board) and some of the adjoining fields.

It was quickly apparent that the common was rather over-grazed, and we later found that this was due to one of the stockholders insisting on grazing substantial numbers of sheep, against the wishes of the other commoners. It was also rather on the dry side (but not nearly as bad as further east in Wales and England), so not many plants were in flower.

Nevertheless, the botanising was pretty good, and we found a wide range of species of heathy and marshy grassland. We were pleased to see a little *Hypercium humifusum* (Trailing St John's Wort), and later on there was *Serratula tinctoria* (Saw-wort) in small quantity. David found *Dryopteris carthusiana* (Narrow Buckler Fern) at the edge of some scrub, and nearby there was some convincing *Dryopteris* × *deweveri* (Hybrid Buckler Fern). *Briza media* (Quaking Grass) was seen by the roadside – a new record for this site.

"It wasn't supposed to be this nice!". Unexpectedly fine weather made for pleasant botanising at Bryn y Garn.

***Ulex europaeus* (Common Gorse) provided an identification challenge for those unfamiliar with it in seedling form (left), and a different sort of challenge for those wishing to stick to the footpath (right, spot the signpost!).**

***Serratula tinctoria* (left) and *Dryopteris carthusiana* (right) were found in small quantity on the common.**

Moving east of the road, we headed into an area towards the N edge of the Common previously known to be good for bog plants, and it didn't disappoint! None of us had ever before seen so much *Vaccinium oxycoccos* (Wild Cranberry), which sprawled over the hummocks of *Sphagnum*, and was festooned with large numbers of berries. *Menyanthes trifoliata* (Bogbean) and *Carex rostrata* (Bottle Sedge) were also in large quantity, as was *Eriophorum angustifolium* (Common Cottongrass). Rather less abundant was *Comarum palustre* (Marsh Cinquefoil), which we saw in one area, *Eriophorum vaginatum* (Hare's-tail Cottongrass),

Erica tetralix (Cross-leaved Heath) and *Calluna vulgaris* (Heather), while *Hypericum elodes* (Bog St John's Wort) was rare. The only negative point was the numerous saplings of *Betula pubescens* (Downy Birch), which if not controlled might ultimately shade out the flora and dry out the ground.

Some of the notable species of the boggy area on Bryn y Garn Common (left to right) – *Carex rostrata*, *Menyanthes trifoliata*, *Comarum palustre* and *Vaccinium oxycoccos*.

Most of the plants of *Carum verticillatum* had long since finished flowering, with only young shoots visible.

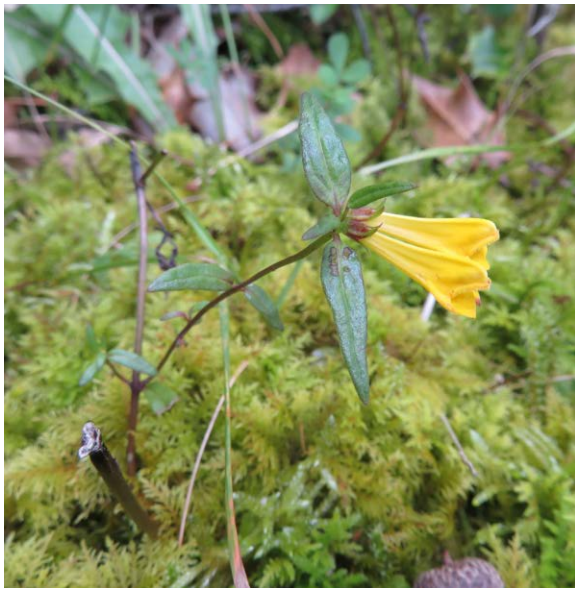
In the second, small field (centred on SS9680.8354), the hedge boundary yielded *Melampyrum pratense* (Common Cow-wheat) and *Betonica officinalis* (Betony), while from the grassland we added *Trichophorum germanicum* (Deergrass), *Genista anglica* (Petty Whin), *Dactylorhiza maculata* (Heath Spotted Orchid) and *Cirsium dissectum* (Meadow Thistle) to

After lunch, we headed over drier ground towards the E end of the common, where we saw a little *Frangula alnus* (Alder Buckthorn), with some more woodland-type species in the vicinity.

Moving into the first of Gill Barter's cattle-grazed fields (centred on SS9670.8352), we found a selection of rhôs pasture species, as well as one patch of *Valeriana dioica* (Marsh Valerian), a little *Persicaria bistorta* (Bistort), *Anagallis tenella* (Bog Pimpernel), and *Veronica scutellata* (Marsh Speedwell). But the highlight was a good scattering of *Carum verticillatum* (Whorled Caraway), in one of its very few sites in E Glamorgan. The plants had finished flowering, and the delicate leaves were rather tricky to spot, low down amongst the vegetation.

Also finished flowering was a colony of *Cirsium dissectum*, here displaying its typical habit of forming clonal patches.

Throughout the day, Rob and Linda had their eye out for insects as well as plants, and they were excited to spot the recent British arrival *Argiope bruennichi* (Wasp Spider), which we later saw several of. The photo shows the zigzag 'stabilimentum' in the web, the function of which is unknown.



We found *Melampyrum pratense* in one place. This is the usual variety found in the W of Britain, subsp. *pratense* var. *hians*, which has a uniformly deep yellow corolla.

our list. Gill said that the latter was formerly more abundant, but diminished following the laying of a pipeline across the land about 20 years ago, and we speculated whether this had disturbed the hydrology of the site.

Gill's third field (centred on SS9684.8361) produced more *Carum*, as well as *Carex hostiana* (Tawny Sedge), *Carex pulicaris* (Flea Sedge) and *Narthecium ossifragum* (Bog Asphodel). A confusing set of *Salix* bushes was encountered, which more-or-less answered to *S. cinerea* (Grey Willow), but one with unusually glossy leaves and another with leaves more rugose than usual – hybrids with *S. aurita* (Eared Willow) may have been involved, but the heat was getting to us, so we left it at that.

Julian also spotted *Agrostis curtisii* (Bristle Bent), perhaps the most distinctive member of the genus with its tight flowering heads and clumps of very narrow, grey–green leaves.

Finally, we headed to the other side of the old railway, where in a field under different ownership, more *Carum* was seen, and where we were pleased to refind a single clump of *Osmunda regalis* (Royal Fern), at its only site in the hectad. We then made our way back to our starting point, hot and tired but satisfied with the day's botanising!

Looking rather less regal than it should, the sole plant of *Osmunda regalis* in the hectad had been well-chewed by the resident cattle!

Saturday 17 September – Nantyfyllon

Our group of 12 enjoyed fine, fresh, sunny weather with light winds on our visit to Nantyfyllon and the hillside to the east. Initially, we headed up a single-track road, but soon diverted off onto some colliery spoil for 20 minutes or so. Here and on the roadsides we soon accumulated a good list of plants, including a few plants of *Agrimonia procera* (Fragrant Agrimony), a thin scattering of *Verbena officinalis* (Vervain), and a tree of *Salix* × *reichardtii* (a Hybrid Willow). Some amusement was had from a specimen of *Carex spicata* (Spiked Sedge) with a 1.8m flowering stem, on account of growing up through tall vegetation. Julian found *Carex disticha* (Brown Sedge) at the edge of a gravelled area, which turned out to be the first hectad record.

A laneside ditch provided the opportunity to compare three ferns growing side-by-side: *Oreopteris limbosperma* (Lemon-scented Fern, left), *Athyrium filix-femina* (Lady Fern, centre right) and *Dryopteris affinis* (Scaly Male Fern, bottom right).

At the top of the the lane near a caravan park, there was some waste ground where building rubble had been crushed and levelled to form a surface for vehicles. There was a selection of aliens and garden plants here that could easily have occupied half an hour – but mindful of the fact that this is an activity that doesn't appeal to all (!), we lingered here only briefly. On our way through, however, we spotted a couple of plants of *Epilobium tetragonum* (Square-stalked Willowherb) – identified by its club-shaped stigma, the absence of glands on the hairs, and its very long pods.

Left: Waste ground furnished several species of garden origin, including this double-flowered *Tanacetum parthenium* (Feverfew). Right: *Rorippa islandica* was frequent along a damp track.

Further up, a number of typical plants of colliery spoil were found on long-abandoned spoil heaps, including a few *Carlina vulgaris* (Carline Thistle), a good quantity of *Linum catharticum* (Fairy Flax), and plenty of *Erica cinerea* (Bell Heather), now well past flowering.

The heads of *Carlina vulgaris* persist long after flowering has finished, and often make for a good end-of-season photo!

Rather more pleasant on the eye than to the the nose was this variant of *Mentha spicata*.

Heading up onto the moorland, the damp track had a good quantity of *Rorippa islandica* (Northern Yellow-cress). Although native to W Britain (including a large area of SW Wales), it wasn't confirmed from v.c. 41 until 1974. Confusion with other *Rorippa* species may have been involved, but whatever its history in the area, is seems to be spreading here in gateways and similar muddy places.

The ground further up was quite hummocky on account of former quarry workings, and on top of one of these hummocks we spotted a few plants of *Spergularia rubra* (Sand Spurrey). A patch of *Mentha* not far away proved to be *M. spicata* (Spearmint), albeit a variant with a rather unpleasant petrol-like smell.

Damp patches in between the hummocks showed a little bit of base-enrichment, with some *Carex pulicaris* (Flea Sedge), and *Anagallis tenella* (Bog Pimpernel) plentiful over limited areas. Typical plants of acid bog were in rather short supply, with some post-flowering spikes of *Narthecium ossifragum* (Bog Asphodel) spotted. Clumps of *Dryopteris carthusiana* (Narrow Buckler Fern) were also scattered generally through the marshy areas, and *Agrostis vinealis* (Brown Bent) was also seen.

Left: Violets are usually thought of as a spring flower, but it's not unusual to find late flowers, with this being *Viola riviniana* (Common Dog Violet). Right: *Narthecium ossifragum* has strikingly-coloured seed-pods.

The group enjoying lunch on the grassy hummocks of the long-abandoned colliery workings on the W slopes of Mynydd Pwll-yr-lwrch.

After lunch, many in the group headed back downhill, with the remainder (four of us) ascending briskly up Mynydd Pwll-yr-lwrch through tussocky *Calluna vulgaris* (Heather) and *Vaccinium myrtillus* (Bilberry). Rocks at the top furnished a clump of *Polypodium interjectum* (Intermediate Polypody) – which at 395 m has a good claim to be the highest plant of this species in Glamorgan!

The E part of Darren y Bannau was deeply shaded and largely dominated by *Luzula sylvatica*.

We then zigzagged across moorland and through forestry, making a reasonable list of typical species in our next monad, including a clump of *Hieracium umbellatum* (Umbellate Hawkweed). Our target was the crags of Darren y Bannau, which we entered near the very brambly E end, where there was the ruins of a small building. The cliffs were largely rather dry, and did not yield a long list of species, but the typical upland-crag plant *Luzula sylvatica* (Great Woodrush) was abundant in places, and Julian spotted the first of two small colonies of *Hymenophyllum wilsonii* (Wilson's Filmy Fern), which turned out to be a new hectad record. David also found a patch

of *Phegopteris connectilis* (Beech Fern) at the base of a rock stack – only the third extant record for the hectad.

By this point, we weren't even halfway along the crags, but were exhausted enough by having to battle through the undergrowth to call it a day. We therefore headed down onto the forestry track, where we were pleased to find a few plants of *Sagina nodosa* (Knotted Pearlwort). Although well-recorded elsewhere in the hectad, this was the first recent record on this side of the Lynfi valley.

JW

Tom, David and Alexis investigating the crags of Darren y Bannau, where we found (top) *Hymenophyllum wilsonii* and (bottom) *Phegopteris connectilis*.

A brisk walk down along the track yielded nothing of particular note except for some fine views, and we emerged in Caerau, where the pillars of a deconstructed railway bridge yielded *Asplenium ruta-muraria* (Wall Rue) and *A. adiantum-nigrum* (Black Spleenwort). From there it was back along the cycle path to the cars, to complete a long but interesting day.

***Sagina nodosa* – in Glamorgan, a characteristic plant of certain dune slacks, but also widely distributed on forestry tracks in the northern valleys.**

Text by David Barden and Karen Wilkinson (July).

Photos by David Barden, Karen Wilkinson (July) and Julian Woodman (JW, where noted).