

Fauldbog Bay & Meikle Ross 7th May 2022

Excellent weather yet again! 7 of us gathered at Ross Farm (NX 65 44), with the owner who accompanied us across the fields of cows with calves, to the edge of the bay. She explained that she'd be interested in our findings and photos as she would like to incorporate some of these into material for holiday visitors. Spending only a small amount of time looking at the disturbed ground and the marshy hollow dominated by grasses, rushes and irises, we soon found many interesting rocky knowes, showing signs of nutrient, slightly calcareous, enrichment. And the first of the spring squills *Scilla verna*, which we found throughout the day, over the whole of the 1km of coastline and maritime grassland we explored.



These knowes also held rock rose *Helianthemum nummularia* with the first flowers appearing; restharrow *Ononis repens*; both hairgrasses, early *A. praecox* and silver *A. caryophyllea*; thyme *Thymus praecox*; dog violets, both common *Viola riviniana* with its pale white, notched spur and what looked like early *V. canina* without the notch and a decidedly greenish tinge to the spur; burnet saxifrage *Pimpinella saxifrage*; and lady's bedstraw *Galium verum*. Elsewhere the knowes were obviously more acidic with heavily grazed heather *Calluna vulgaris* and bell heath *Erica cinerea*, stonecrop *Sedum anglicum*, harebell *Campanula rotundifolia*, mouse-ear *Pilosella officinalis*, burnet rose *Rosa pimpinellifolia* with its dense fine spines or prickles and heath groundsel *Senecio sylvatica*. Closer to the shoreline, thrift *Armeria maritima* occurred with buckshorn plantain *Plantago coronopus* with its distinctive lobed leaves, and sea campion *Silene maritima*. Scattered all over these knowes were clumps of sea mouse-ear *Cerastium diffusum* like a shorter version of the sticky mouse-ear chickweed.



There were patches of saltmarsh with saltmarsh rush *Juncus gerardi*, sea rush *J. maritimus* with its very stiff stem far protruding beyond last year's seed head; scurvy-grass *Cochlearia officinalis* and some Danish scurvygrass *C. danica*, sea arrowgrass *Triglochin maritimus* of tall flower spikes and flattened rosette base, sea milkwort *Glaux maritima*. Nic spotted a lone plant of sea radish *Raphanus raphanistrum* on the upper shore and one of sea beet *Beta vulgaris maritima*, but there was little else there.

We decided to route march over the ground to reach Meikle Ross and the cliffs, with Val spotting a few flowering bulbous buttercups *Ranunculus bulbosus*, identified by the reflexed sepals – the other common buttercups have sepals spreading outwards – and if you look carefully enough there is a distinctly different shade of yellow from the others, creeping and meadow, both of which we also recorded. On route we stopped briefly at a drain outlet and recorded round-leaved water-crowfoot *Ranunculus omiophyllus* and watercress *Nasturtium officinale*.

Next stop was the cliffs where, plants apart, we watched nesting cormorants and, swimming on the sea or standing at the cliff base, small numbers of guillemots, black guillemots, razorbills and the inevitable gulls (herring and greater black-backed).



4 ravens also flew off as we approached. Again, spring squills galore and the cliff slopes awash with carpets of pink thrift interspersed with sea campion. However, the steep slopes of Slack Heugh (photo below) provided the scarcer plants, albeit viewed from a distance. Rock samphire *Crithmum maritimum*, grey-green in colour in

several distinct clumps, a solitary juniper bush *Juniperus communis* hanging down one crevice, numerous sea kale plants *Crambe maritima* at the cliff base and several clumps of hemlock water-dropwort *Oenanthe crocata* where water seeps from the rocks.



And a bit further on, the view over the Dee Estuary and Ross Island with Torrs Point beyond.



The walk back (via Ross Bay) was past rocky outcrops on the east face of Meikle Ross, with both gorse species, common *Ulex europaeus* and western *U. gallii*, the latter recognisable by its duller, yellow-green foliage, finer and denser spines. Scattered on the rock face we found a leek, probably wild onion *Allium vineale*, and dovesfoot cranesbill *Geranium molle*;



and a pair of stonechats chattering from the tops of the gorse bushes. The semi-improved meadow provided bulbous buttercup again, soft brome *Bromus hordaceus* and in one damper area blinks *Montia fontana*. And so back to the cars.

In all, we had around 140 species from 2 and a bit monads. I was particularly pleased with the squill display and to find juniper, rock samphire and sea kale. I hope you all enjoyed the day out, which turned out to be part recording and part a stroll in beautiful scenery. Unfortunately, it needs another visit in June/July to get the full list of species as so many plants were insufficiently developed to allow identification.

All photos provided by Ranald.

Next meeting: scheduled for 27th May at Black Loch NX 8654. Please meet at 10am as usual, at Colvend Kirk NX 863 541. Wellies probably best. Anyone with a grapnel for sapling water plants? If we have time, we might cast a glimpse around White Loch. Tea at Colvend tearoom afterwards before the walk back?

Stop Press Max found 2 plants of purple milk-vetch in NX 6443 during the meeting, the first record since the only other in 1959 (see below). Well spotted!



Here's a link to the photos from David Foreman, none titled deliberately so that you can identify them yourselves.

<https://1drv.ms/u/s!BFjUANXNi1hWhMJXbl9A-3MRkAKJYw?e=VsTWHn>