

## Dumfriesshire Botany Group Upper Kello Water 13 August 2013

During the rather wet August we were lucky to get a breezy day with no rain in Upper Nithsdale. The visit was to a largely unrecorded area of the upper Kello Water north west of Kirkconnel. The Kello Water is a muscular though short tributary of the Nith. It rises on Blacklorg Hill at somewhere over 600m and travels to meet the Nith at an altitude of just 150m just south of Kirkconnel a distance of only 14 kilometres. It has cut itself a deeply incised course with some notable steep and in places rocky slopes. On these there are several plants of interest. The most species rich area is probably at Corserig Hill. That has Juniper, Carline Thistle and Field Gentian amongst other things. Our focus was on the slopes upstream of this which had only one previous record, that of **Hairy Stonecrop** *Sedum villosum*, which we hoped to re-find.



Figure 1 Rough Horsetail colony Kello water Bob Merritt

*repens* var *repens* on rocks by the river just below the forestry bridge. This is very scattered in occurrence in these Upper Nithsdale hills this being only the second localised record in Dumfriesshire in NS60. We found the **Hairy Stonecrop** *Sedum villosum* in the disused quarry. The best find down by the river was a large colony of **Rough Horsetail** *Equisetum hymenale*. This is a first record for NS60 and only the sixth record for Dumfriesshire. It may be one of the largest colonies known.

It was on the south bank across the rather full Kello Water and Bob kindly volunteered to go back to the bridge to go down the other side

Having got the OK from the Forest Authorities we met at the start of the track near Guildhall Bridge and only took a couple of cars 4km up the track to the area we wanted to explore. This took us to just beyond Mynwhirr Hill. The hills here are now dominated by commercial forests and windfarms but once had open cast coal mining as well. There is a small amount of river side in NS6809 where the Polnagrie Burn joins it. The track flora and riverside grassland yielded a surprising 140 plus species. This included nice to find things like **Viviparous Fescue** *Festuca vivipara*, **Hairy Oat-grass** *Avenella pubescens* and **Grass of Parnassus** *Parnassia palustris*. A good find was **Creeping Willow** *Salix*



Figure 2 Rough Horsetail Kello water Bob Merritt

to collect a specimen. It appears to be in a wet seepage area under a light covering of broadleaved trees and may have survived a previous conifer cover.

We followed the track which climbs along Mynwhirr Hill into the next square. The Kello Water is 80m below the track down some very steep grassy slopes. These must have previously had stock grazing but they can never have been agriculturally improved and it was good see they have not been planted with trees either. Along the track the roadside ditch had an extensive colony of **Hairy Stonecrop** stretching for about 200m. Further along Jean found a large stand of **Spearmint** *Mentha spicata* and **Red Bartsia** *Odontites vernus*.



Figure 3 Hairy Stonecrop Mynwhirr Hill



Figure 4 Stone Bramble Kello Water

Most of the river and slope lies in a separate square slightly complicating recording. Here the slope is very steep down to the Kello Water. We traversed this slowly looking for patches of thin soil where different things might occur. In drier areas there was **Wild Thyme** *Thymus drucei*, **Mouse-ear Hawkweed** *Pilosella officinarum* and in several places **Grey-headed Hawkweed** *Hieracium trivale* in flower. Towards the bottom of the slope there were some flushed areas with **Tawney Sedge** *Carex hostiana*, **Flea Sedge** *Carex pulicaris*, **Primrose** *Primula vulgaris*, **Grass of Parnassus** *Parnassia palustris* and **Bog Asphodel** *Narthecium ossifragum*.

The river banks and rocks had shrubs like **Eared Willow** *Salix aurita* and **Sherard's Downy-rose** *Rosa sherardii*. There was also a good growth of **Northern Bedstraw** *Galium boreale*. This extends the known occurrence of this uncommon species further up the Kello Water meaning it is an important river for it in this part of the southern Uplands. One further plant of note on shaded

rocks just above where the Polthigh Burn joins was **Stone Bramble** *Rubus saxatilis*. This is its first record in NS60.

Chris Miles BSBI county recorder for Dumfriesshire VC72 – see [bsbi.org/dumfriesshire](http://bsbi.org/dumfriesshire)

