

Dumfriesshire Botany Group Kettleton Reservoir 29 June 2023

A party of 6 of us met at the parking area beside Morton castle on a fine morning. Morton Castle which dates from around 1260 is rather hidden in this landscape, perhaps by design as a safe retreat. The castle sits on the edge of the hills which are dissected by deep steep sided valleys within one of which lies Kettleton Reservoir, constructed to hold water for the Thornhill area. The hills rise steadily eastwards initially to about 450m which form a lower range below the higher hills rising to 670m at Wedder Law and Ganna Hill on the border with Lanarkshire. The main landuse is hill sheep and game shooting for partridge and grouse, hence the extensive hill tracks. The hills have been traditionally managed by burning and grazing which means they are clad in heather and acid grassland with extensive patches of bracken but very few trees. The botanical diversity is enhanced by small hillside flushes and stream sides.



Fig 1 Heading north just above the end of the reservoir. Bob Merrit

We set off past the castle but not before we had a nice view of an Osprey flying over the small loch. Red Kite which seems suited to the landscape was also flying around, this being one of the first areas in Dumfriesshire they settled. Our route was up the slope of Morton Mains Hill towards the old settlement on the summit. We entered our target monad as we went up picking up the typical acid grassland and moderate flush community species. Species like **Mat-grass** *Nardus stricta*, **Heath Grass** *Danthonia decumbens*, **Bugle** *Ajuga reptans*, **Sneezewort** *Achillea ptarmica*, **Meadowsweet** *Filipendula ulmaria* and **Devil's-bit Scabious** *Succisa pratensis*. On the top of the hill we headed along the slope towards The Hass. This word appears frequently on low points on hill ridges. It appears to mean a narrow place or neck of land maybe named as the obvious crossing point. Here in 2011 I

found **Chickweed Wintergreen** *Lysimachia europaea* in a remarkable isolated outpost. The population is still there extending for 23m on the edge of a bit of blanket bog.

From here we recorded the steep slope above the reservoir and eventually into the monad to the north where we had lunch at the top of Toms Cleuch. The cleuch had reasonable flushes feeding into it off the slope but these were well grazed making it harder to find things. We got a reasonable range of sedges including **Flea Sedge** *Carex pulicaris*, **Tawney Sedge** *Carex hostiana*, **Common Yellow-sedge** *Carex demissa* and **Pale Sedge** *C. pallescens* as well as **Fairy Flax** *Linum catharticum* and **Lady's Bedstraw** *Galium verum*. Getting down to the end of the reservoir was a challenge through tall bracken. Once down though we were able to explore an extensive flushed slope upstream of the reservoir. This was rather dominated by **Sharp-flowered Rush** *Juncus acutiflorus*, **Field Buttercup** *Ranunculus acris* and **Marsh Valerian** *Valeriana officinalis*. We only saw the one species of orchid **Common Spotted-orchid** *Dactylorhiza fuchscii*. Just at the top of the reservoir we saw **Marsh Cinquefoil** *Comarum palustre* and some stands of **Bladder Sedge** *Carex vesicaria*. The reservoir level was very low with a lot of soft mud exposed. On this there was a lot of **Common Water-crowfoot** *Ranunculus aquatilis* and **Water-pepper** *Persicaria hydropiper*. In shallow water there was a little **Water-purslane** *Lythrum portula* and **Common Spike-rush** *Eleocharis palustris*.

As we headed down the side of the reservoir we had a few more interesting finds. Drew spotted one plant of **Hairy Stonecrop** *Sedum villosum* in flower near the fence in a flush coming down the slope. On scree there were a few plants of **Parsely Fern** *Cryptogramma crispa* and on rocks near the dam there was a growth of **Black Spleenwort** *Asplenium adiantum-nigrum*. We saw the two species we hoped to get but did not find any additional rare or uncommon things.

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