



September 2023 Sample Issue

See inside for a selection of articles from *BSBI News* no. 154 and details of how to join the BSBI. Members receive three issues of *BSBI News* each year as part of the package of membership benefits.



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Cover photo: *Verbascum phoeniceum*, Wareham, Dorset. *David Leadbetter*. See *Aliens & Adventives News*, p. 34.

Contributions for future issues should be sent to the Editor, John Norton (john.norton@bsbi.org)

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Assessing changes in the diversity of Irish semi-natural grasslands – my MSc project

OLIVER LYNCH MILNER

Ireland has a large land cover of grassland habitats, which is primarily dominated by intensive agricultural grasslands. A small proportion of the grassland is extensively managed semi-natural grassland, which may have originated as a result of 5,000 years of human activity (Hall & Pilcher, 1995). As a result, these grasslands have a greater diversity of species. They provide a range of ecosystem services such as plant diversity, pollinator abundance, water regulation and carbon sequestration. Globally, research has shown, in some cases, that an increased plant diversity can generally increase carbon storage in response to climate stress (Isbell et al., 2015; Craven et al., 2016; Chen et al., 2018). To date, little is known about the capacity of Irish semi-natural grasslands to store carbon, and how plant diversity affects this.

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine funded 'StableGrass Project', based in University College Cork, and University of Galway,

Above: Upland acid grassland at c.700m, Galty Mountains, Co Limerick. Oliver Lynch Milner. Below: the author in action. Phoebe O'Brien



Plants in urban and rural habitats in Easter Ross

BRIAN BALLINGER

In a previous article we described the work of the Botanical Society of Scotland's (BSS) Urban Flora project¹, including a comparison of urban and rural flora (Ballinger & Grace, 2020). I also reported on some man-made habitats in Easter Ross (Ballinger, 2014). Many studies have suggested that the urban flora may be more diverse than the rural, including Grace's study of BSBI records (J. Grace, pers. comm.). A series of small comparisons in Easter Ross did not show a clear diversity difference, although the characteristics of the urban and rural floras differed, with a higher proportion of neophytes in towns (Ballinger, 2020).

Since then, I have carried a series of small comparative studies of rural and urban habitats in Easter Ross (v.c. 106) and some of these are summarised here.

Vegetation at Tain railway station, Easter Ross. Photographs by the author.

1. Coastal paths

Ten 100 m stretches of urban coastal path were compared with ten 100 m rural coastal path sections. The urban sites were at the first grid reference boundary from the town edge and the rural ones were the first accessible site more than 100 m from the town edge. Each transect was visited twice, recording all vascular plants within two metres. In the urban sites 401 records were made compared to 329 in the rural sites. There were 131 urban species and 109 rural species. Seventeen neophytes (aliens) were seen in the urban sections and 7 in the rural. Taken together with a small North Fife sample the difference was statistically significant. Typical shore species were present in both settings, but more typical urban species were also seen in the

¹ www.botanical-society-scotland.org.uk/Urban_Flora_of_Scotland

A popular section is the vice-county round-up of noteworthy records of non-native 'alien' plants

ADVENTIVES & ALIENS: Adventives & Aliens News 30

ADVENTIVES & ALIENS

Adventives & Aliens News 30

Compiled by Matthew Berry

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Alan Leslie has furnished this month's column with records of three more coir aliens from v.c. 29, a fascinating and for the British Isles, seemingly entirely new source of alien plant records.

(Himalayan Honeysuckle) is an occasional sight in towns, where it has got out of gardens, and occasionally as an odd specimen in plantations close to gardens. In the West Highlands, however,

This follows his article in

There has been a *Veronica cymbalaria* record in v.c. 15. This is a new record. Will that record be confirmed?

I conclude concerning



Lycyesteria



Lemna turionifera, Bideford, North Devon (v.c. 4). Bob Kirby

Echinochloa esculenta (Japanese Millet). Muddlebridge (SS528325), 17/9/2022, R.I. & S.H. Kirby (conf. O. Pescott): single plant growing on a kerb. The first v.c. record. An annual grass that originated in cultivation, found in bird-seed and as a game food relic in Britain and Ireland. It has a clumped inflorescence like *E. frumentacea* (White Millet) but with purple-tinged spikelets rather than yellowish-green. Stace (2019): 1106.

V.c. 5 (S. Somerset)

Cardamine occulta Hornem. (Cryptic Bitter-cress). Minehead (SS97504571), 22/4/2022, G. Lavender (comm. S. Leach): in pots in Minehead Garden Centre; Yeovil (ST541178), 23/4/2022, I.P. Green (comm. S. Leach): weed in the Brimsmore Garden Centre. The first and second v.c. 5 records

ADVENTIVES & ALIENS: Adventives & Aliens News 30

Lophangium luteoalbum (Jersey Cudweed). Minehead (SS97104628), 25/4/2022, I.P. Green (comm. S. Leach): growing in a pavement crack. The first v.c. 5 record. A white-woolly hairy annual composite with straw-coloured phyllaries which continues to spread as an urban weed of pavements and driveways, etc. The first modern Irish record was for 2001 in v.c. H6. Stace (2019): 773. See v.c. 55.



Clarkia amoena, Swanage, Dorset (v.c. 9). David Leadbetter

V.c. 9 (Dorset)

Clarkia amoena (Godetia). Swanage (SZ0301080301), 25/6/2023, D. Leadbetter: one plant in lane south of Bay Crescent. The second v.c. record and first since 1998. A hardy four-petalled annual (Onagraceae) native to western N. America, distinguished from *C. unguiculata* (Clarkia) by the hairy leaves and longer, less clawed petals. It is a garden plant turning up

ADVENTIVES & ALIENS: Adventives & Aliens News 30

V.c. 2 (E. Cornwall)

Valeriana pyrenaica (Pyrenean Valerian). Treligga (SX0501584475), 14/5/2023, D. Steere (comm. D. Steere): one plant on a rural village road verge with ruderal native plants, the nearest gardens c. 30 m away, and an obvious garden escape in David Steere's view. The first v.c. record since 1951 when it was recorded in SW94 by P.T. Barbary. A tufted perennial (Valerianaceae) up to 1.2 m tall with a basal rosette and opposite stem leaves, hollow petioles and pink flowers in dense compound cymes. A native of the Pyrenees, it is a garden escape in Britain and Ireland being more common in the north, particularly Scotland. English records have been mostly concentrated in v.c. 4 and 5, where it has been known since 1933 and 1883 respectively. Stace (2019): 834.



Valeriana pyrenaica, Treligga, East Cornwall (v.c. 2). David Steere

V.c. 4 (N. Devon)

Capsicum annuum (Sweet Pepper). Westward Hol (SS432253), 25/9/2022, R.I. Kirby (conf. T.D. Dines): fruiting in a road side gutter. The first v.c. record. The closest previous south-western records seem to have been for Sherbourne in v.c. 9. A glabrous to subglabrous white-flowered annual (Solanaceae) from tropical America, occurring primarily as a food refuse alien in Britain and Ireland, more rarely from bird-seed. It usually has one flower per leaf axil. Stace (2019): 608.



Capsicum annuum, Westward Hol, North Devon (v.c. 4). Bob Kirby

Lemna turionifera (Red Duckweed). Bideford (SS448273), 1/8/2022, R.I. Kirby (conf. R.V. Lansdown): among a mixed population of *Lemna* in a drainage ditch, Kenwith Valley Nature Reserve. The first v.c. record. Revisited and confirmed in 2022 after it was noticed in a photograph taken in 2013. A N. American/Asian free-floating aquatic perennial (Araceae) which can be hard to distinguish from *L. minor* (Common Duckweed). The red pigmentation of the fronds is a useful spotting character but not wholly diagnostic and not invariably present. See Richard Lansdown's recent comments relating to *L. valdiviana*, *BSBI News* 153, p. 88. *Adventives & Aliens News* 23, v.c. 35. Stace (2019): 876.

Our regular 'Beginners' Corner' feature provides ID tips for beginner botanists



BEGINNER'S CORNER

Paving the way: some increasing alien grasses of urban habitats

Take a browse through the grasses section in *Plant Atlas 2020* and it might seem to go on forever! There's a great diversity of grasses and, seemingly to complicate matters within this already tricky group even further, there are ever more species appearing from foreign shores, generally aided by human hand.

It can be difficult for these new species and it's publications such as *Grass* BSBI handbook series, and guides to sort them out to a reasonably sized to apparent that grasses fa out a living on the drier in paving. While a numl grasses do well in such p notice something a little

Gone are the days or bulk deliveries of p from where exciting n a while and make int botanists. These days, spread most readily to sources: agricultural s

The distinctive flowerheads of Annual Beard-grass (*Polypogon monspeliensis*) on disturbed ground at the edge of a housing estate, Mundesley, Norfolk. All photographs by the author.

rearing, the horticultural industry, and garden bird feeding; with the last two the most likely sources for



Greater Quaking-grass (*Briza maxima*). Originating from southern Europe, this species is no doubt well-known to gardeners and, especially, flower arrangers. Although we have a native Quaking-grass (*Briza media*), this introduced species has much larger flower spikes which can contain up to 16 florets and measure up to 2 cm in length. However, always beware of young flowerheads early in the season and to be sure that the flowerheads are fully developed, as they can be much smaller and more pointed when young and thus more closely resembling our native species. Plants probably originate most often as 'escapes' from gardens, as they self-seed very readily, but some may also originate from bird-seed. Our native Quaking-grass is a plant of chalk grassland, but Greater Quaking-grass can be found in a wide range of urban habitats, doing particularly well at the base of walls and in dry flowerbeds. Widely recorded throughout much of Britain and Ireland, both in urban areas and coastal regions, particularly in the south, suggesting the need for a slightly milder climate for this primarily Mediterranean species.

BEGINNER'S CORNER: Paving the way: some increasing alien grasses of urban habitats



Common Canary-grass (*Phalaris canariensis*). This is a highly distinctive species, with its broadly striped, green-and-white florets gathered together in a neatly rounded head. There are other, less common, canary-grass species, but none have such broad florets. Common Canary-grass is frequently recorded from where bird-seed has been left to germinate, but is also sometimes grown for flower arrangement and may be occasionally found by the field full, being grown as a crop for bird feed. Widely recorded throughout Britain and Ireland, even as far north as Shetland.



Annual Beard-grass (*Polypogon monspeliensis*). A very attractive grass with its dense-packed, softly downy flowerheads. Beware of confusion with the somewhat similar Hare's-tail grass (*Lagurus ovatus*), which has more downy leaves and shorter, more ovate flowerheads, resembling a rabbit tail. This is typically a relatively small, annual species, growing to around 30 cm in height (sometimes more) and often forming multi-stemmed tufts. Annual Beard-grass has a very wide, natural distribution as a plant of salt-influenced sands and drier areas on the edges of saltmarsh across southern Europe, North and East Africa and all the way to the far east of China. This native distribution is considered to include the south-eastern coasts of England, but this species also crops up as a garden ornamental and a constituent of bird-seed and it is from these sources that it has spread to become widespread as a plant of urban habitats. Records are mostly from south of a line from Liverpool to the Humber, but the species is occasionally reported elsewhere and is worth looking for.

Other regular sections include book reviews; news and announcements from BSBI; and a round-up of plant records from across England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

REVIEWS

Compiled by Clive Stace, Book Reviews Editor
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of Britain and Ireland as this is a scientific achievement of high order and cause for gratitude and delight. It is twenty years since the *New Atlas of the British and Irish* maps and accounts are arranged very pleasingly two per page, and the volumes close with a bibliography and index. The work is simultaneously available online with additional slide images.

IRELAND

This has been an interesting summer weatherwise – a slow start, followed by a warm dry spell which seemed to make everything appear at once, followed by a wet chilly July – not at all conducive to botanising. Still, thanks to our dedicated VCRs there have been some wonderful findings across the country.

Epipactis dunensis (Dune Helleborine) has been causing rather a stir across Ireland this year, with speculation that a helleborine specimen that appeared unexpectedly on the lawn of Trinity College (v.c. H21) during 'No-mow May' may have indeed been this species and not the aggravatingly similar *E. helleborine*, as originally reported. The very rare *E. dunensis* is known to occur at a handful of locations in Co. Dublin and in July, Mike Wyse Jackson of NPWS kindly accompanied Paul Green to see it in the Dodder valley, where it continues to thrive. Maybe one to keep a close eye out for next summer...

On the subject of helleborines, Andrew Malcolm revisited successful colonies of both *Epipactis phyllanthes* (Green-flowered Helleborine) and *Neottia cordata* (Lesser Twayblade) in Co Waterford this year, although the former's numbers were down from last year, probably due to the dry conditions in the early summer. The Lesser Twayblade site is a Sitka Spruce plantation that was being thinned this year, and luckily Andrew was able to contact Coillte, enabling the main area that they were growing



Neottia cordata (Lesser Twayblade) (left) and *N. nidus-avis* (Bird's-nest Orchid) (right), Co Waterford (v.c. H6). Andrew Malcolm

habitat for this species in Ireland. Enviously, Andrew also recorded three spikes of *Neottia nidus-avis* (Bird's-nest Orchid) just 1 km from his house in Co Waterford (v.c. H6) – one of which was the best specimen he had ever come across. They have been known to occur in the general area, but he comments that they seem very random in their occurrence from year to year.

David McNeill reports that a new site for *Neotinea maculata* (Dense-flowered Orchid) – only the second site in Co Antrim (v.c. H39) – was discovered at Galboly, where five fruiting spikes were counted, about 1 km west of the only previous record. Interestingly, the new site is on basalt cliffs. One fruiting spike was

sadly it has not been seen since 1985 – I was lucky to witness its swan song that year). In addition, a new hybrid orchid for Co Antrim was found by David McNeill and Ric Else on Rathlin Island. This was confirmed by Richard Bateman to be *x Dactyloдения st-quintinii* (*Gymnadenia borealis* *x Dactylorhiza fuchsii*) which, helpfully, was growing with both parents. Also in Co Antrim,



Plant Atlas 21
Changes in the
of the British
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T.A. Humphrey,
R.J. Burkmarr
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