

Report of Kirkcudbrightshire Botany Group Meeting

Glen Isle, Palnackie, 23rd September 2023

A group of eight of us met at Palnackie and then drove down the private track to the shore with the kind permission of the landowners. It was a beautiful sunny day and the views across the firth to Kippford, Rockcliffe and the Lakeland hills were superb.

Our plan was to concentrate on recording the shore habitats, in particular the merse, leaving the woodland for a spring visit at a later date. We explored two monads: NX8355 and NX8255.



The merse is extensive and impressive both for the range of species and its superb management condition. A mix of typical saltmarsh species are remarkably evenly spread, with little obvious zonation, apart from a band of Sea Club-rush *Bolboschoenus maritimus* at the top edge and some wonderful large clumps of Sea-purslane *Atriplex portulacoides* along the edges of the creeks. This is a plant close to the northern edge of its UK distribution and not always as abundant as this on the Stewartry coast.



Sea Purslane *Atriplex portulacoides*

Other flowering plant species recorded in the merse included Thrift *Armeria maritima*, Common Sea-lavender *Limonium vulgare*, Sea Aster *Tripolium pannonicum*, Sea Arrow-grass *Triglochin maritima*, Sea Milkwort *Lysimachia maritima*, Sea Plantain *Plantago maritima* and Greater Sea-spurrey *Spergularia media*. The grasses included Saltmarsh Grass *Puccinellia maritima*, Red Fescue *Festuca rubra* and Common Cord-grass *Spartina anglica*, while both the typical sea shore rushes Saltmarsh Rush *Juncus gerardii* and Sea Rush *Juncus maritimus* were also present. Unusually, Glasswort *Salicornia europaea* agg., occurred quite evenly throughout the marsh, rather than just in the mud on the seaward edge. As it was late in the year, very few of these plants were still flowering, but it must have looked very colourful earlier in the summer when the Thrift and Sea Lavender were in full flower.

We were very pleased to find a row of huge plants of Grass-leaved Orache *Atriplex littoralis* growing along a fence line. This is quite a scarce plant in Kirkcudbrightshire and it was clearly thriving here! There were also all three of the typical sea shore sedges: Distant Sedge *Carex distans*, Long-bracted Sedge *C. extensa* and False fox-sedge *C. otrubae*.



Grass-leaved Orache and Thrift

We walked west along the shoreline footpath to an area of Common Reed *Phragmites australis* swamp. The map shows this as pools, but clearly these had grown over. There were still, however, a number of wetland plants here including Marsh Pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, Gypsywort *Lycopus europaeus*, Lesser Spearwort *Ranunculus flammula*, Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus pedunculatus*, Water Horsetail *Equisetum fluviatile*, Wild Angelica *Angelica sylvestris*, Common Valerian *Valeriana officinalis*, Marsh Woundwort *Stachys palustris* and Sneezewort *Achillea ptarmica*.



Even this late in the year, there were lots of butterflies enjoying the remaining flowers and the warm sunshine: Red Admirals, Green-veined White and two stunning Small Coppers feeding on a big clump of Apple-mint *Mentha x villosa*.

This quiet area of shore is a haven for birds, and we noted 29 species including over 100 Redshank, Little Egret, over 20 Swallows, Raven, Red Kite and Buzzard.

My thanks to the landowners for so kindly welcoming our visit, and to the group members for their support and contributions.

Sarah White

20th October 2023