

Plants in Vice-county 104: A Review of July-December 2023

Over 60 new hectad records were made in VC104 in the second half of 2023, bringing the year's total to about 110. Over 7,100 2023 records have been transferred to the DDb including 14 new vice-county records for the year. The new taxa are mostly garden escapes or planted and the British native *Pimpinella saxifraga* (Burnet-saxifrage) seems likely to have been introduced with imported soil.

At the *Pimpinella saxifraga* (Burnet-saxifrage) site, there were also *Origanum vulgare* (Wild Marjoram) and *Echium vulgare* (Viper's-bugloss) as well as the Skye native *Galium verum* (Lady's Bedstraw) and the occasional neophyte *Barbarea intermedia* (Medium-flowered Winter-cress), reinforcing the idea that imported soil used to cap landfill is the source of the *P. saxifraga*.

Euphrasia frigida × *ostenfeldii* = *E. × eurycarpa* was found in Coire Scamadail, a first for Skye, though known (and originally thought only to occur) on Rum. Also, a plant that appears to be best described as the triple hybrid *Euphrasia arctica* × *micrantha* × *scottica* was found near Loch Cròcan.

Some 2022 records received in late 2023 included *Scilla verna* (Spring Squill), new to Skye, and *Epipactis helleborine* (Broad-leaved Helleborine), the first record for over twenty years. Another record for *E. helleborine* was made in a different part of Skye in August 2023.

The new alien species from the second half of the year were:

<i>Cotoneaster microphyllus</i> s.s.	Small-leaved Cotoneaster	Naturalised near shore
<i>Geranium psilostemon</i>	Armenian Crane's-bill	Throw-out. Well established
<i>Guizotia scabra</i>	Sunflecks	Birdseed alien
<i>Inula racemosa</i>	Indian Elecampane	Garden throw-out
<i>Ornithogalum umbellatum</i> subsp. <i>campestre</i> *	Star-of-Bethlehem	Escape/throw-out

* *Ornithogalum umbellatum* subsp. *umbellatum* (Garden Star-of-Bethlehem) has been recorded previously

Based on samples of naturalised *Gunnera* plants taken in 2015 for DNA analysis, two from Waternish and the Dunvegan area turn out to be *G. × cryptica*, the [recently described hybrid](#) between *G. manicata* and *G. tinctoria*.

Skye Botany Group (SBG) met five times from July to September. Members were further involved in [BSBI's SHARP Project](#) and had success in the second half of the year with *Euphrasia scottica* (Scottish Eyebright) at Loch Cròcan, but there *Hammarbya paludosa* (Bog Orchid) remained elusive and elsewhere *Saxifraga hypnoides* (Mossy Saxifrage) and *Sorbus rupicola* (Rock Whitebeam) were not re-found. The former is not rare in the vice-county being known in 92 tetrads (76 post-1999) out of our total of 709.

SBG also enjoyed a couple of expeditions with James Merryweather to look at horsetails and ferns including the rare *Dryopteris pseudocomplexa* at Dunvegan.

Small projects:

- Following up some findings by Mike Wilcox, an initial look at mature flower buds of native and naturalised ivies has been interesting and will need to be followed up next year.
- Some mature specimens of *Ulmus glabra* (Wych Elm) on Raasay were measured and samples taken for a project at the University of the Highlands and Islands.
- Over the year, seventeen *Hieracium* (Hawkweed) specimens were taken and sent for expert determination. These were all determined as *H. triviale* (Common Hawkweed) except for three from a single area which were *H. reticulatiforme* (Reticulate-leaved Hawkweed).

Miscellaneous finds:

- Two specimens of *Sagina subulata* (Heath Pearlwort) turned out to be the glabrous form (*S. subulata* var. *glabrata*) which leaves us wondering how frequent this form is locally.
- *Vulpia bromoides* (Squirreltail Fescue) was added to the plant list for the Isle of Muck.
- A tree on the Dunvegan Estate is probably *Eucryphia glutinosa* (Brush bush or Nirrhe) though it needs to be checked for *E. × nymansensis*.

A peloric form of *Pedicularis sylvatica* subsp. *sylvatica* (Lousewort) was found at Garafad, Staffin.

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