

Dumfriesshire Botany at Chanlockfoot SSSI Saturday 18th May

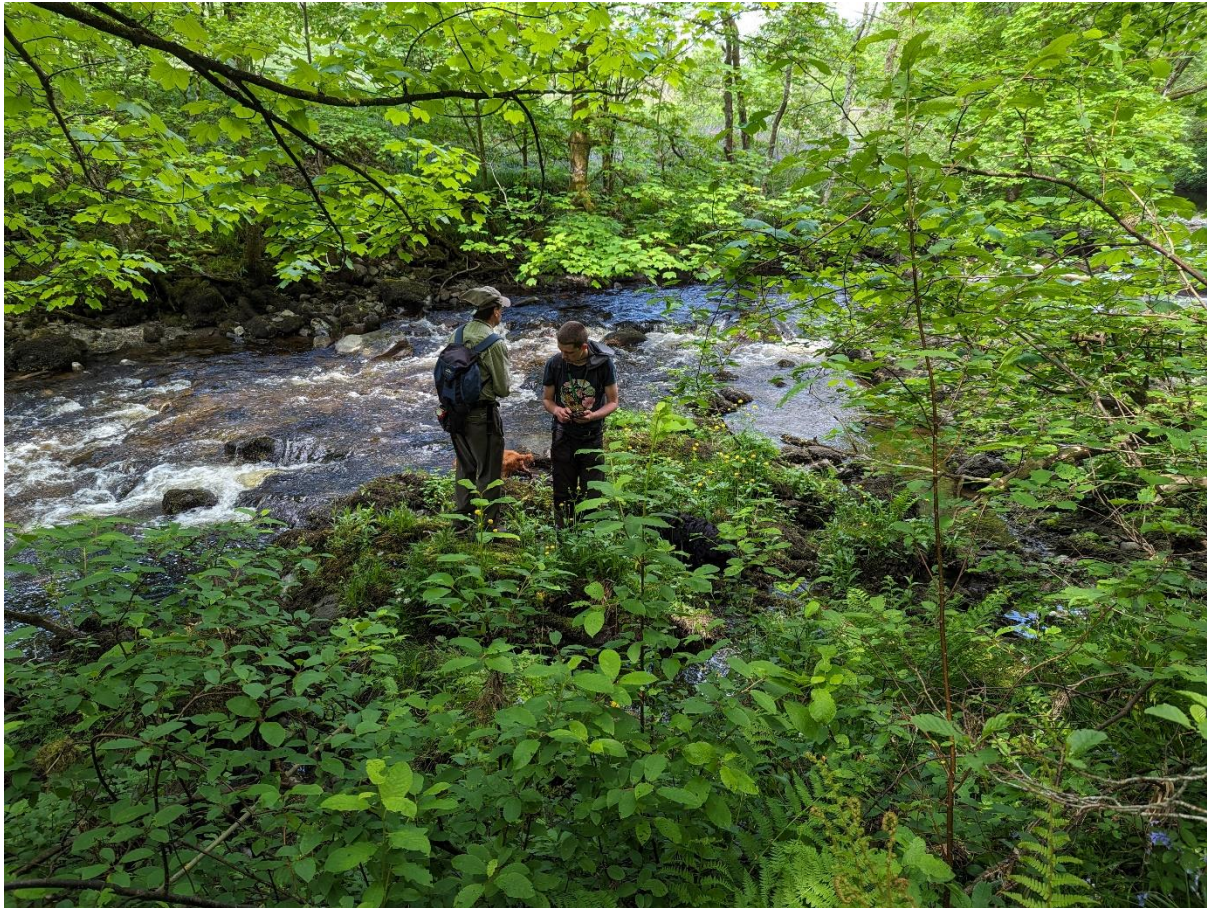
Five of the group met on a warm day in the valley of the Scaur Water to take a closer look at the plants growing in the Chanlockfoot SSSI by kind permission of Queensberry Estates who gave access permission.



Jean, Ranald, Drew and Malcolm among Golden Scaly Male-fern and Bluebells

The designated feature of the SSSI is upland mixed ash woodland. The ash woodland has an understory of hazel and a rich ground layer of herbaceous vegetation. Other features mentioned in the citation include breeding birds and scotch argus butterfly.

The SSSI includes a narrow strip of woodland along the Scaur Water as well as two named woods, Glenscoben at the north end and Back Wood at the south end. The Scaur Water section has a different nature to the main woodland. Along the Scaur Water the woodland survives on the rocky and shingle banks of the river and are subject to high flood events as could be seen from the debris stuck in the trees near to road level from this past winter. Along the river the dominant trees are **Ash** *Fraxinus excelsior* but also **Sycamore** *Acer pseudoplatanus*, **Wych Elm** *Ulmus glabra* and shrubs like **Hazel** *Corylus avellana*, **Bird Cherry** *Prunus padus* and **Red Current** *Ribes rubrum*. Under these grow a typical mix for an upper Nithsdale river. On the stable shingle there was **Greater woodrush** *Luzula sylvatica* and **Pignut** *Conopodium majus*, **Male Fern** *Dropteris filix-mas*, **Golden Scaly Male-fern** *Dryopteris affinis*, **Broad Buckler-fern** *Dryopteris dilatata* and **Lady Fern** *Athyrium affinis*, **Dogs Mercury** *Mercurialis perennis* and **Wild Garlic** *Allium ursinum*. One unusual plant found here is **Sweet Spurge** *Euphorbia dulcis* a non native now well established in the riverside flora here and in the Cairn water.



Among the Globeflowers along the Scaur Water

Where rocks are more open and there is some shelter from the strongest flows **Opposite-leaved Golden-saxifrage**, **Marsh Marigold** *Caltha palustris* and **Sanicle** *Sanicula europaea* was present. We found a plant of **Goldilocks Buttercup** *Ranunculus auricomus* that had finished flowering and were initially fooled by the rounded crenate basal leaves. The spectacle here though was a big growth of **Globeflower** *Trollius europaeus* in full flower.

On the rocks there were a number of lichens that Ranald was listing. One of these was *Dermatocarpon luridum* a lichen that grows on rocks at or below normal flow level drying to grey but turning bright green when in water. It is a feature of clean northern and western fast flowing rivers and streams.

Across the road from the Scaur Water we briefly explored the lower area of the main woodland. This was damp and has a strong growth of **Dogs Mercury** *Mercurialis perennis* **Wild Garlic** *Allium ursinum* and **Upland Enchanter's-nightshade** *Circaea x intermedia* and a shrub layer with **Guelder Rose** *Viburnum opulus*. Along the edge of the wood there was plenty of **Water Avens** *Geum rivale* and its hybrid with **Herb Bennet** *Geum urbanum* **Hybrid Avens** *Geum x intermedium*. There was **Orpine** *Hylotelephium telephium* along the road side edge of the wood.

We had to cross a field to reach the main block of woodland at its northern end. From here you can see the steepness of the woodland which includes some rocky outcrops and scree. Above the SSSI the very steep hillside continues upwards and was presumably once wooded as well. We were immediately into a typical old deciduous woodland with a carpet of **Bluebells** *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*. On steep slopes we soon discovered that they form a very slippery mat as they lie flat after heavy rain. We stopped for lunch amongst an open

Hazel understory. There were occasional large Beech scattered through the wood but they did not seem to be seeding readily unlike the Ash which was present as seedlings of various sizes throughout. The vegetation in this higher section of the woodland was typical of this kind of woodland with **Greater Stichwort**, *Stellaria holostea*, **False Brome** *Brachypodium sylvaticum* and **Red Campion** *Silene dioica*. And more **Sanicle** *Sanicula europaea*. As would be expected patches of **Beech Fern** *Phegopteris connectalis* and **Oak Fern** *Gymnocarpium dryopteris* were also found.



Wood at the north end of the SSSI

The wood has an upper level above a still largely intact stane dyke. This is on the slopes of Druid Hill and if anything is even steeper than the lower part of Back Wood. It is predominantly Birch woodland and has more rocky ground and scree patches. On these there was **Maidenhair Speenwort** *Asplenium trichomanes ssp trichomanes* and **Golderod** *Solidago vigaurea* but being well drained it lacked the diversity of the lower woodland.

The descent from the higher level needed care given the hidden rocks, branches and slippery Bluebells. We made it back to road level and walked back to the cars, Here one final highlight was to find a pair of Pied Flycatcher using a nest box. We had heard them in the SSSI but not had good views. But here the male and female seemed relaxed about our presence and gave fine views of this western woodland specialist.

Total species recorded 128

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