

Dumfriesshire Botany at Tarras Valley Reserve Sunday 28th July 2024

On a dry though largely overcast day seven of us met just south of Cooms Farm on the Tarras Reserve east of Langholm. We had checked the date with the reserve team and they had said that Langholm common ridings would be finished by the Saturday. On the way to Langholm there were still some disconcerting “road closed” signs but there was no problem getting through the town and onto the moorland.

The target for the day was to record in a square just north of the ruin at Lodgegill with no previous records as part of slowly mapping the new Tarras Reserve to give the managers a botanical baseline as they plan woodland expansion and peatland restoration. The geology of the Reserve is quite complex. The target square NY4191 has a basalt outcrop of carboniferous age somewhere along the slope cut into by the two Byre Burns that run down the slope to the Byrecluch Burn at the valley bottom. The hope was that this was exposed at some point to give slightly calcareous conditions.

Just near where we parked is a bridge over the Tarras water to a plantation. On the track through the plantation we noted a good growth of Heath Cudweed *Omalotheca sylvatica* first recorded here in 2017 and still doing well though we did not have time to record the full extent of the population.



Wild Goats head upslope away from us



Heath Cudweed on the Forest track at NY412892 one of only six known extant populations in Dumfriesshire

Once past Lodgegill and into the square the party slowly climbed across the slope to work our way up the first burn and then to come down the second. The slope, rocky in places had a typical acid grassland and heath mosaic. The sheep and goat grazing, the latter encountered in a group of 40 or so, had reduced the dwarf heath plants to remnants so the slope was a predominantly grassy sward with **Sweet Vernal-grass** *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, **Common Bent** *Agrostis capillaris*, **Wavy Hair-grass** *Avenella flexuosa*, **Sheep's Fescue** *Festuca ovina*, **Mat-grass** *Nardus stricta* and **Heath-grass** *Danthonia decumbens*. In this the commonest herbs were **Tormentil** *Potentilla erecta*, **Harebell** *Campanula rotundifolia*, **Heath Bedstraw** *Galium saxatile* with the sedges **Green-ribbed Sedge** *Carex binervis*, **Pill Sedge** *Carex pilulifera* and **Oval Sedge** *Carex leporina*. In wetter areas **Sharp-flowered Rush** *Juncus acutiflorus*, and **Tufted Hair-grass** *Deschampsia caespitosa* harboured amongst other things **Fen Bedstraw** *Galium uliginosum*, **Lousewort** *Pedicularis sylvatica*, **Bog Stitchwort** *Stellaria alsine* and **Marsh Violet** *Viola palustris* with some **Downy Oat-grass** *Avenula pubescens* and **Burnet-saxifrage** *Pimpinella saxifraga*. A small moth with a pale back ground but violet markings attracted attention and Malcolm identified this as **Purple Bar** *Cosmorhoe ocellata*. It is associated with bedstraws.

In the wetter areas two species indicating a formerly more wooded state were **Yellow Pimpernel** *Lysimachia nemoralis* and **Smooth-stalked Sedge** *Carex laevigata*. And at lower levels the slope had good patches of regenerating **Eared Willow** *Salix aurita* indicating potential for a natural willow and birch woodland to re-establish if/as grazing pressure is managed.



Regenerating Eared Willow on the lower slopes of the Byre Burns with the Byrecluch Burn in the valley bottom

On the upper slopes and in the burns the rocky exposures were refuges for ferns and other woodland plants like **Golden-scaled Male-fern** *Dryopteris affinis* and **Narrow Male-fern** *Dryopteris cambrensis*, **Wood Sage** *Teucrium scorodonia*, **Greater Stitchwort** *Stellaria holostea* **Herb Robert** *Geranium robertianum* and **Moschatel** *Adoxa moschatellina*. However no areas of more calcareous rocks were found.

Having worked up one and down the second Byre Burn we reached the flushed area and better grazing beside the Byrecluch Burn at the bottom of the slope. This turned out to be the richest area in terms of herbs. A good mixed herb sedge fen on the lower slope had **Brown Sedge** *Carex disticha*, **Pale Sedge** *Carex pallescens*, **Common Spotted Orchid** *Dactylorhiza fuchsia*, **Ragged Robin** *Silene flos-cuculi*, **Marsh-marigold** *Caltha palustris*, **Marsh Valerian** *Valeriana dioica* and **Wild Angelica** *Angelica sylvestris*. The grassland along the burn had Quaking grass *Briza media*, **Red Clover** *Trifolium pratense*, **Lady's Bedstraw** *Galium verum*, **Fairy Flax** *Linum catharticum*, **Common Eyebright** *Euphrasia nemorosa*, **Rough Hawkbit** *Leontodon hispidus*, **Marsh Lousewort** *Pedicularis palustris* and **Heath Fragrant-orchid** *Gymnadenia borealis* the latter found by Zoe. Along the river there was one good sized patch of **Dark-leaved Willow** *Salix myrsinifolia* where graziers could not get to it.

Total species recorded 154

Chris Miles BSBI county recorder for Dumfriesshire VC72 – see bsbi.org/dumfriesshire



