

Caerdeon 2016 Sarah Stille with Phill Brown, Graeme Kay, Jacky Langton, Martin Rand Polly Spencer-Vellacott and Clive Lovatt

Friday 22 July

Shell Island SH52M and SH52N Clive Lovatt

Sarah had arranged free entry to the camping site at Shell Island and provided species lists for two tetrads, with a total of 186 records, most in the current decade. Clive Lovatt, Phill Brown and Jacky Langton (all from different corners of England) spotted that most of the land occurred in two monads, SH5525 and SH5526 respectively and confined themselves to these. We came back with 239 records – and failed to re-find half of the previous haul. As a result, there should now be over 330 species on record for the two squares added together. It seems to have been the dune slacks and pools that we failed to locate (e.g. *Hydrocotyle*) but we also missed *Heracleum*, and birch trees. Many of our additions were unsurprising things but there were some good 'back of saltmarsh' species such as *Sagina maritima*, Sea Pearlwort in a proper native habitat for once, and *Oenanthe lachenalii*, Parsley Water-dropwort.

We managed to get *Juncus acutus*, Sharp Rush and *J. maritimus*, Sea Rush in both squares, perhaps they were spreading. The prettiest find was the pink-flowered bindweed *Calystegia sepium* ssp. *roseata* but the most dramatic (and unfamiliar) was the aloe-like *Phormium tenax*, New Zealand Flax, on a stabilised dune slope, far from home and out of sight of any garden.

Eisengrug SH63C Sarah Stille

On a fine day Mari Roberts and Sarah explored the drainage ditch to seaward of Talsarnau for a couple of hours in the morning making a fine total of over 100 plants – mostly common or weedy species but including some nice aquatics such as *Alisma plantago-aquatica* Water-plantain and, nearer the sea, plants of more brackish habitat such as *Carex distans*, Distant Sedge and *Juncus acutus*, Sharp Rush, a Meirionnydd speciality. They then drove high up to the chapel at Soar and after lunch called in at a deserted garden with its relict populations of *Leycesteria formosa*, Himalayan Honeysuckle, and Snowberry, *Symphoricarpos alba*, before walking through unspoilt lanes and woods, across a strange overgrown meadow with surfaced footpaths, and back to the chapel along estate tracks through woodland. The indefatigable Mari was still spotting nice new records including Yew, *Taxus baccata*, *Allium ursinum* Wild Garlic and Sweet Woodruff, *Galium odoratum* as we neared the car, making a terrific total of 225 species for the day.

Ynys Dafydd SH61N Graeme Kay

Graeme Kay with Martin and Rosie Godfrey were met by Anna Cawson, who owns this nice woodland and saltmarsh by the Mawddach estuary. The wood had been altered somewhat by a severe storm several years ago, but was still intact and even fallen trees were flourishing. There was much native *Circaea lutetiana*, Enchanter's Nightshade and *Melampyrum pratense*, Common Cow-wheat, but also plenty of the incomers *Juncus tenuis*, Slender Rush, *Buddleja* and Japanese Knotweed, *Fallopia japonica*. An abundance of ferns included two Scaly Male-ferns, *Dryopteris affinis* and *D. borrieri*. On rocks by the shore grew *Umbilicus rupestris*, Navelwort, *Jasione montana*, Sheep's-bit, and *Solidago virgaurea*, Goldenrod, while the saltmarsh itself yielded *Spergularia media* and *S. marina*, Greater and Lesser Sea-spurrey, *Triglochin maritimum*, Sea Arrow-grass, and Brookweed, *Samolus valerandi*. A total of 142 taxa were noted and Anna's kind hospitality concluded the day with tea and biscuits!

Islaw Dref SH61X Polly Spencer-Vellacott

Martyn Stead and Polly Spencer-Vellacott met Ailsa Burns in a small carpark (fortuitously with a broken ticket-machine!) to explore the tetrad around Islaw'r-dref. Beginning on a fine afternoon, it was fairly gentle walking, along tracks through grazed farmland with a descent to the River Gwynant and a return along its banks. Unfortunately around the furthest point from the cars the rain began and the afternoon continued to be decidedly damp. Undaunted, the recording continued, with 169 taxa for the tetrad (which previously had 2). The best record of the day may have been *Tripleurospermum inodorum*, Scentless Mayweed, which is scarce in

the county, but we were also pleased to find *Crepis paludosa*, Marsh Hawk's-beard, along the river, and *Melampyrum pratense*, Common Cow-wheat, - not scarce, but a nice plant. As we walked Martyn predicted species we might hope to find, and one that was mentioned several times was *Campanula rotundifolia* (Harebell) so it was lovely to find it in full flower on the wall along the lane as we returned to the car park.

Saturday 23 July

Garreg and Morfa Gwyllt SH64A Sarah Stille

This tetrad is beautifully situated surrounded by the mountains of Snowdonia and consists mainly of improved fields in the lower River Glaslyn, reclaimed by works in the early 19th Century. It had taken a lot of time and work to find the numerous owners and sadly we had been refused access to what looked to be the more interesting part. On a somewhat overcast but dry day we left the cars near the railway crossing and botanised the expected weedy species along the lane until we reached a gateway to a field with a considerable damp area within, where we found more interesting plants including *Carum verticillatum*, Whorled Caraway. In a ditch we recorded no less than four Horsetails, Marsh, Water and Field - *Equisetum palustris*, *E. fluviatile* and *E. arvensis* respectively - and Shore Horsetail, *Equisetum x litorale*, the hybrid between the last two taxa. *Spergula arvensis* Corn Spurrey, an arable weed which is always nice to see as it continues to decline, was there in some abundance. We continued along the green lane towards Hir Ynys, [which must once have really been a 'long island' before the estuary was reclaimed] but we were unable to find a way through so had to retrace our steps. We garnered a few more ruderal records such as Shasta Daisy *Leucanthemum x superbum* bringing our total to 155, as we returned to Llanfrothen and a welcome cup of tea at the Community café and shop!

Llanfrothen [SH64F] Polly Spencer-Vellacott

Martin and Rosie Godfrey with Martyn Stead and Polly Spencer-Vellacott set off from Rhyd for the Llanfrothen tetrad. After a boggy field full of *Myrica gale*, Bog Myrtle, and several sedges, we found ourselves walking through conifer plantations, but with a good range of ferns to maintain our interest, and the unusual if planted *Nothofagus alpina*, Rauli, to identify. Eventually we came to the Ffestiniog Railway and followed a path alongside, but were disappointed not to find many plants of interest along the track. After almost losing the path we found our way to an open area with "Tips", and dry acid grassland including *Campanula rotundifolia*, Harebell, and then through the wood again, and out. Here we entirely lost our way but fortuitously found ourselves on a different path descending past a bog with the most spectacular displays of flowering *Drosera rotundifolia*, Round-leaved Sundew and *Narthecium ossifragum*, Bog Asphodel. Returning to the village, a lake was spotted in the plantation, and Polly and Martin ventured over a wall to try to investigate. The entire lake seemed to be surrounded by treacherous floating bog but we still managed to identify *Menyanthes trifoliata*, Bogbean and *Nymphaea alba* White Water-lily. Returning to the village we picked up a few additional wall taxa including luxuriant *Asplenium ceterach*, Rustyback, and then on the way home we recorded *Glyceria notata*, Plicate Sweet-grass, in a ditch. This turned out to be a first county record and made a fine end to a day of fine weather.

Gloyw Lin

Sunday 24th July

Pont Rhyd y Fen [SH83E] Sarah Stille

Under Clive's instructions, we started by recording everything we could see without moving from the car! Then we followed the road towards a rather enticing field where we found a very nice boggy community with Sneezewort, *Achillea ptarmica*, Sundew, *Drosera rotundifolia* Narrow Buckler-fern, *Dryopteris carthusiana* and *Euphrasia micrantha* and *E. officinalis* subsp. *pratensis*, Rostkov's Eyebright, in the dryer parts.

After we had exhausted this patch we headed back to the disused railway line which once ran from Bala to Ffestiniog, until in the 1960s it was flooded to create Llyn Celyn as a water supply for Liverpool. We walked some way along the line but there seemed to be few relics of

anything other than weedy species, so we turned off into a patch of conifer plantation which proved to be almost equally unrewarding and very wet and difficult underfoot.

We then decided to move a short distance away to a big layby on a new section of the road, and found it was really rich in plants, perhaps some relics of its former state as a country lane, while some might have been brought in with materials for the road works. So for instance we found *Matricaria chamomilla*, Scented Mayweed, *Veronica arvensis*, Wall Speedwell and *Ranunculus bulbosus*, Bulbous Buttercup but also *Trifolium striatum*, Knotted Clover, as well as Spear-leaved and Common Oraches, *Atriplex prostrata*, *A. patula* and Danish Scurvy-grass, *Cochlearia danica*.

I persuaded Clive to have a look into the next tetrad at what had been a marshalling yard on the railway line during the quarry workings as this had often produced interesting casuals. Today was no exception as we recorded railway plants we might have expected earlier, such as *Chaenorhinum minus*, Small Toadflax, *Arenaria serpyllifolium*, Thyme-leaved Sandwort and *Aethusa cynapium*, Fool's Parsley.

When we got back to Caerdeon we were greeted by an enigmatic Martyn Stead who said they had found a really star find – but wouldn't say what it was! When Graeme appeared he announced to great acclaim that they had found a new site for *Hammarbya paludosa*, Bog Orchid!

Pont yr Afon Gam [SH74K] Graeme Kay

Graeme, Martyn Stead and Martin & Rosie Godfrey visited this area of high boggy moorland dominated by large stands of *Juncus acutiflorus*, Sharp-flowered Rush and *Eriophorum*, Cotton-grasses, with many small rills flowing across the site. *Potamogeton polygonifolius*, Bog Pondweed, *Myosotis secunda*, Creeping Forget-me-not and *Narthecium ossifragum*, Bog Asphodel, were the most common species with *Vaccinium oxycoccus*, Cranberry, *Drosera rotundifolia*, Sundew, *Empetrum nigrum*, Cowberry, and various sedges, including *Carex hostiana*, Tawny Sedge, scattered about. One small clump of *Carex limosa*, Bog Sedge, was a highlight. The peaty river yielded the Water-starwort *Callitriche brutia* s.l. and *Sparganium angustifolium*, Floating Bur-reed. On the north side of the road, a more basic area had *Thymus polytrichus*, Wild Thyme and *Danthonia decumbens*, Heath-grass, with nearby rocks giving *Sedum anglicum*, English Stonecrop, a home. Roadside rocks had *Oreopteris limbosperma*, Lemon-scented Fern, *Erica cinerea*, Bell Heather and *Ulex gallii*, Western Gorse. The highlight of the day was the discovery of a small colony of the rare *Hammarbya paludosa*, Bog Orchid, eventually numbering ca 13 plants, which was in a new site and the first Vice-county record since 1975, prompting much rejoicing! The total tally was 116.

Ogof Ddu

Monday 25 July

Ty'n y Fedw [SH92D] Jacky Langton

Jacky and Martyn parked at Tyn'y Fedw farm and recorded a few species in the farmyard, before setting off on a track up into newly-planted forestry, with wide grassy verges colourful with large blue patches of *Jasione montana*, Sheep's-bit and *Campanula rotundifolia*, Harebell, purple *Geranium robertianum*, Herb Robert and the yellow of *Potentilla erecta*, Tormentil. The flora was quite diverse, with a single patch of *Centaurea nigra*, and a short, dry strip with *Aira praecox* and a thriving bush of *Ribes rubrum*, bearing very fine red-currants! Ferns included Male-fern, *Dryopteris filix-mas* and Scaly Male-fern, *D. affine*, Broad Buckler, *D. dilatata*, Lady-fern *Athyrium filix-femina*, Hard-fern, *Blechnum spicant* and in a damper area, Lemon-scented Fern, *Oreopteris limbosperma*.

As we climbed higher, we stopped to examine some rather odd-looking colonies of *Juncus bufonis* on the side of the track which was damper with water run-off from above, and here there was also *Isolepis setacea*. At the top a huge pond had formed beside the track, permanent enough to hold Round-leaved Water-crowfoot, *Ranunculus omiophyllus* and Bog Pondweed, *Potamogeton polygonifolius*.

Salix x multinervis, the hybrid between Rusty Willow, *S. cinerea* subsp. *oleaefolia* and Eared Willow, *S. aurita*, was in a boggy area with *Sphagnum* where a gully had formed and here we

found *Chrysosplenium oppositifolia*, Opposite-leaved Golden-saxifrage, *Galium palustre*, Marsh Bedstraw and other marsh plants including the sedges *Carex nigra* and *C. echinata*, Common and Star Sedge. We walked down onto the road and added many common species to our list including *Asplenium trichomanes* ssp. *quadrivalens* growing on the bridge, *Valeriana officinalis* near the river and Sherard's Downy-rose, *Rosa sherardii* in the hedge

We returned to the cars, after a most enjoyable day with a good list of species, to find growing in the farmyard a single robust specimen of *Fallopia convolvulus*, scarce in Merioneth "possibly as marginal cultivations are abandoned" [New Atlas, 2000].

Llynau Gamallt [SH74M] Martin Rand

Once the cloud base lifted Phill and Martin had a much pleasanter day weather-wise than the Sunday. It wasn't the most interesting square and it was certainly hard work getting around it! However we did cover quite a bit of upland moor and bog, the three lakes as well as a stretch of the Gors Goch cliffs and several smaller ponds. We recorded comprehensively in SH7444 and added a few things of interest outside the tetrad. *Silene uniflora*, Sea Campion, was in both monads and the dwarf shrub heath was a nice mosaic of *Calluna vulgaris*, Heather, the two expected *Ericas*, *E. cinerea*, Bell Heather and *E. tetralix*, Cross-leaved Heath and the Vacciniums, *V. myrtillus* and *V. vitis-idaea* Bilberry and Cowberry with *Empetrum nigrum*, Crowberry: not much to quicken the pulse besides.

The star of the day was *Neottia cordata*, bringing a 49-year quest to an end - and Phill was the star for finding it! We had been on the lookout for much of the day and finally saw it a few metres inside the tetrad.

The lakes were really pretty dull - all with steeply shelving banks most of the way round. The only interest was *Carex rostrata*, *Littorella uniflora* and some washed-up leaf fragments of *Isoetes* whose Plant Crib description suggested *Isoetes lacustris*. The cliffs were astonishingly dull and didn't even have *Solidago* so it was something of a surprise to see even a few plants of *Silene uniflora*, only the second montane record for VC48 and the only one in the north of the VC.

Pont y Gribble [SH73A] Sarah Stille

After packing up to leave Caerleon once again, we made our way up the A470 to Pont y Gribble where the River Eden was tree-lined and the vegetation luxuriant. We found ample parking and as usual hit the commoner species around the cars, then ventured towards the river through long wet grasses, damp underfoot as well as in the air. We found the expected suite of acid wetland plants, and it was nice to find both *Scutellaria galericulata*, Skullcap, and *S. minor*, Lesser Skullcap – but no sign of the hybrid. We went uphill towards the edge of the tetrad, where in a saturated upland bog we found a concrete leat in which the water seemed to be flowing up the valley, strange and unexplained! Here were species indicating better habitat, *Hypericum elodes*, Marsh St. John's-wort, *Rhynchospora alba*, White beak-sedge, *Carex dioica*, Dioecious Sedge and *Menyanthes trifoliata*, Bogbean. The second part of the day was spent on the other side of the main road in some semi-abandoned fields and buildings and we collected a different suite of waste and wetland plants – recording species as diverse as Japanese Knotweed, *Fallopia japonica*, and *Spergula arvensis*, Corn Spurrey.

To round off a fine few days, Graeme led us unerringly back to his *Hammarbya* site of the day before, where we found a dozen or so of the tiny orchids nestling in a small runnel with Bog Pondweed, *Potamogeton polygonifolius* and Bogbean, *Menyanthes trifoliata* otherwise almost indistinguishable from the surrounding bogland!