

Botanical  
Newsletter for  
South  
Northumberland

Issue 1.  
January 2017.

Welcome to this new addition to the increasing range of BSBI vice-county newsletters. 'Boneson' will be published on-line through the BSBI website once or more a year and will be limited to news and information relating to the recording of vascular plants in vc 67, South Northumberland. Material for publication should first be sent to John Richards, ([hightreesgarden@btinternet.com](mailto:hightreesgarden@btinternet.com)). Hopefully, folk will send text and pictures of interesting targets, finds, problems and mysteries in the county. Don't hold back, its your newsletter!

### New finds in 2016.

There were two outstanding new finds in the county in 2016. In early August, Rosi and Jim Bowyer took a rather little-known path in the Hollybush sector of the Dipton Forest (in fact its not a right-of-way!) and stumbled across a sizeable colony of *Potentilla anglica* (Trailing Tormentil) along the path edge.



Now, this is not a new county record. Indeed there have been six previous records in vc 67 for this decreasing species with a south-westerly disposition. Nevertheless, it had not been recorded in the county since 1977 and the record was both unexpected and welcome. Note the distinctive three-lobed leaves. Some flowers (but not all) have five petals.

The second good discovery as made when your convenor went to check out a walk he had planned for the Botanical 'Wednesday walkers' of the Natural History Society of Northumbria in early September. The idea

was to circumnavigate Fontburn Reservoir in the centre of the county, not far short of Rothbury. As is often the case in the late summer, there was a considerable drawdown. Luckily (for botanists), access is not prohibited as the site is popular with fisherpeople. Several significant records were made on the exposed shore including fruiting *Callitriche platycarpa*, *Crassula helmsii* (not yet a menace with us), *Veronica scutellata* and Shoreweed, *Littorella uniflora*. However in two localised areas I found reasonable quantities of *Persicaria mitis* (Tasteless Water-pepper). Although confirmed with a lens, noting the gland-free inflorescences, the pinkish flowers and slender habit separated it from *Persicaria hydropiper* (Water-pepper) which abounded on the shore further to the west (also an uncommon plant with us). This is only the second record of *P. mitis* for the county and the first for nearly 30 years.

## High Level Halophytes

Another interesting series of finds in 2016 originated from Michael Braithwaite making a chance stop at Hareshaw Head (308 m) on the B6320 which runs north of Bellingham. Michael was looking for a distinctive halophytic race of *Elytrigia repens* (Common Couch) with glaucous inrolled leaves when he stumbled upon a small roadside colony of *Triglochin maritimum* (Sea Arrow-grass) at almost 1000'! A few days later I paid a visit and was stunned to discover an almost continuous strip of *Juncus gerardii* (Saltmarsh Rush) which occurred with the Arrow-grass and all the way to, and then back down the A68 so that I recorded it in eight contiguous tetrads (mostly at 50 mph!). It was also above Bellingham on the West Woodburn road where it also occurred with Sea Arrow-grass. However, it was Hareshaw Head that provided the greatest interest. As well as the species noted and the expected roadside halophytes *Puccinellia distans* (Reflexed Saltmarsh-grass) and *Spergularia marina* (Lesser Sea-spurrey), I was delighted to find a colony of *Sagina maritima* (Sea Pearlwort). Michael says this is becoming common on salted verges in Berwickshire, but it was not only our first inland record, but the first record anywhere in the county for more than 20 years.

To add to the excitement, Hareshaw Head boasted a good deal of a very distinctive semiprostrate Knotgrass with narrow homophyllous leaves (all the same size), a rather glaucous hue, reddish ochreae and shiny nutlets about 3 mm long. My first hope was that this might prove to be *Polygonum oxyspermum* ssp. *raii*, (Ray's Knotgrass), long absent from the county. However, the fruits were no way big enough, nor the leaves blue enough. When asked for advice, Arthur Chater kindly forwarded an advance copy of the account that will appear in the as yet unpublished volume of Sell & Morrell. This boasts no less than 16 weedy knotgrasses, doubling the number in Stace! This genus is not easy and problems are compounded by descriptions that conflict between most main sources. In the end the Hareshaw halophyte proved to be *P. rurivagum* (Cornfield Knotgrass) which I had discounted from the start as a) the habitat was very unlike a cornfield and b) this is usually stated to be a southern species. However it now seems that *P. rurivagum* is spreading fast and northern records are no longer exceptional. It will be interesting to see if it settles as a major component of our salted verges.



*P. rurivagum*, Hareshaw



*P. aviculare* s.s Note broader heterophyllous leaves

## Reichenbach falls

Spring is fast approaching (hurrah!), and presents an opportunity to search for the Early Dog-violet (*V. reichenbachiana*). Although we are at the northern extremity for this southern species, it is almost certainly overlooked in vc 67, not least because it usually occurs with the familiar *V. riviniana* (Common Dog-violet) and confusing hybrids. One way of identifying the hybrid is that it is sterile; both species usually form pods full of seeds from their tiny cleistogamous flowers. However, the best way to identify *V. reichenbachiana* is to look at the sepal appendages which are tiny in this species. The narrow dark spur can also sometimes be found in Common Dog-violet and hybrids, although anything with a stout and/or pale spur will be *V. riviniana*. The best place to look for Reichenbach is in lowland old woodland on south-facing rather base-rich banks. These pictures were taken in 2016 in the West Dipton Gorge.



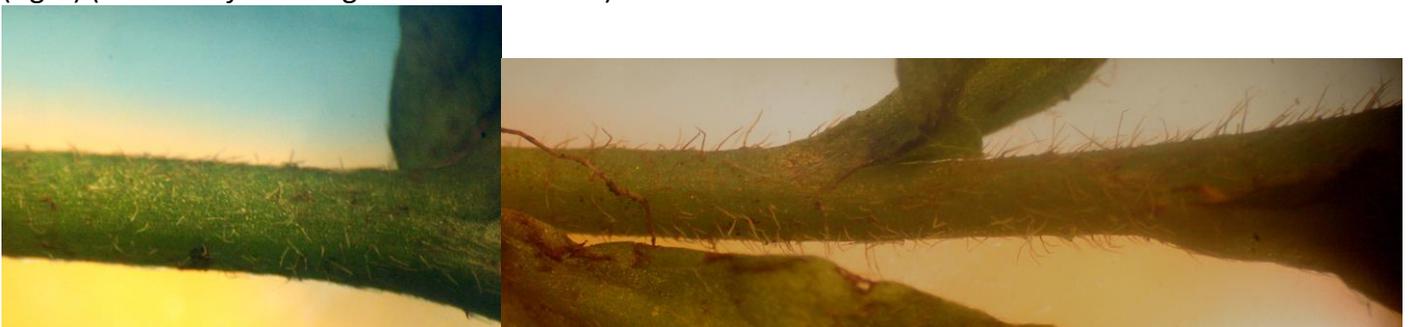
*V. reichenbachiana*



*V. reichenbachiana* x *riviniana*. Note longer sepal-appendages

## Its all a load of Bollands

A few years ago it was starting to look as if *Myosotis stolonifera*, the Pale Forget-me-not was going the way of other upland flush specialities in the county, notably Hairy Stonecrop, *Sedum villosum*, and was disappearing fast as upland springs became eutrophicated. However, wetter summers have led to a spate of new findings, both in Hexhamshire and west of Allenheads, so that our worries have declined. This is one of our 'specials' with a curious distribution limited to northern England, over the border into southern Scotland, and north-west Iberia. A few years ago, its hybrid with *M. secunda* (Creeping Forget-me-not) was first described from the Forest of Bowland (hence *M. x bollandica*). Our stoloniferas usually occur near *secunda*, and it was not long before we identified the hybrid growing with Pale Forget-me-not in two distinct areas. The original authors tended to rely on sterility as the main discriminant for the hybrid, which can resemble *M. secunda* fairly closely. However, I have found that the indumentum of the lower internodes of the hybrid (left) is characteristic being shorter, sparser and less deflexed than in *M. secunda* (right) (*M. stolonifera* has glabrous internodes).



## Fragrant Orchids

In recent years two more orchid species have been added to our not inconsiderable total as it has been decreed that the previously recognised varieties or subspecies of *Gymnadenia* should be elevated to specific rank. Generally, these taxa have tended to be rather overlooked in our county, even as subspecies, but as it seems that the three species tend to inhabit very different habitats, the time has come to take them more seriously. *Gymnadenia borealis* (Heath Fragrant-orchid) tends to occur in rather damp slightly acidic places and is probably underrecorded especially in the north-west of the county. It is easily recognised as the lip (labellum) is usually less than 4 mm wide and almost unlobed. The common species in limestone grassland and base-rich meadows is *G. conopsea* (Chalk Fragrant-orchid) with a labellum wider than 4 mm and lobed. There are also no less than 13 previous records for *G. densiflora* (Marsh Fragrant-orchid), mostly from calcareous flushes in the hills. I am rather sceptical as to whether this species, in which the labellum is twice as wide as long, about 7 mm wide and has distinctive long horizontally held sepals actually occurs in vc 67. It is a species of calcareous fens mostly in the lowlands. My experience of the populations at Bishop Middleham in Co Durham this summer suggests that it merges into *G. conopsea* in some localities, although whether this represents hybrid swarms or one variable taxon is less clear. In my experience *G. borealis* is the better species.



*G. borealis* (Haggbank)



*G. conopsea* (Irthing)



*G. densiflora* (Haweswater)