

The BSBI Welsh AGM 2019 based at the Stradey Park Hotel, Llanelli

Expanded text by Richard Pryce, based upon the report by Barbara Brown & Richard Pryce that appeared in BSBI Welsh Bulletin 104 published in July 2019.

What better excuse to enjoy some late spring sunshine and botanising than the BSBI Wales Spring Meeting and AGM? This was held between Tuesday 21st and Thursday 23rd May at the Stradey Park Hotel in Llanelli and a packed programme had been prepared by Richard and Kath Pryce (VCRs for Carmarthenshire)

Members arrived after lunch on Tuesday and set out for Burry Port Harbour (SN4400). Richard led us through the various brown-field and disturbed dune habitats, pointing out the plant highlights, the first of which, on the stone-topped wall of the West Dock, was seventeen plants of *Silene gallica* (Small-flowered catchfly) at its only site in the county, by now, following the spell of dry weather, mostly in seed, although a few flowers remained. Nearby, on the site of the once-extensive, but now grassed-over railway sidings most recently used as the venue for a weekly car-boot sale, the differences between *Ranunculus sardous* (Hairy Buttercup) and *R. bulbosus* (Bulbous Buttercup) were demonstrated by Julian Woodman where both species were growing in close proximity and were obviously thriving happily in the often open, scuffed, well-draining clinker soil. Both *Trifolium scabrum* (Rough Clover) and *T. striatum* (Knotted Clover) were in areas of generally bare soil nearby. Walking around the west end of the harbour, a short stop was made at the bridge over the canal that was once used to bring anthracite from the Gwendraeth valley to be exported from Burry Port. On the bridge, a particularly large plant of *Geranium rotundifolium* (Round-leaved Crane's-bill) was growing at the base of the parapet and two species of fumitory, *Fumaria muralis* ssp. *boraiei* (Common Ramping-fumitory) and *Fumaria capreolata* (White Ramping-fumitory) were growing by the side of the road nearby.

Taking the cycle path to the disturbed dunes between the back of Parsons' Pickles factory and the sea-shore, an extensive stand of *Silene conica* (Sand catchfly) was the first notable species found but there was no sign of *T. ornithopodioides* (Bird's-foot Clover), discovered here by BSBI members in 2007. Julian commented that this was just the habitat where he would expect to find *Poa bulbosa* (Bulbous Meadow-grass) in his own county of Glamorgan and, sure-enough, it wasn't long before he had found it! There were many plants, abundant in some areas at the edges of the wide parched pathways but all totally desiccated this late in the spring, and which, despite being easily identified by the bulbous based culms, was the First VC record. On some dry dune grassland patches away from, but adjacent to the paths, several large populations of *Anisantha diandra* (Great Brome) were seen, its identity being confirmed later by Graeme Kay, the discovery proving to be the 5th VC Record, whilst some less disturbed, *Ammophila arenaria* (Marram)-dominated dunes towards the yacht clubhouse had many small stands of *Vulpia fasciculata* (Dune Fescue) growing at the edges of the *Ammophila*. Turning towards the outer harbour across the dunes, a few plants of *Poterium sanguisorba* ssp. *balearica* (Fodder Burnet) were seen but we failed to find the *Malva neglecta* (Dwarf Mallow) as the site of the only plant had recently been destroyed by repairs to the harbour promenade.

As time was going on, a brisk walk was made around the northern end of the outer harbour where Richard lamented the over-zealous management of the Council mowing staff who have succeeded in all but exterminating fine but robust species such as *Carduus nutans* (Musk Thistle) and *Centaurea scabiosa* (Greater Knapweed), both very uncommon in Carms. The brisk walk took-in the area around the Lifeboat Station where there was discussion over the *Silene* with a consensus agreeing that the population was mainly *S. vulgaris* x *S. uniflora* (Hybrid Champion) although *S. vulgaris* (Bladder Champion) was also

present. Nearby, *Blackstonia perfoliata* (Yellow-wort) and *Lepidium draba* (Hoary Cress) were seen in an old boatyard, the latter at one of only four extant sites in the VC. The brisk walk ended on the rubbly, mostly vegetated, crushed-concrete site of the Carmarthen Bay Power Station, demolished in 1992. Here, many plants of the very attractive *Linaria supina* (Prostrate Toadflax) were shown to the party scattered in the least-vegetated areas whilst the local abundance of *Linum bienne* (Pale Flax) was amazing, it being impossible to walk in some areas without trampling on the plants. Returning to the cars, a single plant of *Papaver lecoquii* (Yellow-juiced Poppy) was found growing on the road verge, only the 3rd recent VC record despite, over the years, the sap of potential plants being checked by the local botanists without finding it.

In the evening Richard gave a talk on 40+ years of botanising in Carmarthenshire describing how he was gradually drawn away from geology to botany whilst working for the National Coal Board and paying tribute to early inspiration from Barry Goater, his school biology teacher and to the day in 1973, when he first met Irene Vaughan, the then BSBI County Recorder. He touched on the development of the National Botanic Garden of Wales and the growth of the very successful Carmarthenshire Meadows Group. He also showed us a series of maps illustrating the importance of high-precision recording (to at least 10 figure grid reference) as this gives a much better feeling for local abundance and a better chance for botanists following in years to come, to re-find the plants so recorded. A few botanical highlights were also featured, from *Lathyrus palustris* (Marsh Pea) found for the first time in Carmarthenshire in 1971 at the time when Richard was just a novice botanist, to the recently recognised hybrid fleabane *Erigeron x stanleyi* – discovered by Barry Stewart (at the Burry Port site that members had visited earlier in the day) just in time for its inclusion in Stage 4.

After the Committee for Wales meeting and AGM on Wednesday morning, the second field trip explored part of the Capel Dyddgen SSSI near Crwbin (SN4612 & SN4712) which includes a delightful series of meadows, both calcareous and acid, as well as dry and marshy grasslands enclosed by both ash and oak woodlands and thick hedges. Richard and Kath wove us through the maze of small fields and woodland paths where *Aquilegia vulgaris* (Columbine), both the 'natural' blue form and an albino, were seen in the woodland in a native situation, together with many *Orchis mascula* (Early Purple-orchid) plants, by now, mainly in seed. *Geranium columbinum* (Long stalked Crane's bill) was also in the woodland but in areas cleared of bramble at the woodland edge, earlier in the year, it had greatly increased from the few plants of previous seasons. Emerging from the woodland into the small area of NVC MG5b grassland, the only patch of this community known in the county, characteristic species were seen to be *Poterium sanguisorba* ssp. *sanguisorba* (Salad Burnet), *Orchis mascula*, *Leontodon hispidus* (Rough Hawk's-beard), *Briza media* (Quaking-grass), *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* (Southern Marsh-orchid) and, although not in flower, *Succisa pratensis* (Devil's-bit Scabious) and *Betonica officinalis* (Betony).

After a relaxing packed-lunch in one of the meadows in the glorious sunshine during which Tim Rich identified a number of dandelions growing in the sward, including the first hectad record of *Taraxacum duplidentifrons* and the recently described *T. pietii-oosterveldii* (which seems to be common in Carms), the party moved to the wetter areas of the site where Andy Jones helped us understand the subspecies of *Myosotis discolor*, (Changing Forget-me-not), drawing attention to the initially whiter flowers and the alternate uppermost leaves of ssp. *dubia*, the species of damp grassland growing at this site. Nearby were a few rosettes of *Trochdaris (Carum) verticillatum* (Whorled Caraway) in a relatively dry area of the site where it had not been seen previously. Next, we visited the small population of *Geum rivale* (Water Avens) near the stream where Martyn Stead found a plant, very obviously intermediate with *G. urbanum* (Wood Avens) and being a good candidate for the hybrid *Geum x intermedium*.

This was the first record of the hybrid from the site and the first post-2000 record for the SN41 hectad. Onward to the rush-pastures where *Conopodium majus* (Pignut) was abundantly in flower along the dry, heathy edge of one field and Richard was able to point-out its distinguishing features when compared with *Trocdaris verticillatum*, which, although not yet in flower, was recognisable by its very distinctive leaves. *Pimpinella saxifraga* (Burnet Saxifrage) is another similar, later-flowering species that grows in this community but in lower abundance, but was not seen on this occasion. The components of the flush community in the southern corner of Waun Ganol, one of the wettest meadows on the site, include *Eriophorum angustifolium* (Common Cotton-grass), *Comarum palustre* (Marsh Cinquefoil), *Equisetum fluviatile* (Water Horsetail), *Anagallis tenella* (Bog Pimpernel), *Trocdaris*, *Succisa pratensis*, *Valeriana dioica* (Marsh Valerian), *Hydrocotyle vulgaris* (Marsh Pennywort), *Carex hostiana* (Tawny Sedge), *C. pulicaris* (Flea Sedge) and *C. x fulva* (the hybrid between *C. hostiana* and *C. demissa* (Common Yellow-sedge)). Following much discussion, Julian identified this vegetation as belonging to the NVC M24 *Molinia caerulea* - *Cirsium dissectum* fen-meadow community, although it does not include *Cirsium dissectum* (Meadow Thistle), the species that characterizes M24, but does have *Valeriana dioica*, *Carex hostiana* and *C. pulicaris* as indicators.

Arthur Chater, Nigel Stringer and Ray Woods raised the microfungi records from the site to 18 rusts and 25 species from other groups, whilst Tim Rich sought to add to the 23 refereed *Taraxacums* (dandelions) already recorded! The party was encouraged to look out for Marsh Fritillary butterflies but none were seen until after most people had left, when Arthur spotted a rather active individual which delighted the occupants of the last two cars to leave but required a degree of nifty pursuit to confirm its identity! Also, Stephen and Anne Coker, reported another sighting in its more usual *Molinia* grassland habitat earlier in the day.

Before dinner, The Wales Officer, Barbara Brown, and Pete Stroh, gave a workshop for VCRs on data validation in the DDb whilst a small group led by Richard, walked from the hotel, the short distance to the Upper Trebeddrod Reservoir (SN5001), passing the ruins of Raby's iron furnace dating from about 1793. In several places in flushed woodland by the path, *Cardamine raphanifolia* (Greater Cuckooflower) was in full flower, often in company with *Symphytum tuberosum* (Tuberous Comfrey). Returning to the hotel over the reservoir dam, Tim Rich pointed-out *Bromus commutatus* (Meadow Brome) and several dandelions including *Taraxacum subbracteatum*, both first records for the hectad.

Following the AGM dinner, for which the hotel and its staff must be warmly congratulated for putting-on such a fine menu and exemplary service, Pete updated us on progress with Atlas 2020. Nigel Stringer then delivered his very entertaining introduction to the biology of rusts and some other fungal plant parasites and the importance of the contributions that amateur mycologists are making to the science now that the museums, academic institutions and government research bodies employ much less such expertise. He also described his recording method which he has designed to be easily repeatable by future mycologists.

Members attending the last field day visited Pembrey Burrows, a Special Area of Conservation and Local Nature Reserve managed by Carmarthenshire County Council (SS4199 and SS4299) with rich duneland and saltmarsh habitats where we were led by Paul Aubrey, the Council's "Outdoor Recreation Service's Coordinator for Volunteers & Education" and accompanied by numerous Skylarks singing overhead. *Vulpia fasciculata* and *Bromus lepidus* (Slender Soft-brome) were seen on the dry dunes and *Thalictrum flavum* (Common Meadow Rue) and *Ranunculus lingua* (Greater Spearwort) were found to have been heavily grazed in the vegetation-choked pond where they have been known for some years (SS413995). *Carex disticha* (Brown Sedge) was found to be abundant in the

southern part of the pond and a small population of *Eleocharis uniglumis* (Slender Spike-rush), determined by Arthur Chater, was growing near the north-eastern bank.

The party had lunch by the second pond (SS413996) where Elsa Wood identified *Chara vulgaris* (Common Stonewort) growing with *Myriophyllum spicatum* (Spiked Water-milfoil), *Potamogeton crispus* (Curled Pondweed) and *Ranunculus baudotii* (Brackish Water-crowfoot). Onward over the dunes, where characteristic species included *Anacamptis morio* (Green-winged Orchid) (now mostly in seed), *Viola canina* (Heath Dog-violet), *V. tricolor* ssp. *curtisii* (Dune Pansy) and four tiny plants of *Botrychium lunaria* (Moonwort), the dry season probably being responsible for the poor showing of this species this year. There was considerable added interest in the vicinity of the gated cattle-handling pen at SS420994 where numerous ruderal species were found including *Urtica urens* (Annual Nettle), the first record for the Carms part of the hectad, *Chenopodium ficifolium* (Fig-leaved Goosefoot) and a large stand of *Anisantha madritensis* (Compact Brome), the fourth VC record and first for the Carms part of the hectad.

Following the main track eastwards, patches of flowering *Trifolium striatum* (the first record for the Carms part of the hectad) were growing in a wide gateway at the edge of the track in amongst a low sward of *Vulpia bromoides* (Squirrel-tail Fescue), whilst the nearby line of scrub afforded shelter to a Green Hairstreak and numerous Small Blue butterflies. Finally reaching "Jim Davies' Pond" (SS423994), there was great excitement about the floating rafts of leaves – mostly just beyond reach but specimens were eventually grappled! Thoughts that they were *Luronium natans* (Floating Water-plantain) were progressively reinforced by successive experts' contributions to the discussion which were initially confirmed in the field by John Poland. However, on his closer examination back in the lab, the plants turned out to be *Alisma plantago-aquatica* (Common Water-plantain) as they had latex which was not possible to see in the field. This is a disappointment as *Luronium* has been searched for over many years without success and has never been confirmed as a Carmarthenshire species despite several 'hopeful', but since disproved, records.

The party dispersed at about 3pm as many participants had long distances to travel home. Richard and Kath were warmly thanked for arranging the meeting which had been made all the better by the warm sunny weather, the comfortable hotel accommodation and first-rate meals! Richard and Kath were heartened to hear much discussion taking place between all abilities of botanists during the field excursions.

In addition to the numerous new vascular plant records, Nigel Stringer reports that forty-three rust records were made during the site visits over the three days, comprising of thirty rust species on thirty-two hosts, the most notable of which, all being uncommon in Carmarthenshire, were those on *Betonica officinalis*, *Caltha palustris* (Marsh-marigold), *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* (Opposite leaved Golden-saxifrage) and *Valeriana dioica*.



Geranium columbinum (Long stalked Crane's Bill) (photo Barbara Brown)