

## Kirkcudbright Botany Group Meeting at Portling Friday 12<sup>th</sup> May 2023

A group of 13 of us assembled at High Portling. By good fortune it was a fine sunny day and, with low tide at midday, we had the perfect conditions to record plants along the shore and cliffs.

Our aim was to record monads NX8854 and 8752, trying out the new coastal survey recording form which Iain had produced for us and Jan had printed up with a detailed map of each monad. We also hoped to check and re-record two rare species, Sticky Catchfly *Silene viscaria* and Spring Sandwort *Sabulina verna*.

We began by recording the fragmentary area of saltmarsh at the bottom of the track, where we found Thrift *Armeria maritima*, Sea Aster *Tripolium pannonicum*, Sea Milkwort *Lysimachia maritima*, Sea Plantain *Plantago maritima*, Common Scurvy-grass *Cochlearia officinalis*, Sea Arrowgrass *Triglochin maritima* and Parsley Water-dropwort *Oenanthe lachenalii*. There was also a flowering sedge which we identified as *Carex distans*, and on a flushed area at the top of the beach was Glaucous Sedge *Carex flacca* and Few-flowered Spike-rush *Eleocharis quinqueflora*.

We then walked along the beach northeast towards Sandyhills with the vegetated cliffs rising high above us. We decided that the boundary of the coastal recording should be the top of the cliff, although the cliff grassland was a mixture of coastal and inland species. The vegetation here is very species-rich but much of it is inaccessible. Luckily, we had brought binoculars and a telescope to aid identification, and this proved invaluable.



We had only walked a few hundred yards before Ken, who had walked ahead, called out to say that he had spotted the Sticky Catchfly, and we were all able to enjoy good views of this beautiful plant, in full flower, through the scope. Jim recalled that this group of plants had been found by Anna White some years ago, although there is no record on the database.



*Silene viscaria* Sarah White

Walking on, we found many other specialities of these cliffs including Bloody Cranesbill *Geranium sanguineum*, Common Rock-rose *Helianthemum nummularium*, Juniper *Juniperus communis*, Early Purple Orchid *Orchis mascula*, Rock Samphire *Crithmum maritimum* and Bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*. A particular surprise was flowering Meadow Saxifrage *Saxifraga granulata*, picked up through the telescope. We were approaching the end of the monad and still had to find Spring Sandwort *Sabulina verna*, a very small flower to spot amongst all the other vegetation. Then Nic appeared with a tiny sprig of what was clearly *Sabulina* which he had found and managed to climb to. It looked spot-on, but we carefully checked that it had the required three

styles before celebrating the re-finding of this rare species at its only site in VC73. This species was first recorded from here in 1836!



*Sabulina verna* Nic Coombey

Reaching the end of the monad, we decided to retrace our steps in order to record our second monad. However, before we did, Nic showed us some Rock Sea-spurrey *Spergularia rupicola*, hanging vertically down a rock face, which he had found the previous year.

On the return route, the group split into two with the more intrepid and nimble members walking round the rocky point to Port O'Warren while the others walked along the track through the village, taking advantage of Portling resident Maggie's kind offer of the use of her loo on the way. This second group were also able to enjoy the stunning view from her balcony and we had to drag ourselves away in the hope that the tide was still low enough to find the well-known colony of *Silene* at Port O'Warren. Unfortunately we were too late as the tide had risen too far to allow access to the cliffs where it grows. However, two Portling residents whom we met told us that they had checked the colony a few days before and it was indeed still there and in flower.

So we took the opportunity instead to record the plants in the bay which falls into a different monad, NX8752. Here we found some plants we had not seen in the earlier monad, including Sea Kale *Crambe maritima* and Sea Sandwort *Honckenya peploides*. The group which had walked round the shore also found Dyer's Greenweed *Genista tinctoria*. The last notable record of the day was

Star-of-Bethlehem *Ornithogallum umbellatum*, several plants of which were growing in the verge along the track.

We finished with a very welcome cup of tea and shortbread provided by Ken.

My thanks to the group: their excellent company and plant-spotting skills combined to make this an extremely enjoyable day.

Special thanks to Val for very kindly completing the recording card for us, and to the photographers who contributed their photos to the album.

Sarah White 17<sup>th</sup> May 2023

Postscript: We re-visited Portling with David Hawker on 16<sup>th</sup> May and were able to access the Port O'Warren colony of *Silene* where there were three clumps in flower.