

## Carrhill Woods, Bunclody, Co. Wexford (H12), 11<sup>th</sup> May

After our small party meet in Bunclody town centre on the Saturday afternoon, we walked the one kilometre to the nearby Carrhill Woods (S913.576) in order to view the abundant stands of *Lamiastrum galeobdolon* subsp. *montanum* (Yellow Archangel) that this site is renowned for. These woodlands are a mixture of broadleaf and coniferous trees and combined with varying geological and edaphic conditions offer a variety of vegetation communities. The woodlands are situated on a hill that runs down to the Slaney and is a beautiful location for walkers and botanists. The weather on the day was cool and showery, with one or two very heavy hail showers in the afternoon. Despite the un-May like conditions on the day and the unusually cold spring, the woodlands did not disappoint.

The walk started with a ramble across flat sheep grazed grassland that offers stunning views of the woodlands and the Slaney. The entrance to the woodlands (S9120.5767) was our first stop as one of the four stands of *L. galeobdolon* occurs here. A total of 12 flowering heads were counted with many more in the early budding stage. *Silene dioica* (Red Campion) grows along the river bank here but had not yet flowered. Other species recorded include *Viola riviniana* (Common Dog-violet), *Anemone nemorosa* (Wood Anemone), *Sanicula europaea* (Sanicle), with a canopy of *Ilex aquifolium* (Holly), *Corylus avellana* (Hazel), *Prunus* sp, and *Fagus sylvatica* (Beech).

The second stand of *L. galeobdolon* occurs along the edge of the woodland and an improved grassland field (S9129.5807). With only 5 flowering heads counted, this stand is in danger of being lost due to the grazing in the field and clearance of the field margin. With the recent modifications around the field edge, floral diversity is quite low. Abundant numbers of *Urtica dioica* (Common Nettle) along the woodland edge are evidence of fertilizers being applied to the newly re-seeded field. Among species recorded here were *Stachys sylvatica* (Hedge Woundwort), *Potentilla sterilis* (Barren Strawberry) and *Ajuga reptans* (Bugle). Of concern is the presence of numerous shoots of *Impatiens glandulifera* (Indian Balsam), despite the location being well removed from the Slaney and any other waterbody.

The disappointment of the vulnerability of this stand of *L. galeobdolon* was somewhat offset by the majestic carpet of *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* (Bluebell) throughout the woodlands in this area. Tens of thousands of plants presented a stunning vista and we agreed it was perhaps the most impressive Bluebell display seen by us in any Irish woodland.

The walk continued on through the woodlands with Paula O' Meara aiding in the identification of the different ferns that grow abundantly along the pathways. Ferns encountered include *Dryopteris filix-mas* (Male-fern), *Dryopteris affinis*, *Anthyrium filix-femina* (Lady-fern) and *Dryopteris borreari*. Rocky outcrops and cliff faces are scattered throughout the area and are rich in bryophytes and stands of *Umbilicus rupestris* (Navelwort).

The next stop was at a junction of the two pathways where in a small 'island' approximately 10 metres long and 3 wide, another stand of *L. galeobdolon* is found (S9131.5818). Ten flowering heads of *L. galeobdolon* were counted here with other budding ones hidden among the vegetation that included *Carex sylvatica* (Wood-sedge), *Carex remota* (Remote Sedge), *Circaea lutetiana* (Enchanter's-nightshade), *Anthyrium filix-femina* and *Hypericum androsaemum* (Tutsan).

Our final stop was at a point where the woodlands transition from broadleaf into plantation conifers (S9133.5824). This fourth stand of *L. galeobdolon* is by far the most impressive. Hundreds of flowering plants have spilled from the woodland edge and occupy both sides of the gravel pathway. Many robust specimens were observed with some plants over 30 cm in height. It is rather unusual to see *L. galeobdolon* in an area dominated by coniferous trees as in Ireland it is a plant normally associated with *Fraxinus excelsior* (Ash) and *Coryllus avellana* (Hazel) woodland as it is a plant that prefers calcareous conditions. Plant species amongst this stand was low but *Schedonorus giganteus* (Giant Fescue), *Scrophularia nodosa* (Common Figwort), *Hypericum pulchrum* (Slender St John's-wort) and *Epilobium parviflorum* (Hoary Willowherb) are plentiful.

*L. galeobdolon* subsp. *montanum* is currently recorded from only seven hectads throughout the east and southeast of Ireland and the populations at Carrhill are of national importance. The abundance of the plant here is only surpassed by the population at Knocksink Wood in Co. Wicklow. Overall the woodlands are in good shape although there are a number of possible issues such as the continuing conifer planting, rampant spread of *Acer pseudoplatanus* (Sycamore) and the encroachment of *Impatiens glandulifera*. Our short excursion to the woodlands was well rewarded

and although no rarities were recorded by us on the day, the vivid yellow of the *L. galeobdolon* flowers against the duller woodland backdrop made it a worthwhile trip. For anyone who has not encountered *L. galeobdolon* subsp. *montanum* on their forays then a trip to Carrhill between April and June is a must!

Seán Meehan