

# Co. Down recording in 2015

Monthly field meetings were organised to make records for the forthcoming new atlas, and in support of the proposed flora of Co. Down. My grateful thanks go to David McCormick, Margaret Marshall, Anne McComb and Mark Wright who sent records to me.

Castleward (National Trust) by Strangford village was visited in mid-May when most of the estate was walked. Many established introductions were found, including *Polygonatum x hybridum*. Other than the ornamentals and estate woodland, much of the land is given over to improved grassland which botanically is of little interest. However, a single specimen of *Alchemilla filicaulis vestita* was found on a track. Also notable was an extensive colony of white-flowered *Geranium robertianum* by the campsite.

The Eastwood sand pits in the south-east of the county near Carlingford Lough were visited in early June in fair weather. The pits provide some shelter from the wind. *Ranunculus aquatilis* was in full flower in a stream at the bottom of a pit where it was in the company of many damsel-flies. The sides of the pit had *Spergularia media*, *Myosotis discolor* and sand-martin holes. By the entrance to the pit, *Ornithogalum umbellatum* (Star-of-Bethlehem) was in flower.

Castlewellan Forest Park was visited in late June. Work had been done to restore the greenhouses in the arboretum, and the *Spergularia rubra* colony had vanished, probably due to use of herbicides. *Crassula tillaea* and *Oxalis exilis* were, however, present. *Lysichiton americanus* was present in one of the ponds by the forestry tracks.

The highpoint of the year was a visit to the Ballykinler army base in early July as part of the National Trust's Murlough NNR BioBlitz. Part of the dunes and land adjacent to Dundrum Bay was recorded, but much remains to be seen, and this ground would be of enormous interest. All the usual native species found at Murlough NNR at this time of year were also seen here, but in greater abundance. Of particular interest was a colony of *Rosa spinosissima x caesia* growing by one of the access tracks, and *Bromus lepidus* on disturbed ground by some buildings close to the estuary. Murlough NNR itself was visited the following day. *Crassula tillaea* was seen on the boardwalk and roadside, and *Erodium maritimum* was around Murlough House. *Atriplex littoralis* was present by Dundrum estuary. The dunes held *Euphorbia paralias* and *E. portlandica*, *Filago minima*, *Erodium lebellii* and *Cerastium semidecandrum*, but large areas were closely cropped by rabbits and identifications were much reduced in these.

In mid-July, a note from Margaret Marshall led me to a *Senecio inaequidens* plant in the Cregagh, Belfast.

Walking along pads in the Slieve Croob hills in early August produced *Hypericum humifusum*, *Myosotis discolor* and *Carex hostiana x viridula*. Species-poor improved grassland made up fields adjacent to the pads, and the pads and tracks

themselves were the best pieces of ground remaining in the low-lying hills that were seen.

The River Bann at Polands Bridge, south-east of Banbridge, produced *Ranunculus pennicilatus*, *Sparganium erectum* and otter tracks in mid-August.

Large numbers of *Chrysanthemum segetum* were seen in two small arable fields and *Mimulus x robertsii* was present in streams at Imdel south-west of Knockiveagh in mid-August.

The Bog of Donard, Chimney Rock Mountain, Long Mountain and the Crock Horn Stream in the Mourne were walked in beautiful weather in mid-August. *Carex bigelowii* and *Salix herbacea* were found on Chimney Rock, and a large colony of *Equisetum sylvaticum* was present by the Crock Horn. The latter also held *Pinguicula lusitanica* and *Euphrasia micrantha*.

After leading a plant identification day for the Conservation Volunteers at Clandeboye, an invitation was given to record at Giant's Ring House, Ballynahatty in Belfast. This produced a few *Heracleum sphondylium x mantegazzianum* plants (first record since 1980 at Belvoir Park) and one *Rumex obtusifolius x sanguineus*.

A meeting for the Belfast Naturalists' Field Club at Ballyhornan produced an interesting record of 12 *Crambe maritima* plants. Walking north, *Parapholis strigosa* was found at Benderg Bay in a small area of salt marsh, and several species typical of light east Down soils were found in a crop by the beach. These included *Lamium confertum*, *Stachys arvensis* and *Veronica agrestis*.

On a visit to the Belfast Harbour Estate by the RSPB reserve in late August, several unusual species were found on gravelly ground. These included *Blackstonia perfoliata*, *Filago minima*, *Galeopsis bifida*, *Myosotis ramosissima*, *Thlaspi arvense*, and very large numbers of *Senecio inaequidens*. Immediately adjacent to the RSPB reserve was a population of *Heracleum sphondylium x mantegazzianum*, some of which appeared to be fertile.

Walking south from Killough in mid-September to check on the population of *Artemisia maritima*, Paul Hackney's 1988 record of *Glyceria maxima* was refound in a small marshy area before finding the *Artemisia*. *Asplenium marinum* and *Eleocharis quinqueflora* were also noted close by. The well-known *Mertensia maritima* plant by the lighthouse further on at St John's Point was not seen. This may have disappeared in last winter's severe storms. On the walk back to Killough, *Sambucus ebulus* was recorded. This may be the same site where S.A. Stewart found this species in 1866.

*Salicornia ramosissima* was identified from specimens and *Elytrigia x drucei* recorded at Mahee Island, Strangford Lough in late September.

In late September, Ian McNeill's first Co. Down record for *Polypogon viridis*, which he found growing in a plant pot at Ballywalter, Ards Peninsula in 2014, was followed up. The species was found, this time growing against a wall.

Finally, samples of *Gunnera manicata* were collected from Mount Stewart, Whiterock and Crawfordsburn for genetics work at RHS.

Graham Day

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