

Co. Down recording in 2016

Ad hoc field trips and monthly field meetings were organised to make records for the forthcoming new Atlas, and in support of the proposed flora of Co. Down. I also give grateful thanks to Lesley Crawshaw, Margaret Marshall and Ian McNeill who sent additional plant records to me.

The recording year began early on the morning of 1 January when the Stormont estate in Belfast was visited for the BSBI New Year Plant Hunt. Twenty-nine flowering taxa were found including naturalised *Geranium x drucei*, and *Anthemis arvensis* which was in a 'wild flower' bed.

Margaret Marshall started the spring recording season very well with a 'first for Co. Down' of *Saxifraga cymbalaria* from the recently re-opened but unrestored walled garden by the farm.

The next records were made by the Saltwater Brig near Portaferry in mid-April, when an old churchyard and adjacent roadside were walked. The churchyard had old *Berberis darwinii*, *Veronica salicifolia*, *V. x francisciana* bushes and *Iris foetidissima*. The roadside produced *Valerianella locusta* and *Geranium lucidum* (which seems to have rapidly expanded its distribution in the past few years).

Walking on the shore and roadside between Greencastle and Cranfield produced *Lampranthus falciformis*, *Lycium barbarum*, *Muscari armeniacum*, *Sedum spectabile* and *S. rupestre*. Some specimens of *Sherardia arvensis*, now rarely encountered, were found on a roadside bank. There was no sign of *Carduus tenuiflorus*, once so abundant around Greencastle, and the village seemed to have been subjected to a 'tidy-up'.

In late April, the Ormeau embankment in Belfast held large populations of *Erophila verna* and *Saxifraga tridactylites*. A few *Heracleum mantegazzianum* were also seen.

A short section of the Comber Greenway at Dundonald produced *Aphanes australis*, *Myosotis discolor*, *Rorippa sylvestris* and *Veronica montana* in mid-May. In late May, an adjacent section had *Veronica agrestis*.

A party of four visited Dromantine north of Newry in mid-May. Numerous introduced species were present along the roadside, but there was also some good woodland with understorey containing *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, *Lonicera periclymenum*, *Sanicula europaea*, and *Veronica montana*.

In late May, Lesley Crawshaw sent me a record of *Allium roseum* from Groomsport. This was the first record for Co. Down. The small patch of plants seems to have been present for some years, probably a discard from the gardens close by.

Mew and Lighthouse Islands (by Copeland Island – hectad J68) were visited in mid-June. Both had large numbers of nesting gulls and thorough searches were not possible. However, Mew may have become drier, as conspicuous marsh and aquatic plants previously recorded were not seen. It is now dominated by bracken with bluebells underneath. Rocky areas have abundant *Festuca rubra*, *Silene dioica*, and *Rumex* spp. On Lighthouse Island, effort has been made to control *Impatiens glandulifera*, and bracken is now dominant with abundant *Heracleum sphondylium*, *Hyacinthoides* spp., *Sambucus nigra* and *Silene dioica*. *Urtica urens* and *Carduus tenuiflorus* were seen around the old lighthouse and bird observatory.

In mid-June, *Polysticum aculeatum* and *Festuca altissima* were relocated at Tollymore, but a thorough search for the filmy fern, *Hymenophyllum wilsonii* was unsuccessful. On the return journey, *Silene vulgaris* was noted growing out of a hedge near Dundrum.

The Whyte Estate was visited with the Belfast Naturalists Field Club in mid-July. *Dryopteris borrieri*, *Agrostis vinealis*, *Poa nemoralis*, *Veronica montana* and several species of introduced trees including *Carpinus betulis* and old *Cupressus macrocarpa* were recorded.

Chenopodium rubrum, *Papaver rhoeas* and *Veronica anagallis-aquatica* were found in a quarry at Skelton's Cut. *Cicuta virosa* and *Rorippa palustris* were noted at Islanderry Lake in mid-July.

The most surprising find of the year was *Crassula tillaea* on a roadside in the north west of the county at Tonaghmore in mid-July. Previously this species was known only from Murlough and Newcastle in the east.

The land-fill adjacent to the RSPB reserve at Belfast docks was revisited in late July and early August when note was made of *Blackstonia perfoliata*, *Filago minima*, *Mentha arvensis*, *Myosotis ramosissima*, *Ophrys apifera*, *Senecio inaequidens* and *Heracleum sphondylium* x *mantegazzianum*. A first county record was made for *Stipa tenuissima* (identified by T.B. Ryves).

Ground by the Victoria Park bridge to the Harbour Estate produced *Heracleum mantegazzianum*, *Lactuca serriola* and *Phalaris canariensis* in early August.

In early September, recording at Kilkeel produced *Crocasmia paniculata*, *Solanum nigrum*, *Diplotaxis muralis* and *Vicia sativa* ssp. *segetalis*. At Wilson's Point, *Pilosella aurantica* and *Gaultheria mucronata* were seen.

Of the 42 hectads in County Down, 21 were visited (7 specifically targeted due to under-recording) in 2016, producing 434 new or upgraded (from previous Atlas) records.