

Cronberry and Bellow and Glenmuir Waters on 19th May

Another warm sunny Saturday. On studying the map some of us wondered why we had chosen the Cronberry tetrad (2km x 2km square) at this time when we like to focus on woodland vernal plants. Angus led a breakaway group with Peter and Carol to the tetrad to the south where we could explore semi-natural woodlands by the Bellow and Glenmuir Waters. Gill, Deidre and Jane were happy to tackle the post-industrial habitats round Cronberry.

Gill's group in the old railway and bing square had hope of some good brownfield specialists but, unfortunately, everything was grassed over and grazed within an inch of its life by sheep. Woodlands too. And the peat bog. Despite that they recorded around 120 species. They spent some time 'nose to ground' in close examination of the largest bing on the route. It had a lovely rash of common dog violet *Viola riviniana*, fairy flax *Linum catharticum* and changing forget-me-not *Myosotis discolor*. Find of the day was two extensive, suckering, bushes of tea-leaved willow *Salix phylicifolia* beside the Bellow Water. The shiny leaves were a clue to it being something a bit different. Also of interest was the one plant of celery-leaved buttercup *Ranunculus sceleratus* growing in a bit of rough ground near the houses. Deirdre did a neat job of ticking off the sheet and Jane was good at spotting new plants. The curlews, lapwings and hare were a treat.



Bitter vetch photo by Peter Mackie

Angus' group spent most of the morning by a short but twisting section of ancient semi-natural woodland by Bellow Water in the north west of their tetrad. It was the ash-elm type of woodland, though elm was scarce, with few non-natives only lime and horse chestnut at the edges and some sycamore. Hazel *Corylus avellana* and bird cherry *Prunus padus* were abundant, the latter often splendid in full flower. There were more open areas of species-rich grassland higher up the banks. On a bank on the way in they were pleased to find bitter vetch *Lathyrus linifolius* in flower. And at the foot of the bank, by the burn, they too spotted tea-leaved willow with big catkins and shiny leaves flickering in the sunlight. More woodland plants were showy than a month ago: including common dog violet and bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, while for primrose *Primula vulgaris*, lesser celandine *Ficaria verna* and wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa* flowering was almost over. Peter and Angus were in wellies so able to look at the other side of the burn too where they found sweet woodruff *Galium odoratum* and alternate-leaved golden saxifrage *Chrysosplenium alternifolium*, both good ancient woodland indicators. We were also pleased to find moschatel *Adoxa moschatellina*, its season so short. Ferns were further on and we also found leaves of early purple orchid and wood club rush *Scirpus sylvatica* by the burn. From her description Gill found the latter too: "it was big and luscious, like a pendulous sedge but not quite – big soft leaves but not a big tussock; more like individual plants growing fresh this year".



Bird cherry on banks of Bellow Water

After lunch Angus' group took a road leading south from the A70 and soon dipped into woodlands by Glenmuir Water. These were steeper and more acidic than the morning's woods: oak type with spreads of greater woodrush *Luzula sylvatica* and carpets of bluebell. Peter made the find of the day: rough horsetail *Equisetum hyemale* – dark with no branches. There are patches of it by the River Ayr in the reserve at Failford, and in Leglen Wood at Auchincruive, but it hasn't been found in this hectad since 1892 and, Angus reports, at the very same place! There were some nice open flushes lower down the slopes which increased our sedge count for the day – ten in all. Another tea-leaved willow was also seen.



Rough horsetail on the banks of Glenmuir Water

The group returned via the northern section of Low Moss adding peat bog specialists to the list including cranberry *Vaccinium oxycoccus* and notably bog Rosemary *Andromeda polifolia* in flower. The hedgerows by the minor road were quite rich too. In all nearly 200 species were found, nearly all in one monad (1km x 1km square) evidence of richer habitats in good condition and also the expertise of Angus!