

Glenbuck and East of Lugton 16th and 17th June 2018

This was an unusual weekend with outings each day. On the Saturday the Lanarkshire group organised recording in the Glenbuck area, at the east edge of the Ayrshire Vice County and on Sunday the Ayrshire group organised recording east of Lugton, much further north.

Glenbuck on Saturday 16th

On the 16th the Lanarkshire group, a.k.a. 'Team 77', were represented by VC Recorder Michael Philip and Cameron McIver, while myself and Peter Mackie came from Ayrshire. Conditions were terrible: heavy showers, and midges when the rain let up. But with waterproofs and Smidge we got through the day.

We began in plantations of largely exotic conifers and broadleaves. The ground flora was disturbed and not rich in woodland specialists, sweet woodruff *Galium odoratum* probably the best find. Non-natives such as Pyrenean valerian *Valeriana pyrenaica* were also present. The disturbance was from a Muirkirk community group and the local angling club (paths, sculpture, fire sites, and hut). Swampier conditions were found by the watercourses and at the lochside. At the latter more interesting species such as bulrush *Typha latifolia* and marsh ragwort *Senecio aquaticus* were also seen and Cameron waded in to identify the emergent species - mare's-tail *Hippuris vulgaris*. Towards the east of the square we encountered more semi-natural habitats: damp grassland by the loch and acid grassland/heath on the steep banks. Many sedges were found in the damp grassland including pale sedge *Carex pallescens*, star sedge *Carex echinata* and flea sedge *Carex pulicaris*, while the banks yielded wood sage *Teucrium scorodonia*, mouse-ear hawkweed *Pilosella officinalis* with its lemon flowers, wild thyme *Thymus polytrichus* flowering brightly, and English stonecrop *Sedum anglicum* with its white flowers, in addition to heather *Calluna vulgaris* and blaeberry *Vaccinium myrtillus*.



Melancholy thistle in foreground road verge, heath on bank beyond burn

After lunch we followed the Stottencleugh Burn north to areas of old mineral workings and railways typical of the Muirkirk area. Initially the burn was canalised (and greyly polluted) and inside woodland similar to that traversed in morning. However the opposite side of the road had more semi-natural

woodland edge habitat with species such as hazel, primrose *Primula vulgaris*, bitter vetch *Lathyrus linifolius* and hairy woodrush *Luzula pilosa*. North of the wood the road verges became more species-rich and interesting with the delightful quaking grass *Briza media* and melancholy thistle *Cirsium heterophyllum* (not yet in flower). Above this to the east was more heath vegetation and on the west marshy grasslands with flowering herbs such as marsh bedstraw *Galium palustre* and ragged robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi* among the rushes.

The spoil from the old workings supported the best finds of the day, including creeping willow *Salix repens* and hybrids with grey willow *Salix cinerea* and small cudweed *Filago minima* with common spotted orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* just coming into flower. We initially thought we had a swarm of that orchid but it turned out to be the more exciting heath fragrant orchid *Gymnadenia borealis* with its wonderful smell. I have only ever seen this in old calcareous grasslands - not on a bing!



Heath fragrant orchids *Gymnadenia borealis* on spoil

Slightly north of the old workings, by a ruin, was a large colony of dame's violet *Hesperis matronalis*. All in all it was a productive day, despite the weather, and we learned from each other. Michael had captured 100 species by mid-morning and 200 by the end of the day, from two monads. Thanks to him for doing the recording and organising help with our patch.

Sunday 17th East of Lugton

As Dave Lang, Alistair Allan and myself drove into the square we saw Pyrenean valerian on the verge! Minor roads, hedges, and fields were the habitats first seen, fields mostly improved. The satellite image suggested that the flanks of the hill surmounted by Knockmade plantation were less improved so we headed for them. However some had more recent planting, difficult to cross.

The road verges had wetland species such as wild angelica *Angelica sylvestris*, bog stitchwort *Stellaria alsine* marsh foxtail *Alopecurus geniculatus*, tufted hair grass *Deschampsia cespitosa* and soft rush *Juncus effusus*; not particularly species-rich and as we climbed through the fields damp vegetation continued. Higher up we saw two sedges: oval sedge *Carex leporina* and white sedge *Carex canescens*, changing forget-me-not *Myosotis discolor* and towards the top two interesting ferns stood out from the marshy grassland. First narrow buckler-fern *Dryopteris carthusiana*, narrower than broad buckler-fern and with light brown rather than dark-centred scales at the stem base. Lemon-scented fern *Oreopteris limbosperma* was the other nice fern, with that distinctive smell, and spores round the margins of the leaflets, rather than centred as in most ferns.



Narrow buckler-fern *Dryopteris carthusiana* Lemon-scented fern *Oreopteris limbosperma*

Knockmade plantation had a canopy largely of exotics and ground layer dominated by creeping bent *Agrostis stolonifera*; wood sorrel *Oxalis acetosella* the only woodland species seen. We headed downhill returning to damp fields, a feature of which were the boundaries of acid grassland on old dykes. These supported typical species such as tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, heath bedstraw *Galium saxatile* with masses of tiny white flowers, sheep's sorrel *Rumex acetosella* and common bent *Agrostis capillaris*. Yarrow *Achillea millefolium* was about to flower, its relative sneezewort *Achillea ptarmica* on a wetter margin not so far on.

We headed down towards a spring where there were richer marshes with a common spotted orchid and ragged robin up with the rushes and opposite-leaved golden saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* below. A nearby burn had several bay willows *Salix pentandra* over it with dark green glossy leaves. Shorter flushes nearby were species-rich including as bugle *Ajuga reptans* and lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica* with blue and pink flowers respectively.

We pointed ourselves homewards but got bogged down in the tall ditch-side margins of a field, where we hoped to avoid frisky bullocks, adding more species such as marsh woundwort *Stachys palustre* and creeping forget-me-not *Myosotis secunda*, it's sticking-out lower stem hairs contrasting with appressed

upper hairs, and tufted forget-me-not *Myosotis laxa* seen earlier with appressed hairs all up the stem. The bullocks caught up with us at the top of that field but were no trouble really.

At the top of the next field we swithered – whether to detour to a rocky bank with short grassland or to try to get the boys back to Dunlop for the 13.09 train. We decided to aim for the 14.09 and the bank did prove fruitful – masses of pignut in the grassland, and species such as heath milkwort *Polygala serpyllifolia* and common dog-violet *Viola riviniana* amongst others. Best of all were the orchids: a heath spotted orchid *Dactylorhiza maculata* and two greater butterfly orchids *Plantathera chlorantha* whose flowers were about to open (Dave opened one to confirm it wasn't the lesser species). The butterfly orchids seem early; after a late start to the season summer is now ahead of itself!



Greater butterfly orchid *Plantathera chlorantha*, flowers not yet fully open

We recorded about 140 species in three monads, not a bad morning's work for an initially unpromising-looking tetrad.

Carol Crawford
23rd June 2018