

Mabie Forest, New Abbey (NX9370), 1st June 2019

The field meetings this year just get better and better with rare or scarce plants recorded – the Nationally Scarce *Carex elongata* last meeting, and now this is surpassed and was enjoyed by 7 of us. Even the weather was better behaved than that forecast...



The group Fiona Macfarlane

Mabie Forest, although owned and managed by the Forestry Commission, is about 50% mature deciduous woodland with a variety of habitats besides woodland – including a loch, several ponds, marshy areas, grassland, forest rides and glades, all over soils varying from acidic to virtually neutral, dry to damp/wet. Several ancient woodland indicator species were recorded in the first half hour or so, with dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, common enchanter's nightshade *Circaeae lutetiana*, wood speedwell, *Veronica montana* (hairs all round the stem), yellow pimpernel (*Lysimachia nemorum*), wood melic *Melica uniflora*, wood sedge *Carex sylvatica*, remote sedge *C. remota*, giant fescue *Schedonurus gigantea* (with purple auricles clasping the stem), sweet woodruff *Galium odoratum*, hairy wood-rush *Luzula pilosa*, beech fern *Phegopteris connectilis* (with the lowest two pinnae pointing backwards) and hard shield fern *Polystichum aculeatum*.



Beech fern *Phegopteris connectilis* David Hawker



Hard shield fern *Polystichum aculeatum* Iain Gormly

Quite apart from other species not exclusively associated with woodland – bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, some still in flower, wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, greater wood-rush *Luzula sylvatica* and wood sorrel *Oxalis acetosella*. Even the odd primrose *Primula vulgaris* was still in flower. We recorded both avens, wood *Geum urbanum* with its small upright yellow flowers, and water *G. rivale* with purplish large nodding flowers, and finally the hybrid *G. x intermedium* of large yellow drooping flowers.



Hybrid avens *Geum x intermedium* David Hawker

There was a wide variety of trees, both deciduous and coniferous, and shrubs (several obviously planted) including hybrid whitebeam *Sorbus x thuringiaca*,

Other highlights included two ladies mantles, smooth *Alchemilla glabra* with no hairs anywhere on the plant, and *A. xanthochlora* with sparse hairs on the under-surface of the leaves. Sedges were scattered around with the two mentioned above, plus carnation sedge *Carex panicea* (both leaf surfaces glaucous); glaucous sedge *C. flacca* (upper leaf surface green, under-surface glaucous); star sedge *C. echinata* with fine leaves and widely spaced spikes; common yellow sedge *C. demissa*; and in and around the loch/pools bottle sedge *C. rostrata* (dark grey-green leaves), smooth-stalked sedge *C. laevigata* and slender sedge *C. lasiocarpa* (a very fine-leaved

plant). Of the two sedges I brought home to identify, one of them was the tawny sedge *C. hostiana* and I quote, to show the variable nature of the site:

"a plant of wet flushes and marshy ground where the water contains a fairly high proportion of bases and has a pH of 5.5-6.5"

Both the loch and pools contained pondweeds, either bog pondweed *Potamogeton polygonifolius* or broad-leaved pondweed *P. natans*, amongst the duckweed *Lemna minor*, water horsetail *Equisetum fluviatile* with its hollow stem, and white water lily *Nymphaea alba*. Jim and Iain hauled out a mass of a stonewort which turned out to be *Nitella flexilis*. Unfortunately in one of the man-made pools we came across curly pondweed *Lagarosiphon majus* which is an invasive water weed, while around the edge there was garden *Hemerocallis* and purple-flowered garden *Iris*.

But the highlight of the day was undoubtedly the re-finding of the previously reported, by Peter Robinson two weeks earlier, bird's nest orchid *Neottia nidus-avis*, the last and only record being in 1848 from somewhere close by.



Bird's nest orchid *Neottia nidus-avis* Fiona Macfarlane

This was the first recent record for the whole of Dumfries & Galloway, at least until I got home when I found an email from Chris Miles forwarding another email from a Gatehouse resident with photo and location details of the same species near Creetown in 2017 and 2018! So two recent records in the last 3 years after an apparent absence of 170 years! It's a saprophyte (derives its energy from dead and decaying material) with no chlorophyll. Fortunately for us, it was right next to a marker post for one of the forest trails.



Lee at orchid site David Hawker

What better place to relocate it....and this almost at the end of our day out.

What a day! The tally was 173 species in two monads of one tetrad and 92 in a monad of an adjoining tetrad, making a total of 198 species during the day. If I tried to list or describe all we'd seen, then this missive would have formed a small booklet. Sorry if I've missed out some of the species or photos you may have individually preferred, but the file would be too big otherwise.