

Plants on Walls in E Ross towns and villages

Brian Ballinger

Northern Scotland has few large urban centres but there are plants to note in many villages and small towns. Wild plants growing on walls have been surveyed in England including Norfolk (Payne 1989) and Durham (Woodell and Rossiter 1959) but there is little information from Scotland.

12 small towns and villages in East Ross v.c. 106 were visited on 3 occasions in 2011 following a standard route round the older part of the town. Vascular plants growing on walls that did not appear to have been planted were noted if more than 20 m inside the 30 mph limit and if the road was built up on both sides.

RESULTS

A total of 64 species were identified. 28 were noted on a winter visit, 50 in May and 46 in July/August. Only one species was found in the winter that was not seen later in the year. In May the number of species per town/village varied from 15 to 8 with a mean of 10.6.

The walls were virtually all mortared and only 2 were retaining.

Of the May species 41 were east facing, 23 west, 19 north and 14 south facing with 27 on the top (taking the first plant of the taxon to be found in that particular location).

The most frequently identified species were:

1. *Taraxacum officinale* agg.
2. *Festuca rubra*
3. *Chamerion angustifolium*
4. *Cymbalaria muralis*
5. *Epilobium montanum*
6. *Asplenium trichomanes*
7. *Asplenium (Phyllitis) scolopendrium*
8. *Dryopteris filix-mas*
9. *Urtica dioica*
10. *Asplenium ruta-muraria*

A few plants could not be identified with certainty.

Discussion and Conclusions

This was a limited survey and had to be performed with discretion to avoid arousing suspicion – I was only asked what I was doing on one occasion. Some immature and damaged plants defied definite identification – at least by me.

The number of species found was lower than some English surveys but the towns were small and the climate harsher.

There were also differences in the frequency of the various species. In a similar recent survey in west Dundee the most frequent species were *Asplenium ruta-muraria*, *Cymbalaria muralis* and *Pseudofumaria lutea*.

Many of the species seen were also growing in the towns on roads, pavements, waste ground etc.

Being a plant on a wall is a precarious business and many do not survive for long. This was an important location for some of the species and these constituted a high proportion of the vice-county sites for some of the ferns, particularly *Asplenium trichomanes*, *A. ruta-muraria* and *Asplenium (Phyllitis) scolopendrium* which are locally fairly scarce elsewhere.

In my opinion wild plants add interest and beauty to the urban landscape and people should be encouraged to welcome them rather than cleaning the wall. Some fern species in particular deserve preservation.

Appendix 1: Species List

Aegopodium podagaria, *Agrostis capillaries*, *Alchemilla mollis*, *Alliaria petiolata*, *Anthriscus sylvestris*, *Asplenium ruta-muraria*, *Asplenium trichomanes*, *Bellis perennis*, *Betula pubescens*, *Buddleja davidii*, *Campanula porsharskyana*, *Cardamine flexuosa*, *Cardamine hirsuta*, *Cerastium fontanum*, *Chamerion angustifolium*, *Cotoneaster simonsii*, *Crepis capillaris*, *Cymbalaria muralis*, *Dacylis glomerata*, *Digitalis purpurea*, *Dryopteris dilatata*, *Dryopteris filix-mas*, *Epilobium montanum*, *Epilobium obscurum*, *Erysimum cheiri*, *Festuca ovina*, *Festuca rubra*, *Fragaria vesca*, *Galium aparine*, *Geranium robertianum*, *Geum urbanum*, *Holcus lanatus*, *Hypochaeris radicata*, *Lapsana communis*, *Leontodon autumnalis*, *Linaria purpurea*, *Mycelis muralis*, *Pentaglottis sempervirens*, *Phyllitis (Asplenium)scolopendrium*, *Picea sitchensis*, *Pilosella aurantiaca*, *Plantago lanceolata*, *Plantago major*, *Poa annua*, *Poa pratensis*, *Poa trivialis*, *Polypodium vulgare*, *Pseudofumaria lutea*, *Rumex crispus*, *Rumex acetosa*, *Rosa sp*, *Sagina procumbens*, *Salix sp*, *Sambucus nigra*, *Sedum album*, *Sedum acre*, *Senecio jacobaea*, *Senecio viscosus*, *Senecio vulgaris*, *Sonchus oleraceus*, *Sorbus aucuparia*, *Stellaria media*, *Tanacetum parthenium*, *Taraxacum* , *Urtica dioica*.

Appendix 2: Places visited: Alness, Conon Bridge, Cromarty, Dingwall, Evanton, Fortrose, Invergordon, Muir of Ord, Portmahomack, Rosemarkie, Strathpeffer, Tain.

References

Payne R. M. (1998), "The Flora of Walls in West Norfolk". Privately published.

Woodell S. R. J. and Rosseter J. (1959) "The Flora of Durham Walls" Proceedings of the BSBI 2, 257-273