

Saturday 21st April 2018: Concaird Estate woodlands and Tranew habitats: NS30N

It was very pleasant for our first outing to be in warm sunshine, after the long cold winter. We were seven, the most we have started a season with and plenty for two teams. It would have been eight had Dave Lang not had to cry off the day before with a sprained ankle. Fortunately he had already emailed the maps and a list of notable species previously found in the tetrad. The notable species were all in the NW monad, part of the area Gill Smart's group were to tackle, though we thought it too early for those in Tranew Flushes. My group visited the Cloncaird woodlands on the west side of the Girvan water, as these appeared to have a higher proportion of broadleaves and less conifers than the east bank.

At Cloncaird we soon found that despite the conifers there was a good array of woodland specialists and found in total 23 ancient woodland indicators and 12 candidate indicators (as per my 2009 paper in Scottish Forestry, downloadable from publications page of www.carollcrawford.com). Good indicators found were woodruff *Galium odoratum* and wood speedwell *Veronica montana*. The latter has hairs all round the stem, unlike the commoner germander speedwell *Veronica chamaedrys* which has two lines of hairs down the stem. Vernal flora showing best were celandine *Ficaria verna*, wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa* and primrose *Primularia vulgaris*, and on damp ground opposite-leaved golden saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*. Bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* was just starting to flower in contrast to our first visit last year to Currarie Glen (albeit a week later and further south) when full bluebell carpets were seen. We had not gone far when a text arrived from Gill to say they had found yellow star-of-Bethlehem *Gagea lutea*, almost immediately at its only station in Ayrshire!

Tracy in my group then had a text from a friend out with the Lanarkshire group to say they had found moschatel *Adoxa moschatellina*. We found it a bit later at the edge of a *Chrysosplenium* flush, though at that time Tracy was bravely investigating an undulating felled area, but we soon found it for her again in another damp area. This is the best time of year to see this small plant with its strange flowers, also known as town-hall clock.

We lunched by the beautiful Tranew Linn waterfalls, where I was stumped by a dark-green leaved aquatic with tubers below. It was identified later from the photograph by Angus Hannah as hemlock water dropwort *Oenanthe crocata* (which I'd seen earlier by a spring!) who noted that the tubers are very poisonous. We returned by the upper path where we found moschatel in another habitat on drier barer ground. With spring so late, some of the ID was challenging with only green parts showing. In all found we found 101 species; OK for one habitat in this late spring.



Oenanthe crocata with its poisonous tubers

Gill's group were also charmed by moschatel, encountering it frequently along the hedgebank where blackthorn flowers also flanked their passage. They took a minor road which runs NW to SE across the tetrad visiting woodlands, Tranew Flushes (not much grown and as expected too early for target species) and ending at Approach Loch (also poor at this time). Finding *Gagea lutea* was the highlight, 20 plants at Waulkmill Bridge. There were also a few clumps of goldilocks buttercup *Ranunculus auricomus* (not yet flowering) like the *Gagea* a good ancient woodland indicator, as is the sanicle *Sanicula europaea* they found. Peter Mackie dispensed tips on fern ID and took some polypody home to identify under the microscope confirming it was *Polypodium interjectum* intermediate polypody. This species can only be distinguished from common polypody *Polypodium vulgare* microscopically.



One of the *Gagea lutea* plants

Though there was overlap between our lists Gill's group had a greater range and total with more habitats visited. The combined total was 153 species, not bad for the time of year.

Carol Crawford.