

South end of Vice County (VC): 23rd – 30th June 2018

Last week of June I went on the Wigtownshire Recording Week with VC recorders from all over Scotland, the BSBI Scottish Officer Jim McIntosh and other good botanists. We were based at Lagafater Lodge which used to be in Ayrshire (and is still in Ayrshire VC) but is now in Dumfries and Galloway (D&G). Each day most attendants went into Wigtownshire, which is under-recorded, compared to other Scottish VCs, because its VC recorder has been ill for a few years. Jim had worked out the gaps and groups of two-three botanists tackled two monads (1km x 1 km squares) per day there. Jim thought we should also tackle Ayrshire VC squares which were unrecorded because so far south. Each day I was given a team to help record three moorland and two coastal tetrads. All this for the Atlas 2020 project, for which 2019 is the last recording year.

Moorland tetrads in hectad NX17

These lay either side of the road to the lodge and a track running north of it.

Recording began on **23rd June in NX17I** round the lodge by Jim and early arrivals: David Hawker (VC recorder Kirkcudbrightshire, Valerie Heppel, a member of his Kirkcudbright Botany Group (which records fortnightly like the Ayrshire group) and bryologist Liz Kungu brushing up her vascular plants. They visited woodlands, the Laggie Burn and moorland to the north, recording 101 species in an hour and a half. Highlights were five twayblade orchids *Neottia ovata* and a magnificent shuttlecock of *Dryopteris cambrensis* both at the bridge by the lodge.

The woodlands comprised Sitka spruce, with *Rhododendron ponticum* and other pheasant cover such as shallon *Gaultheria shallon* below, and some native broadleaves on damper ground: common alder, ash, rowan, grey and eared willows *Salix cinerea* and *S. aurita*, and silver and downy birches *Betula pendula* and *B. pubescens*. Woodland/woodland edge plants included other *Dryopteris* ferns, wood sorrel *Oxalis acetosella*, lesser celandine *Ficaria verna*, pignut *Conopodium majus*, the non-native pink purslane *Claytonia sibirica* and ground elder *Aegopodium podagraria*. Wetland species by the burn and in rush areas included: lady fern *Athyrium filix-femina*, marsh marigold *Caltha palustris*, creeping forget-me-not *Myosotis secunda* and bog stitchwort *Stellaria alsine*. The moorland was typical blanket bog with abundant *Molinia*, *Calluna*, cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix*, blaeberry *Vaccinium myrtillus*, hare's tail and common cotton grasses *Eriophorum vaginatum* and *E. angustifolium*, and deer grass *Trichophorum germanicum*. They were pleased to find cranberry *Vaccinium oxycoccus*.

This SE monad was completed and rest of tetrad recorded on **26th June** by me and Liz Kungu. Liz, based at Edinburgh Botanics, has joined us on bioblitzes in Ayrshire and runs a bryophyte recording group in D&G. We only added another 15 species to the monad, by the lodge (e.g. bracken and rosebay willowherb), by the track to the north and blanket bog beside (some burned), noting the absence of cranberry as we moved north. We visited open areas by the Laggie Burn in that monad on the return leg.

In the monad north of that there were few species to add, even in a fenced area of more improved moorland, so I started a new card to make things more interesting. Liz had plenty of time to look at bryophytes too. Cranberry and sundew continued to be absent from the dry blanket bog. We got more species as we descended to Black Glen Burn, particularly on flushed slopes, despite heavy grazing. These included flea sedge *Carex pulicaris*, pill sedge *Carex*

pilulifera, bottle sedge *Carex rostrata*, lesser clubmoss *Selaginella sellaginoides*, wood horsetail *Equisetum sylvaticum*, marsh arrowgrass *Triglochin palustris* and yellow pimpernel *Lysimachia nemorum* without flowers. The best spots were also good for bryophytes with brown mosses. We climbed out of the glen to a breezier insect-free spot for lunch. Then to the end of the maintained track (recently ditched) where the track becomes grassed over and runs over to Ballantrae.



Sphagnum-rich flush in Black Glen Burn

Next we climbed to the Pildinny watershed adding crowberry *Empetrum nigrum*, cowberry *Vaccinium vitis-idaea*, heath woodrush *Luzula pilosa* and lemon-scented fern *Oreopteris limbosperma*. On the watershed we finally found common sundew *Drosera rotundifolia* on *Sphagnum* lawns and the first cranberry of the day in wetter bog there. We also saw common spike-rush *Eleocharis palustris* emerging from the largest pool. There were great views.



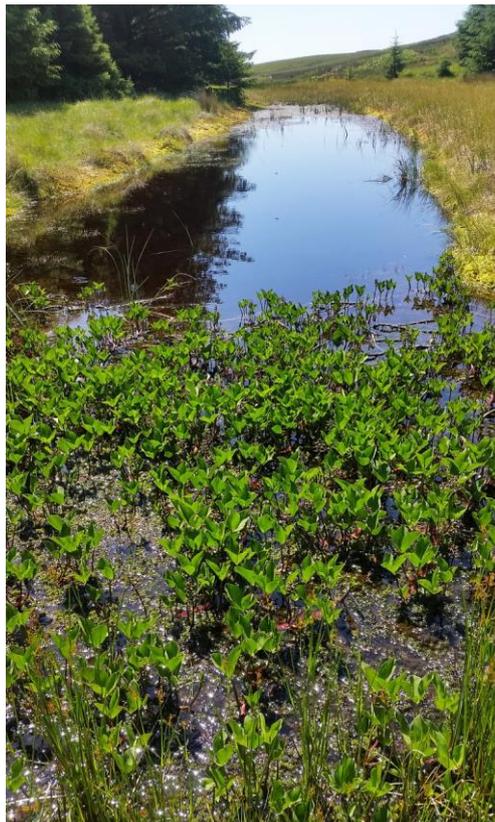
Bryologist Liz Kungu by the watershed bog pool

Descending into the NW monad we picked up green-ribbed sedge *Carex binervis* and found some good flushes by the Laggie Burn, less grazed than by the earlier burn. There we recorded lesser club moss and marsh arrowgrass again, the only other *Drosera* of the day, bugle *Ajuga reptans*, marsh marigold, yellow pimpernel with flowers, lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica*, and the only bog asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum* and common butterwort *Pinguicula vulgaris* that day.

In the three other monads of the tetrad our total was only 77 species.

My first recording of the week was on **Sunday 24th June in NX17M** south of the lodge with Jay MacKinnon (VC recorder W Lothian), Mat Dodd and local naturalist Jim McCleary. We recorded its two western monads.

In the morning we started at the edge of the lodge woodlands, where ash, rowan and grey willow were scattered among nice grassland with sweet vernal grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, pignut, heath woodrush *Luzula multiflora* ssp *congesta*, devilsbit scabious *Succisa pratensis* and smooth hawksbeard *Crepis capillaris*. Then out onto the moorlands paying close attention to the Laggie Burn, 'Main Water of Luce' and confluence, where lemon scented-fern was often seen. We had the common bog species of NX17I with cranberry now plentiful and bog asphodel commoner, even in small bogs, fens and the edges of flushes. There were banks with bell heather *Erica cinerea* and acid grassland of typical species plus green-ribbed sedge, heath grass *Danthonia decumbens* and milkwort *Polygala serpyllifolia*. Bracken clothed the west banks of the burn but the place names: Strabracken, an old steading, and Drumbracken were among extensive blanket bog on the east side! At the Strabracken ruin we found the ferns *Dryopteris affinis*, maidenhair spleenwort *Asplenium trichomanes* and wall rue *Asplenium rutamuraria* (and nettles *Urtica dioica*).



Bog bean *Menyanthes trifoliata* at old dam

Rush areas and flushes proved rich with narrow buckler fern *Dryopteris carthusiana*, marsh thistle *Cirsium palustre*, marsh bedstraw *Galium palustre*, bog stitchwort, cuckoo flower *Cardamine pratensis*, creeping forget-me-not, marsh arrowgrass and sedges including: *Carex demissa*, star sedge *Carex echinata*, pill sedge, flea sedge and notably *Carex dioica*. At the south of the monad was the start of an old dam with pools and planting. In a pool bog bean *Menyanthes trifoliata*, bog pondweed *Potamogeton polygonifolius* and starworts *Callitriche* spp were seen, while Sitka and rhododendron made up the bulk of the planting.

The SW monad began in the dam area where we encountered fen vegetation in an old lade, including fen bedstraw *Galium uliginosum*, with prickles on its stems, and marsh speedwell *Veronica scutellata*. A planted area (formerly an island in the reservoir designed to resemble a battleship!), was dominated by common alder *Alnus glutinosa* with some conifers and a whitebeam *Sorbus aria*. The short grassland on the dam yielded additional species such as catsear *Hypochaeris radicata* and early hair grass *Aira praecox*. Atop an old bridge stanchion was common whitlow grass *Erophila verna*.

We climbed up through *Molinia* mire to a nearby summit hoping to find raised bog but it was dry and dwarf shrub heath dominated. We descended to an area of wetlands near the south of the monad, between burn and road, which was more fruitful: marsh cinquefoil *Comarum palustre*, ragged robin *Silene flos-cuculi*, and marsh pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris* were recorded.

Mat and Jim had a look for two hut circles just south of the square and may have found one, and then we started returning up the road, baking in the sun. Most of us dipped down to an old quarry site upslope of the dam, where wet heath with lousewort was encountered, and returned to the lodge along the NW monad.

Over 100 species were recorded in each monad. An unusual feature of the tetrad was shallon (from the lodge woods) colonising a range of habitats including: the edges of burns and within bogs. Jim pointed out a range of moths and other invertebrates including three of the four Scottish species of grasshopper.

The final moorland tetrad **NX17G was recorded on 28th June** with Robin Payne, one of the VC recorders for Angus, and chair of the Scottish BSBI committee. This reaches the most southern point in VC 75 (Ayrshire).

The road runs diagonally through the middle. Being familiar with the terrain we decided on sampling strategy: to sections of bog, grassland and watercourses. We recorded it as one tetrad noting additional species in successive monads, numbered the Angus VC way.

The moorland was mainly the blanket bog and/or *Molinia* mire crossed all week, with cranberry still present. At one flatter are, resembling raised bog with beefy *Sphagnum* spp, we searched unsuccessfully for bog rosemary but found crowberry and good colonies of cranberry and common sundew. We saw one heath spotted orchid *Dactylorhiza maculata* in a bit of bog by the road and bog myrtle *Myrica gale* in a southern bog, both the only records in the trio of tetrads.

We chatted to the farmer from Barnvannoch, who runs blackface sheep on Lagafater estate. He talked of the family who own the estate and of their plans for a hydro scheme, as well as water

supply, at the dam to north before it was dismantled. And of when the area was still in South Ayrshire; the council paying for taxis to take kids to D&G schools.

Wetlands by the burns, including Laganbeastie, Bungsie and confluences were less rich than those in the NX17L, the banks being less steep and flushed, but we picked up ragged robin, tufted forget-me-not, narrow buckler fern, lemon-scented fern and several sedges. Branched-bur reed *Sparganium erectum* emerged in one stretch and bell heather adorned one bank.

In grasslands on road verges, by the farm and in enclosed areas we found acid grassland and more agricultural species. An esker at south end of tetrad, upon which Shennas cottage stands, yielded pignut, bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, mouse-ear hawkweed *Pilosella officinarum* and the first harebell *Campanula rotundifolia* of the year.

Again just over 100 species ticked off the card.

Coastal tetrads in NX07 hectad

These were alternated with moorland tetrads to make recording more interesting.

NX07N is 50% sea. Access involved a series of narrow roads and farm tracks forking back from the A77 near the head of Glen App. Some tracks are part of the Ayrshire Coastal Path therefore well maintained. Other sections might be easier to reach by boat!

I tackled the **southern monad on 25th June** with Jo Whatmugh, over from Northern Ireland to see her daughter Jenny Farrah, a botanist at Edinburgh Botanics.

The day started with a species-rich verge of woodland, wetland and meadow species including ash, *Dryopteris* ferns, dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, primrose *Primula vulgaris* meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, wild angelica *Angelica sylvestris*, lady's bedstraw *Galium verum* and trailing tormentil *Potentilla anglica*.

The track then zig-zagged through broadleaved woodland. By its roadside ditch we added more woodland species such as common polypody fern *Polypodium vulgare*, opposite-leaved golden saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* and yellow pimpernel. The dry conditions allowed us into an area of alder woodland where we found bugle *Ajuga reptans*, creeping soft grass *Holcus mollis* and lower down bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* and sanicle *Sanicula europaea*. The insects were troublesome and we were happy to get to open habitats out the other side.

All that was left of Drumbain House was a ruined cottage with overgrown garden. We continued down the track seeing areas of tall grassland 'set-aside' either side, including one field of reed canary-grass *Phalaris arundinacea*. We saw that the steep slopes near the sea were dominated by tall grassland or bracken. At Ford we found round-leaved crowfoot *Ranunculus omiophyllus* and marsh foxtail *Alopecurus geniculatus* in the water. The upstream section of that burn was full of hemlock water dropwort *Oenanthe crocata*. At high ground near the end of the track (100m) we could see short cliff-top maritime grasslands, way below, but no route down.

The map suggested more chance of getting to the sea in the northern monad, via the Coastal Path. This meant retracing our steps then driving out of and back into the tetrad via the network

of tracks. We were still 1km from the edge of that monad when we reached a closed gate and realised we would not have time to get down and back that day.

I got to the **northern monad** on my way home on **30th June**. After the long switching drive in, that gate was open so I could park nearer the edge of the monad. Inside I found grazed meadows among the bracken and gorse with a good range of dry acid to marshy grassland dicot herbs, grasses and sedges. Lower down a herd of bullocks fed – they later watched me lunch!

At Currarie Port I double-backed to the end of Currarie Glen woodland (upper parts visited spring 2017). A narrow strip of common alder was in the monad with primrose, wood sorrel, lesser celandine, wood dock *Rumex sanguineus*, enchanter's nightshade *Circaea lutetiana* and remote sedge *Carex remota*.



Browsed *Rumex crispus* ssp. *littorale*

At last onto the shingle and rocks for coastal specialists such as sea mayweed *Tripleurospermum maritimum*, thrift *Armeria maritima*, sea campion *Silene uniflora*, sea plantain *Plantago maritima* and the seaside sub-species of curled dock *Rumex crispus* ssp. *littorale* which has three warts on each tepal. Also Smith's pepperwort *Lepidium heterophyllum* and lesser swine-cress *Lepidium didymus*, the last strong-smelling!

Above were coastal grasslands with species such as *Koeleria macrantha*, mountain everlasting *Antennaria dioica*, wild thyme *Thymus polytrichus*, bird's-foot trefoil and bell heather. Notable were fruitheads of spring squill *Scilla verna* (a species I've only seen at four stations in Ayrshire). Perched saltmarsh was also present with saltmarsh rush *Juncus gerardi*, parsley water dropwort *Oenanthe lachenalii*, distant sedge *Carex distans* and black bog rush *Schoenus nigricans*.



Coastal grassland at Currarie Port and bullocks above

Above that was an extensive wetland with many rushes and sedges, marsh species such as marsh pennywort, ragged robin, northern marsh orchid *Dactylorhiza purpurella*, common valerian *Valeriana officinalis*, yellow flag *Iris pseudacorus*, and bog species including crowberry, common cotton grass, cross-leaved heath, bog asphodel and notably bog pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*. This was a beautiful colourful place to be.

140 species were recorded in that monad and 120 in the southern monad of NX07N.

NX07M was recorded on 29th June by Luke Gaskell, VC recorder for Peeblesshire, and Chris Miles, VC recorder for Dumfriesshire, a crack team. The tetrad involved a steep walk in from Glenapp along the Coastal Path and descents to and ascents from the coastal edge and various burn gullies. They had an adventurous time with a long list of notable species recorded as well as many species from tetrad to north, though not spring squills.

Along the Coastal Path they found sand spurrey *Spergularia rubra*. The upper fields in north half of tetrad were more improved but they found a flush with bog pimpernel which they saw elsewhere later. A track leads down to Two-door Cove where they first saw fool's watercress *Apium nodiflorum*, and found creeping willow *Salix repens*, carline thistle *Carlina vulgaris* and wood vetch *Vicia sylvatica*. Most exciting was narrow-leaved everlasting pea *Lathyrus sylvestris* growing in cracks in the cliffs. They brought one back – it is a bit like sweet pea but with narrower leaves. This has rarely been recorded in Ayrshire before. Sea spleenwort *Asplenium maritimum* and roseroot *Sedum rosea* were also recorded at the cliffs.

Surprisingly at Portandea Cove a house was being built near the strandline, a tractor bringing materials down to it.

Luke and Chris travelled along the cliff tops to the March Burn where they found the hybrid between eared and creeping willow, and dwarf gorse *Ulex gallii* near its northern limit and rarely recorded in Ayrshire before. Continuing along cliff-top paths they saw good populations of sheep's bit *Jasione montana*. Both southern monads were less improved with bog, heath and marsh habitats. On Finnarts Hill they found slender club rush *Isolepis cernua*, another species rarely recorded in Ayrshire.

All in all 170 species for the tetrad the best VC75 haul of the week.

During recording weeks evenings are spent identifying specimens brought back, sometimes by microscope. There are good discussions over dinner (excellent catering by Hilary Hawker, David's wife). Finally each group gives a brief report to everyone else. For botanists who have reached intermediate level, recording weeks are an excellent way of improving skills.

Carol Crawford 8/7/18