

Plants in Vice-County 104: A Review of July - December 2019

Over 15,000 vascular plant records were made in VC104 in 2019 including 212 new hectad records, although a few of these are the result of subspecies or aggregate recording. Very many thanks to all who have contributed this year – 15,000 is an all-time high.

Skye Botany Group met three times, visiting Ulfhart Point, Hinnisdal and an area near An t-Sron, north of Camasunary. The trip to Ulfhart Point on Skye (opposite Soay) meant that the last two tetrads with any significant land but no plant records were finally covered. Ulfhart means roar or howl and we had to postpone our boat trip from Elgol twice before the seas were calm enough, and even then getting back to the boat at the end of the day was slightly hair-raising.

There is now no tetrad in VC104 with more than 2% land and no post-1999 records. Six partial tetrads have been checked and have no vascular plants and the three remaining with no records are likely to be the same. However, a great many tetrads can still not be described as thoroughly surveyed.

The issue over which species of *Agrimonia* is or are present in VC104 was largely resolved, in that all specimens examined closely once fruiting are *A. procera* (Fragrant Agrimony). This follows decades of confusion where the same populations have been recorded as both *A. eupatoria* (Agrimony) and *A. procera* (Fragrant Agrimony) by different recorders. There may, of course, still be *A. eupatoria* waiting to be found. The main lesson from this exercise is that existing floras do not give adequate descriptions of the two species, except perhaps for the fruit characteristics.

A poster on “The Spread of Aliens in VC104” was displayed at the Scottish Botanists’ Conference at Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh.

Skye

New to VC104:

- *Lemna gibba* (Fat Duckweed) was recorded in two places
- *Hieracium subcrinellum* (previously *H. crinellum*) (Blunt-leaved Hawkweed) was a late entry as it was found in flower in October near Sligachan.
- *Melilotus altissimus* (Tall Melilot) was found as a weed in Lower Breakish
- *Ilex x altaclerensis* (Highclere Holly) at Tokavaig,
- *Euphorbia sikkimensis* (Sikkim spurge) in Portree as a garden throw-out but only the second record on the entire BSBI Distribution Database, the first being in Acton, West London.

Also found as weeds in Lower Breakish:

- *Amsinckia micrantha* (Common Fiddleneck) is new to Skye, though recorded on Muck in 1996.
- The only previous record for *Thlaspi arvense* (Field Penny-cress) in the vice-county was from Soay in 1946.
- *Viola arvensis* (Field Pansy) had only two previous records in modern times.

Most of these Breakish weeds have come from imported topsoil purchased from the local builders’ merchant in Broadford. The provenance of the soil is unknown, but it is likely to have been used all over Skye so these species may start to turn up elsewhere.

Further interesting *Hieracium* records include:

- *Hieracium eucallum* (Spreading-toothed Hawkweed) had one pre-2000 record but this is the only more recent one from Skye, though there are two modern records from the Small Isles.
- *Hieracium sparsifolium* (Sparse-leaved Hawkweed) from an area to the west of Tormore is the first modern record.
- *Hieracium sublasiophyllum* (Slender-bracted Hawkweed) from Abhainn Gremiscaig is the first for Skye and the second for the VC as there is a 1986 record for Eigg.

Acaena anserinifolia (Bronze Pirri-pirri-bur) at Glasphein is the second vice-county record and *Alstroemeria aurea* (Peruvian Lily) at Bernisdale and Portnalong were second and third vice-county records.

Raasay

Re-examination of some established *Montbretia* colonies showed that *Crocsmia pottsii* (Potts' *Montbretia*) had been overlooked previously.

Chamaecyparis lawsoniana (Lawson's Cypress) near Temptation Hill and a single specimen of *Quercus cerris* (Turkey Oak) near Inverarish were found as planted specimens. There is only one vice-county record for *Q. cerris* - on Skye: NG51 1987-1999

Very late in the year *Ranunculus* subgenus *Batrachium* (a Water-crowfoot) was noted in a small garden pond on Raasay. Determination to species will have to wait for flowers.

The Small Isles

A single day on Canna and Sanday proved very useful as 1930s records for *Catapodium marinum* (Sea Fern-grass) and *Trifolium campestre* (Hop Trefoil) were re-found in the Sanday dunes. In both cases these are only the second recent records for the vice-county, the others being on Rum and Eigg respectively.

There were also first Canna/Sanday records for several species including *Botrychium lunaria* (Moonwort), *Carex remota* (Remote Sedge) and *Scrophularia auriculata* (Water Figwort), the last looking like a recent import at the ferry terminal.

A single plant of *Polygonum boreale* (Northern Knotgrass) was the first VC104 record. This species was thought to be restricted to the Northern Isles, but has recently been found in the Outer Isles, Tiree and Colonsay.

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Meanwhile, Lee has found an extraordinary number of *Orobanche alba* (Thyme Broomrape) spikes – over 300 – near Coaire, and Seth followed by Keith have reported *Alstroemeria aurea* (Peruvian Lily) as garden escapes.