

PERTSHIRE SOCIETY OF NATURAL SCIENCE

BOTANICAL SECTION

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Introduction

Barbara Hogarth has been getting her nose into everything you might think! Certainly that dreaded name crops up rather frequently in this year's Bulletin. The reasons for this had best be explained to ensure that it doesn't happen again. Firstly, as I have experience of habitat survey work I undertook the leadership of those meets involving the section's new venture into SWT Wildlife Site Surveys, secondly Lunan Bay is in my vice county (VC90) and thirdly Little Ballo is more or less on my doorstep. I also wanted to make sure that there were plenty of outings during the 1995 summer season and if that meant leading them - then so be it! However, I sincerely hope that a few more section members will feel able to lead field meetings in future years as this would take the pressure off the current 'regulars'.

The Botanical Section can certainly look back on 1995 as a successful field season with exceptionally good attendances at all the meetings - the Section Committee are to be congratulated for putting together a series of meetings which clearly appealed to a broad spectrum of the membership. It was certainly good to welcome several new members and it is hoped that they will continue to support the Section in the future. It is also heartening to see familiar faces, old and young, and catch up with the gossip as well as the plant recording. Finally, many thanks go to Neale and Helen Taylor for hosting the Section's first, and very successful, barbecue to round off the Strathbraan meeting.

Barbara G Hogarth, Editor

Comrie Meadow & Comrie Gravel Pits, 28 May 1995

What is it about wet weather that brings Botanical Section members out in droves? Like slugs was one comment - I had ducks in mind! A group of 15 assembled in Comrie ready to head off, some on foot and some by car, to Comrie Meadow. This was to be the first of several 'Wildlife Sites' the Section would be surveying for the Perthshire Branch of SWT. Chins hit the ground as we passed through the gate - could this partly churned-up field really be a 'Wildlife Site'? A glance across this field was enough for us to know that it contained nothing of botanical interest so we hastened through a second gate to an even more barren area. This narrow strip, which ran between the River Earn and a disused railway line had clearly been disturbed by works needed to reinforce a section of riverbank and may have been partly washed away by flooding. It also explained the bare ground and vehicle tracks in the previous field. We had a look at some of the plants on the railway embankment although this area was not part of the survey site.

The meadow beyond this point began to look a little more promising but agricultural 'improvement' appeared to have much reduced the species-richness. We spent most of our time along the riverbank which supported a fringe of trees and a mix of woodland, wetland and grassland plants. A small area of shingle also provided some botanical interest. We felt, however, that as much of the interest was restricted to the margins of the site Comrie Meadow was no longer worthy of 'Wildlife Site' status and moved on to Comrie Gravel Pits after a stop for lunch.

Cars were moved to a large lay-by alongside the cemetery to the south of Comrie and the party set off once more. We found that the former gravel workings now support a fairly open, broadleaved woodland dominated by alder with birch, ash, bird cherry, willows and a fairly lush ground flora, interspersed with damp hollows and pools. Wood Stitchwort *Stellaria nemorum* and Wood Speedwell *Veronica montana* were notable finds on drier ground whilst the wet depressions contained Creeping Jenny *Lysimachia nummularium*, Remote Sedge *Carex remota* and Bladder Sedge *Carex vesicaria*. Comrie Gravel Pits we felt was a suitable candidate for 'Wildlife Site' status.

We are grateful to Squadron Leader A McAdam for allowing access to Comrie Meadow and to Mr Nigel Gibbons for allowing access to Comrie Gravel Pits.

Barbara G Hogarth

Kinnoull Hill, 4 June 1995

Fourteen members supported this potentially adventurous meet - in spite of rumours of abseiling being the only way to survey the cliffs! The main objective of this field meeting was to update the numerous records made by Jim Aitken of Perth and others over the years. The large party divided into two groups - those who did not wish to scramble about explored the top of the crags whilst a small group descended (without ropes) to the base of the crags and traversed along the steep slopes through the trees. Progressing along the base of the crags it became clear that the plants in this vicinity were being shaded out by the trees on the slope below. These included Sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*, Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, and Larch, *Larix decidua*. The list compiled by Jim Aitken contained some 105 species that had been found on or near the crags. On this occasion 61 species were recorded by the section, some being identified at some distance when spotted on inaccessible parts of the crags. Of interest were Common Cornsalad *Valerianella locusta*, Teasel *Dipsacus fullonum*, Fairy Foxglove *Erinus alpinus*, Musk Mallow *Malva moschata*, and Annual Knawel *Scleranthus annuus*.

Special thanks go to Jim Aitken for the information he was able to provide and to Ros Smith who liaised with him prior to the visit and who took charge of the high level group on the day. We also thank the Forest Authority for their permission to visit the base of the crags.

Nick Boss

Lunan Bay, 18 June 1995

An excursion to the Angus coast and once again a trip to the seaside was blessed with fine weather although, typical of the east coast, the cloud-studded blue skies that gave the impression of mid-summer sunshine belied a cold, relentless wind! Fortunately the landward side of the dunes was relatively sheltered. The group of ten headed south from the car park towards the Lunan Water, passing firstly through an area of fairly species-rich dune grassland. This meeting was billed as dealing with plant-insect inter-relationships so we did our best to look for insects as well as plants but clearly any sensible beastie was curled up in a sheltered spot waiting for the cold wind to abate so we had to content ourselves with spotting a variety of galls. We progressed slowly, eventually reaching a small area of saltmarsh alongside the river and this gave us another habitat to look at in detail before moving back to the dune grassland where we found a sunny, warm, wind-free spot and all agreed that it was time for lunch. The wind died away as the afternoon approached which meant that we could comfortably head seawards and take a brisk walk on hard sand to the red sandstone cliffs at the northern end of the bay. The cliffs support a number of interesting plants such as Carlina Thistle *Carlina vulgaris*, and Pellitory of the Wall *Parietaria judaica*. Here we probably upset a couple of groups, who thought they had found a pleasantly peaceful place to sit, as we searched the base of the cliffs and commented on the geology as well as the plants. We made our way back to the car park away from the beach and found splendid banks of Wild Pansy *Viola tricolor* on rather unpromising dunes that were largely colonised by gorse.

Barbara G Hogarth

Doone Ponds & Graeme Morison's Wildlife Garden, 24 June 1995

This was an unusual outing in several respects. Firstly, it was to Stirling District (although still VC 87 West Perth), secondly there were two destinations, thirdly the weather was wonderfully warm and sunny, and lastly all the recording was done by English name by popular request.

For the eight in the party Doone Ponds was the first stop in the morning and for lunch. Owned by the District Council, the area is a series of revegetated gravel workings with areas of birch and willow woodland, wetland and ponds. Some reseeded and planting has gone on over the years and there were a number of odd introductions and a wide array of non-native shrubs. Amongst the former are Greater Spearwort *Ranunculus lingua*, Wild Carrot *Daucus carota* and Salad Burnet *Sanguisorba minor* (although only the last named was recorded on this outing). The woodland and clearings within yielded Common Spotted Orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, Heath Spotted Orchid *D. maculata* and Northern Marsh Orchid *D. purpurella*, as well as some trifid Common Twayblade *Listera ovata*. The main pond contained Spiked Water Milfoil *Myriophyllum spicatum*, in a 'scrape' amongst an area of cleared trees was Water Purslane *Lythrum portula*.

Next we headed for Graeme and Moya Morison's house in Deanston Gardens. Here the group was warmly greeted with fresh lemonade and other goodies and we reclined on the patio. The Morisons explained that their garden was only six years old and had been built from scratch along with the new house. Space prohibits a full description but essentially it consisted of a more formal setting close to the house and wilder elements further away, with several ponds, wildflower meadows and wetland areas.

There was a prize of a bottle of wine for the person who could record the most species but with the glorious weather and the cordial welcome no-one felt competitive (at least no more than usual!). In all we recorded 80 species. The ponds and wetlands which seemed to have been largely colonised naturally contained 53 species including Water Plantain *Alisma plantago-aquatica*, White Sedge *Carex curta*, and Fringed Water Lily *Nymphoides peltata*, and lots of rushes and sedges. Unfortunately the dreaded Pond Stonecrop *Crassula helmsii* was also present, having arrived no doubt in a pot from a garden centre.

The meadow contained 34 species, including (astonishingly) self sown Greater Butterfly Orchid *Platanthera chlorantha*, as well as planted Northern marsh orchid which has seeded extensively. The garden was an absolute picture and a joy, and we are very grateful to the Morisons for their hospitality and all their hard work on the garden. It just goes to show what can be done.

And the bottle of wine? Awarded to me (as I compiled the list) but drunk by all at the barbecue later in the season. Just how civilised can you get? ?

Neale Taylor

Sidlaw Hills (Little Ballo/Thrawparts), 9 July 1995

This was a very successful afternoon's outing to an interesting area on the lower slopes of the Sidlaws. We visited two areas of wet meadowland both with a rich diversity of plant species, which, combined with very pleasant weather, made the leaders' task relatively easy. Anne and Barbara were grateful to have the assistance of Richard Thomas as the party of 12 began to split into small groups. This allowed some to practise using a flora to key out the genus and species once a plant's family had been recognised whilst others tried to get to grips with some of the many grasses, sedges and rushes. We also took the opportunity to look across the sites to get a feel for the subtle changes that occur in vegetation and to try and identify the visual differences in the communities present. The afternoon was certainly not all work and no play - we had ample time to look at some of the site's specialities. Orchids were especially showy. Northern Marsh Orchid *Dactylorhiza purpurella* were abundant and we were also treated to a good number of Early Marsh Orchid *D. incarnata*. The Lesser Butterfly Orchids *Platanthera bifolia* (just two) were eventually found amongst tall meadow grasses. Other colourful attractions included Ragged Robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, Marsh Lousewort *Pedicularis palustris* and Butterwort *Pinguicula vulgaris*.

The recording aspect was taken care of by Ros Smith who rejoined the group after a visit to an adjoining (and much less interesting) piece of hillside. The rest of us enjoyed the beautiful meadows, the warm, sunny weather, the good company and a 'day off' from making plant lists.

We would like to thank Dave and Morag Scougall for allowing us to visit their wet meadows - regrettably Morag's susceptibility to hay fever prevented her joining us.

Barbara G Hogarth & Anne Mathers

Moulin Flush & Creag Glunaidh, 15 July 1995

Six of us met up in Pitlochry, from where just three cars were used to take us to the small car parking area (for the NTS walk up Craigower) close to the golf course where we met up with Alec Barbour. He was interested in seeing what the section was doing by way of surveying SWT 'Wildlife Sites'. Maps in hand we headed across the golf course and into conifer plantation in the direction of Craigower. We managed to walk straight past the flush. After some debate and a tortuous route through the trees we came upon a small, midge-infested clearing. It appeared to contain a number of sedges and other 'flush' species so we started to record the plants present and make some descriptive notes about the area. We knew we had found the right location when Bill Hay found Black Bog Rush *Schoenus nigricans*, as this is the plant's only known station in Perthshire. The area was easy to map as it simply consisted of a small, roughly oval-shaped flush in a clearing surrounded by conifers. The clearing was actually very close to the edge of the golf course and once we felt sure we had recorded anything of interest we headed for a stretch of rough close to the boundary wall and settled down to lunch and consider the best way in to Creag Glunaidh which seemed to be completely surrounded by impenetrable ranks of conifers.

We gave the crags our best shot and managed, with great difficulty, to reach the easternmost end. This involved forcing our way through the branches of a fallen tree which had conveniently flattened the surrounding deer fence, scrambling over huge boulders and battling with a wall of nettles at the base of the crag. For much of the slope the *terra* was not *firma* and it required a lot of nerve to move across, especially where lush ferns hid yawning gaps. As a result our visit was not prolonged. Luckily we arrived at the base of the crag at a point where Sticky Catchfly *Lychms viscaria* was hanging on, and once we established that the remains we had found were that species we felt that we had done our duty. We scrambled, slithered and generally fell about the place as we headed off the boulders and out of the conifer woodland - not helped by a steady drizzle.

We decided that both sites could stay on the SWT 'Wildlife Sites' list, the Moulin Flush being of interest as a habitat and because it supports Black Bog Rush, Creag Glunaidh because it supports a colony of Sticky Catchfly.

Barbara G Hogarth

Strathbraan, 12 August 1995

A party of about a dozen members, led by Neale Taylor, met at the car park by Rumbling Bridge. The purpose of the meeting was to collect records for two 5 x 5 squares, NN 94SE which includes Rumbling Bridge and the Kennacoil road, and NO 04SW along the River Braan as it flows towards the Hermitage, Dunkeld.

Notable finds in the short, dryish turf around Rumbling Bridge were Betony *Stachys officinalis*, in one of its only three known Perthshire sites, and Bird's-foot *Ornithopus perpusillus*, which favours gravelly ground derived from conglomerate rocks. Not far away grew Sweet Woodruff *Galum odoratum*, and many other species typical of the rich, slightly calcareous soil. As we walked eastward above the very steep river gorge we moved into more acidic ground with Oak *Quercus petraea* and Goat Willow *Salix caprea* as tree cover and a typical wet grass/rush flora alternating with drier Blaeberry *Vaccinium*.

stands Further eastwards still and we came to the edge of the Hermitage conifer plantation here we recorded the uncommon Smooth-stalked Sedge *Carex laevigata* The return took us by the side of open fields with Beech *Fagus sylvatica* borders One interesting find in this section was Hop *Humulus lupulus* trailing over a hawthorn hedge In all 183 species were seen

Undoubtedly the day's most memorable feature was the subsequent barbecue to which Neale and Helen invited us in their riverside cottage further up the Braan The garden setting and the food were equally attractive Our thanks go to them for a splendid end to the day Thanks also go to Mrs Stuart-Fotheringham for permission to visit

Richard Thomas

Braco Castle Wood, 3 September 1995

Thirteen of us eventually found our way to a suitable parking place up the attractive castle drive and in behind the castle itself Perhaps this number had its unfortunate effect on the weather - the very heavy clouds opened up as we discussed our purpose and our route, and that was the pattern for the day, a coolish wind and frequent torrential downpours Despite all we persisted The intention was mainly to map the habitats in this SWT 'Wildlife Site' and secondly to collect botanical records

The abiding memory of this day will be the tenacity and skill shown by Barbara Hogarth in overcoming the worst that the weather could throw at us In the most adverse circumstances she marked and colour-coded the variety of moorland, marsh, grassland and heathland habitats that we encountered The end result was a work of art and a triumph over adversity With this important information about the current habitats, plans for the management of the site can be suggested and discussed with its owner

Botanically the site is interesting but could be much richer The Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris* does not seem to be regenerating plentifully and plants of drier pinewoods, such as Cow-wheat *Melampyrum pratense* are absent Marsh, bog and heather communities are well represented, including some Juniper *Juniperus communis* Three areas were particularly noteworthy The first was a small boggy area with Cranberry *Vaccinium oxycoccus* in flower The second was a wet area of rushes with some evidence of calcareous flushing it held Quaking Grass *Briza media*, Marsh Cinquefoil *Potentilla palustris*, two subspecies of Yellow Sedge *Carex viridula* and, most showy of all, several fine clumps of Grass of Parnassus *Parnassia palustris* in full flower Just downstream of this was a small area of open water which appeared to have been dammed, growing here up against the eastern dam wall were fine stands of Marestalk *Hippuris vulgaris*, Burr Reed *Sparganium erectum*, Spike Rush *Eleocharis palustris* and Bottle Sedge *Carex rostrata* These are likely to have been introduced, but whether deliberately or accidentally is hard to say

We thank the owner, Mr N Muir, for permission to visit and will hope for better weather to look at the remaining half which is still to be recorded

Richard Thomas

(Picture if you will a scene observed during one of the more severe downpours - four botanists huddled for shelter under one pine tree, twenty sheep under another and two deer under yet another Anne Mathers)

Fungal Foray to Killiecrankie, 28 October 1995

Seven members met at the NTS car park at Killiecrankie on a bright but cold afternoon Armed with a mixed bag of identification guides we set off to do battle with the woodland fungi Earlier in October colourful fungi were to be seen everywhere but by the end of the month a spell of cold and rain had turned many of the larger fungi into mushy heaps In spite of this we soon started to form huddles as we investigated possible names for the many 'little brown jobs' that proved to be most numerous Fungal

identification requires the use of a number of senses - does this smell of radishes? - is it rough or smooth? - does it taste peppery? So each specimen gets passed around the group for a thorough inspection and we all hunt through our various books to see if we can agree on its identity. The books vary in the quality of the information about the various fungi found but none the less we named at least 30 specimens. The best area for fungi that afternoon turned out to be open woodland close to the path above 'Soldier's Leap'. Before the light went we had a brief look for fungi along the riverside path but without success although, as we made our way back to the car park, Joanna Thomas appeared from a scramble through the bushes with a collection of weird and wonderfully shaped specimens. During the course of the afternoon a few fungi were gathered to take spore prints and sketch, however, as most were damp they deteriorated too quickly to work on.

Barbara G Hogarth

Surveys of SWT Wildlife Sites

In addition to the five sites surveyed by PSNS in 1995 a further nine sites were surveyed by the Perthshire Branch Members' Team. Highlights included Creeping Jenny *Lysimachia nummularia* at Balnamuir Bog and Lesser Water Plantain *Baldellia ranunculoides* on the shore of Loch Tay in Drummond Hill Wood, plus confirmation of Broadleaved Helleborine *Epipactis helleborine* at Insherrit Island and Trifid Bur Marigold *Bidens tripartita* (in additional locations) at River Earn Meanders.

In 1996 a further five or six sites will be surveyed by PSNS and another eleven sites, covering a wide range of habitats across Perthshire, by the Members' Team. A training day on the survey method will be held at Scottish Agricultural College, Cleeve Gardens, Oakbank Road, Perth, on Saturday 11 May starting at 10.00 am. If you would like to attend this and/or join the SWT Members' Team, please contact Peter Cramb (01887 830428).

Peter Cramb