

PERTSHIRE SOCIETY OF NATURAL SCIENCE

BOTANICAL SECTION

BULLETIN No. 20 - 1996

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT ON THE FIELD MEETINGS

The 1996 summer field meetings were not as well supported as those of 1995 although the coastal botanising always seems to be popular. The help given on two of the SWT survey outings, Grandtully Meadow/Ballechin Bog and Loch Kinnardochy & Tomphuil Lime Kiln was adequate and much appreciated by the surveyors. The surveys at Stronamuck and Drimmie Mire were sadly very poorly supported - only five members (mostly also SWT members) were present. This was a pity since both sites proved to be interesting. Perhaps we should take heart from the fact that next year the pressure for site survey work will be less great and only two sites will be tackled on these joint PSNS/SWT meetings and hopefully more helpers will make lighter work. We do also appeal to members to give more support to 'square bashing' - the Atlas 2000 project does put pressure on our vice-county recorders - so field meetings for this purpose do give us an opportunity to help and at the same time learn about more plant species.

Anne Mathers

After a sudden and brief illness Anne Mathers died on Monday, 3rd March 1997. She will be missed by all her friends in the Botanical Section.

EAST HAVEN TO ELLIOT LINKS

9 JUNE 1996

A visit to the Angus coast has almost become a 'must' and as vice-county recorder for that area I welcome having a group of knowledgeable and enthusiastic botanists to help me get my records up to scratch. The plan was to look at the tiny Easthaven SSSI in the morning - travel light and have lunch in the vicinity of the car park (and loos) - and then head northwards to Elliot Links. Small it might be but the strip of coastal grassland at Easthaven provided plenty of challenges to get our botanical skills honed again after the winter break. These included several garden escapes from the nearby houses. *Cerastium tomentosum* Snow in Summer is a frequent escapee in this vicinity but here it appeared to have hybridised with *Cerastium arvense* Field Mouse-ear (we found a few plants of this species) giving rise to a very vigorous intermediate form. The plant for which the site is important is *Rhinanthus angustifolius* Greater Yellow Rattle. Neale Taylor was able to show us the whereabouts of a small colony but as it was nowhere near to flowering we had to take his word that it was the Rattle.

Neale and Helen joined us for part of the day and introduced baby Jenny to the joys of natural history recording - what must she have thought! At only a few weeks of age does this make Jenny the youngest participant at a PSNS botanical field meeting?

Jackie Muscott also joined us and gave us some useful pointers for distinguishing between the smaller *Cerastium* species.

After lunch we headed northwards along the shore but as we were not making the anticipated progress and as rain clouds were being blown fast in our direction I decided that Elliot Links could be put on hold for a future visit and chose instead to head back over dune grassland. What looked like a very closely grazed grassland proved to be fairly diverse and sharp eyes found a selection of dwarfed grasses and sedges. By the end of the meeting we had gathered a very respectable species list - getting Angus off to a good start in 1996!

Barbara Hogarth

KINDALLACHAN

23 JUNE 1996

The purpose of this meeting was to square bash the small, under-recorded corner of NN 94 NE that falls into VC 89. The first challenge of this meeting was to get the party of nine safely across the A9, along the road verge, over the railway crossing and down to the River Tay. The first stumbling block was the rather dry and compacted field between railway and banks of the River Tay. Some of us were keen to get to the more semi-natural habitats whilst others were intent on tracking down all the ephemeral 'weed' species they possibly could! The riverbank, shingle and adjacent fields yielded a respectable number of plants including *Anthyllis vulneraria* Kidney Vetch, *Cardamine amara* Large Bittercress, *Erodium cicutarium* Common Storksbill and an introduction *Thalictrum aquilegifolium* French Meadow-rue.

It was a very hot, sunny day and the lunch stop had to provide a combination of shade for those in need of a cool break and sun for those desperate to get a tan. The northernmost point of the square was soon reached once we got going again and here some of the group investigated a silted up ox-bow, which turned out to hold a very uniform swamp of *Equisetum fluviatile* Water Horsetail and *Carex vesicaria* Bladder Sedge surrounded by *Alnus glutinosa* Alder whilst the attention of the others turned to a small pond nearby. Although the area covered that day was relatively small it contained a variety of habitats and yielded a list of over 190 species.

Due to unforeseen circumstances Ros Smith was unable to lead this meeting and I would like to thank Richard Thomas for helping me to 'stand in' at short notice. The Section thanks Kinnaird Estates for permission to visit the riverbank.

Barbara Hogarth

GRANDTULLY MEADOW & BALLECHIN BOG

30 JUNE 1996

Eight members gathered in the car park of St Mary's Church, Grandtully, where we were met by Christine Thomson, the owner of Grandtully Meadow. Some then travelled by Land Rover and some on foot the half mile to the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) Wildlife Site. We were told by Mrs Thomson that, apart from grazing, the meadow had been virtually untouched for at least 100 years. The meadow contains a mix of unimproved, calcareous grassland and marshy grassland and, reflecting the

good grazing regime, is in excellent condition and species-rich. A notable find, not previously recorded on the site, was a colony of the nationally scarce *Corallorhiza trifida* Coralroot Orchid. There were also attractive colonies of *Platanthera* sp. Butterfly Orchid. Following our visit to the meadow we had lunch in the car park and took the opportunity to view the beautiful painted ceiling of St Mary's Church.

In the afternoon we proceeded 3 miles eastwards to another SWT Wildlife Site, Ballechin Bog. By the time we arrived there the morning's showers had given way to heavy rain but we stoically made our way through waist high, very wet, vegetation. This site contains areas of marshy grassland, scrub, conifer plantation and, of most interest botanically, a mosaic of open water/swamp/basin mire/scrub. Around the open water a floating raft of *Sphagnum* mosses supported a good range of species including *Potentilla palustris* Marsh Cinquefoil, *Scutellaria galericulata* Common Skullcap, *Carex aquatilis* Water Sedge and *Rhinanthus minor* Yellow Rattle. Later, in an area of marshy grassland, we found a colony of *Dactylorhiza purpurella* Northern Marsh Orchid apparently flourishing in quite tall grass. In general the vegetation was rather rank - possibly due to a lack of recent grazing.

By the time we had completed our tour of the site the rain had stopped and we returned to our cars still rather wet but happy in the knowledge that both sites are well worth retaining on the Wildlife Sites list.

The Botanical Section and SWT are grateful to D & J Thomson for allowing access to Grandtully Meadow and to Miss E Honeyman for allowing access to Ballechin Bog.

Peter Cramb

DRIMMIE MIRE & STRONAMUCK

14 JULY 1996

Five members and one visitor arrived at the Kirkmichael meeting point before proceeding to Pitcarmick House. Here we were joined by Lady Nairn who escorted us to the site and then came round with us as we carried out the survey.

The site, part of a larger area of enclosed but relatively unimproved grazing land, contains a mosaic of hummocks and hollows with flushes and a marshy depression. Outcropping slopes in the northern part of the site have a well-grazed turf with *Helianthemum nummularium* Common Rock-rose, *Thymus polytrichus* Wild Thyme, *Linum catharticum* Fairy Flax and *Viola lutea* Mountain Pansy. At the base of these steep slopes lies a marshy depression which supports an intriguing mix of wetland grass, sedge and rush species. Elsewhere hummocky ground is crossed by numerous flushes creating a very diverse sward. Orchids, mostly *Dactylorhiza maculata* Heath-spotted Orchid with occasional *Gymnadenia conopsea* Fragrant Orchid, were particularly showy. Noteworthy species present include *Triglochin palustris* Marsh Arrowgrass, *Eleocharis quinqueflora* Few-flowered Spike-rush, *Pedicularis palustris* Marsh Lousewort and *Briza media* Quaking Grass.

As the weather was lovely and sunny we had a relaxing lunch break at Stronamuck before heading off towards Bridge of Cally and thence to Drimmie Mire. Surrounded on two sides by conifer plantation the mire was approached via a wide heathery ride.

With extreme caution we left *terra firma* to cross a spongy and at times bouncy carpet of *Sphagnum* mosses. Around the margins *Juncus effusus* Soft Rush was the most abundant of the plants growing through the *Sphagnum* but this soon gave way to *Carex rostrata* Bottle Sedge and *Carex curta* White Sedge. For the most part the mire flora was fairly uniform, relatively species-poor and exhausting to plod through! Perseverance was rewarded as, in adjacent marshy ground, we found a more varied flora which included *Carex disticha* Brown Sedge and *Lychnis flos-cuculi* Ragged Robin

As a point of non-botanical interest we found a moth cocoon with a number of small exit holes in it. These were obviously not made by the emergence of the adult moth Keith Bland identified the cocoon as that made by a Northern Oak Eggar caterpillar which had become prey to a parasitic wasp.

The Botanical Section and SWT thank Sir Michael and Lady Nairn for their help and for granting access to Stronamuck, and Forest Enterprise for allowing access to Drimmie Mire

Anne Mathers & Margaret Cramb

LOGIEALMOND

28 JULY 1996

Nine members of the Botanical Section met on the Inveralmond Lodge drive to record the flora in grid quadrant NN 93 SE, which includes Inveralmond Lodge and the hill ground to its north. We first looked at the Milton Burn and the steep meadows and marshy ground on either side. Despite considerable poaching by cattle they held a good number of plant species of note were *Triglochin palustris* Marsh Arrowgrass and five different Forget-me-nots *Myosotis arvensis*, *discolor*, *laxa*, *scorpioides* and *secunda*. By the stream there was a healthy colony of *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* Common Spotted Orchids

We had lunch near the waterfall and after this we walked alongside the Lodge and on to the hill ground. Here the usual acid upland flora was seen. Noteworthy here was the fine show of *Cryptogramma crispum* Parsley Fern which was growing in clumps all over the spoil heaps of the quarry. In all 192 species were recorded in this quadrant. Two members visited an adjacent quadrant and recorded a few species.

We thank Lord Mansfield and the Estate factor for permission and arrangements to visit

Richard E Thomas

TOMPHUBIL LIMEKILN & LOCH KINNARDOCHY

4 AUGUST 1996

After a brief exercise in tyre changing the group made its way around the species-rich grassland of Tomphubil. A small patch of *Astragalus danicus* Purple Milk Vetch was pointed out close to the car park entrance. Why do areas close to car parks always seem to produce such interesting finds? The species list grew quickly with an interesting mix of calcicoles and upland species to record, including *Trisetum flavescens* Yellow Oat Grass, *Arenaria serpyllifolia* Thyme-leaved Sandwort, *Antennaria dioica* Mountain Everlasting and *Gentianella campestris* Field Gentian

Gentianella amarella Felwort was hunted for but not found on this occasion, however those who knew the site were confident that it was still around and were proved correct when a later visit yielded several hundreds of flowering plants.

The afternoon saw a smaller group head round Loch Kinnardochy. Species of note found along the shore included *Potamogeton alpinus* Red Pondweed and *Subularia aquatica* Awlwort. The day produced an excellent species list for the records of the Scottish Wildlife Trust.

Angus Blair

Members might be interested to know that we do rather better than produce species lists for the sites we survey for SWT. We actually produce a professionally presented report which includes a habitat map to what is known as Phase II standard, a brief description of the site and its component habitats, and a species list with abundance ratings for each vegetation compartment of the site. Editor

TALLA BHEITH

11 AUGUST 1996

A successful visit was made to record the plants of an unexplored part of Talla Bheith Estate several miles to the north of Loch Rannoch. The meeting place was the car park at Killichonan, three cars duly met at its western end while the intended leader parked at its eastern end - and sadly never the twain did meet! So those in the three cars, with the advantage of knowing where to collect the key that unlocked the gate at the entrance of the estate road, drove up into the hills blissfully unaware that they were leaving their leader to record up the track on foot.

The goal was to record the two quadrants NN 56 NW and SW. Taking advantage of the lovely sunny day (there were superb views over the Ben Alder range), the party was divided into three groups. One looked at the high ground above Coire Odhar Beag, another traversed the slopes along the Allt a' Choire Odhair Bhig before heading south to Loch Mheugaidh and returning over Sron Bheag, whilst the third followed the Allt Ghlas down to the Ericht dam.

The two best finds were *Lycopodium annotinum* Interrupted Clubmoss and *Betula nana* Dwarf Birch, both on the higher ground. *Genista anglica* Petty Whin and *Carex pauciflora* Few-flowered Sedge were scattered widely throughout the area surveyed. In total the quadrants NN 56 NW and SW now have 120 and 156 records respectively - very respectable totals for upland squares with no geological variation.

The Section would like to thank Mr R Robertson of Ardlarich Farm for arranging access and the use of the estate road (and fortunately we didn't meet any of the Italian visitors travelling at high speed!)

Richard E Thomas

The Editor is very grateful to Richard for taking on the responsibility of producing the report for this meeting - quite voluntarily - in lieu of the intended leader.

On a fine morning nine of us met at the car park on the A9 by the county boundary signs. From here we were to look at two 5 km squares - NN 57 NE and NN 67 NW, the former completely unrecorded hitherto. We split into two parties, one heading rapidly for the high tops, the other exploring the disturbed habitats near the road, railway, and derelict cottages south of the car park before moving on to the Allt Coire Dhomhain, the lower parts of some gullies to the north, and lastly some deep peat just west of the railway.

The dominant feature of the day was not the plants but the MIDGES. One of the low ground group had a net hood whilst the other three used midge repellent of somewhat doubtful efficacy. However, when we were able to concentrate on botanising, we managed to record a grand total of 174 species. The most notable of these were found in the gorge of the Allt Coire Dhomhain, namely *Angelica sylvestris* Wild Angelica, *Carex pallescens* Pale Sedge, *Oxyria digyna* Mountain Sorrel, *Populus tremula* Aspen and *Vicia sylvatica* Wood Vetch, and on the deep peat where the flora included *Carex pauciflora* Few-flowered Sedge and *Drosera intermedia* Oblong-leaved Sundew.

The high ground group headed on to the southern flanks of the Boar of Badenoch, then along the ridge up to the A'Mharconaich plateau. They discovered that a gain in height did not necessarily mean a decline in midge numbers and had to have lunch at about 900m to avoid them. The party split yet again and returned to Coire Dhomhain along a couple of side burns in NN 57 NE.

The rock type was not particularly lime-rich and botanising was hard work. *Lycopodium annotinum* Interrupted Clubmoss (which is locally frequent in the Drumochter area) was the most interesting species, with others such as *Sibbaldia procumbens* Sibbaldia, *Juncus trifidus* Three-leaved Rush, *Gnaphalium supinum* Dwarf Cudweed and *Loiseleuria procumbens* Trailing Azalea on the plateau or in snow bed vegetation. Bruach nam Iomairean yielded some rich montane heath with a lot of *Vaccinium uliginosum* Bog Blaeberry and *Cornus suecicum* Dwarf Cornel and there seemed to be a tremendous amount of *Diphasiastrum alpinum* Alpine Clubmoss on the slopes leading up to the main ridge.

Neale Taylor and Ros Smith

THE LAST WORD.....

Many thanks go to those who lead the field meetings and who, as a matter of course, contribute items for the Bulletin. What about the rest of you? You must have something to say! You may have missed your opportunity as this may be the last edition for a while - unless of course there is someone out there with word processing facilities and time on their hands. If there is I would like to hear from you as owing to other commitments I am not able to continue as editor this coming year. Barbara Hogarth, Editor