

PERTHSHIRE SOCIETY OF NATURAL SCIENCE

BOTANICAL SECTION

BULLETIN No. 21 - 1997 & 1998

Editorial

It is two years since Bulletin No. 20 appeared, under Barbara Hogarth's editorship. Her last words in that Bulletin were headed just that, 'the last word.....' and she surmised that that 'would be the last edition for a while, unless there was somebody with word processing facilities and time on their hands'. Along with the editorial position there was need for a new Chairman ...and a new Secretary ...and a new Field Meetings Secretary... and Section Members will know that the Section survived and that new faces were found to fill the gaps at 1998's Section AGM. We are very grateful to those leaving office for all the work they did and to those volunteering to take over. And the Editor is keen to point out in self-protection that he does NOT feel he has time on his hands!

The Section has lost three valuable members in the last two years. First, Anne Mathers, its Chairman, died just before the last Bulletin went to print. Since then, John Durran, a former PSNS President, and Gunnar Godwin have died. Three Section members have briefly written about them

The remainder of the Bulletin comprises reports of the Field meetings, those in 1997 first and then 1998.

I should like to express my sincere thanks to all contributors to this Bulletin

Richard Thomas

In memoriam

(Beatrice) Anne Mathers (1928-1997)

It is almost two years now since Anne left us and this is the first opportunity to pay tribute to the great contribution she made to the success of this Section of the PSNS. She was always unstinting in her giving of time and effort, whether it was to botanical surveys, committee meetings, organisation or entertaining of speakers.

On our summer outings she was meticulous in her recording and was willing to help even when she became less fit. On survey days or at meetings she was always patient, helpful and friendly especially to amateurs like myself who wished to learn some of the intricacies of botanical recording. She imparted a great enthusiasm and love, not only of plants but also of the larger conservation issues Anne is being sadly missed.

The committee propose that a plaque bearing her name be affixed to the projector gifted by Anne and her mother. It was further agreed to have a photograph of Anne at her great grandfather's memorial hung in the Museum library.

Irene McKinnie

(Anne's great grandfather was Francis Buchanan W White, founder of the PSNS - Ed)

John Hunter Durran (1929-1998)

Our Botanical Section's winter programme last year was overshadowed by John's illness and death. He had been reluctant to let even close friends know of the gravity of his terminal illness and he withstood much unrevealed pain latterly with considerable courage.

Coming back to Perth in retiral after many devoted years of school-mastering at Winchester College he quickly linked his wide interests in life to well-established local groups, particularly in music, travel and natural sciences.

His presence as a Council member of the PSNS was much valued and he carried the Presidential duties of our society with enthusiasm and humour over his last two years

His interest and knowledge of botany was extensive and to have travelled so recently with other dedicated plant hunters to far-off Tibet was truly remarkable in view of his increasing disabilities. I know he had been looking forward to his talk to our Section to illustrate this journey

We shall miss the presence and friendship of this kind and erudite gentleman who supported our Society so well.

John Kirk

Gunnar Godwin (1915-1998)

Gunnar was born in Grimsby, the son of an Icelandic deep-sea fisherman father and a Danish mother. He went to school there and was influenced to take up forestry by a Danish forester uncle. He graduated from Edinburgh University and as a student worked for Atholl Estates clearing 'weed species' such as juniper! He started his Forestry Commission career in South Wales and ended up in Aberdeen as Conservator East Scotland in 1973. He retired in 1975 to a cottage in Glenalmond with his wife Kath who sadly predeceased him in 1993.

He had a lifelong interest in trees and the plants that surround them. He took an active part in the Scottish Wildlife Trust, particularly as the efficient and hard-working Chairman of its Scientific Subcommittee, and helped in the preparation of farm plans for the local Farming, Forestry and Wildlife Advisory Group. It was largely owing to his commitment and enthusiasm that the Black Wood of Rannoch became a Forest Nature Reserve in 1975 by agreement with the Nature Conservancy Council thus ensuring the future of this precious wood, now a designated European site. We hope something will be dedicated to his memory next year, the 25th anniversary celebration of the Reserve. He contributed significantly on trees to the *Checklist of the Plants of Perthshire* and was one of the referees for this work.

Gunnar was a reserved person but with a charm and humour which warmed those he met and was appreciated by his circle of friends. Certainly I treasure the 20+ years of his friendship that I was privileged to enjoy.

(acknowledgements to Jean Balfour, John Davies & David Patterson)

Ros Smith

Reports from 1997 Field meetings:-

1. Ardtrostan Wood, 25th May 1997

Eleven members gathered at the bottom of the wood on a fine early summer day to survey this SWT Wildlife Site. The going was fairly slow up the steep wooded slope but it was pleasant threading our way through the well-spaced trees.

The wood is mostly *Quercus robur* Pedunculate Oak with *Alnus glutinosa* Alder in the wetter areas. Many of the Alder trees appeared very old and showed signs of coppicing. There were also small areas of *Betula pendula* Silver Birch, *Corylus avellana* Hazel and *Fraxinus excelsior* Ash. The ground flora was undistinguished but provided good identification practice on the first outing of the season!

We reached the top of the wood in time for lunch in the sunshine with beautiful views over Loch Earn and St. Fillans. After lunch we made our way back to the bottom of the wood via the western boundary and then - with the party by that time reduced to eight members - examined the small eastern section of the wood.

The meeting was notable for the good variety of birds recorded, including Great Spotted Woodpecker, Pied Flycatcher, Redstart, Tree Pipit and Willow and Wood Warblers.

We are grateful to Drummond Estates for allowing access for this meeting.

Peter Cramb

2. Methven Woods, 8th June 1997

On 8th June we had an excursion to Methven Woods SSSI. In addition several other members paid a further 4 visits to the wood, all as part of an SNH contract to precisely locate the rarer plants in the wood, and to try and refind some old records, so as to ensure these plants are not unintentionally damaged during woodland management. A total of 10 of the target list of 19 species was relocated, partly on the steep banks by the River Almond, or the flat haughs adjacent, and these plants included *Gagea lutea* Yellow Star of Bethlehem, *Orchis mascula* Early Purple Orchid and *Paris quadrifolia* Herb Paris. Six of the species that we failed to relocate were orchids which may in fact be extinct, or have been overlooked because they are inconspicuous (eg *Corallorhiza trifida* Coralroot Orchid, *Epipactis helleborine* Broad-leaved Helleborine and *Neottia nidus-avis* Bird's Nest Orchid). However it is hoped that at least one person will continue searching this year - would anyone interested please contact Ros Smith. The work of 1987 was submitted as a report to SNH and we received £200 in payment.

Ros Smith

3. Tonguey Faults, 22nd June 1997

Six members assembled in the Forest Enterprise car park on a rather dull, wet day to survey a further SWT Wildlife Site. We were met there by the owner of part of the Site, Dr Jim Macdonald, who explained to us the measures he had taken to improve access for walkers.

We first examined an area of marshy grassland at the western boundary of the Site supporting a good diversity of species, with *Carex rostrata* Bottle Sedge and *Potentilla palustris* Marsh Cinquefoil both frequent. We then set off eastwards along the steep-sided valley of the Water of May. An area of grassland along the valley floor contained some attractive clumps of *Dactylorhiza purpurella* Northern Marsh Orchid. Of greater interest, however, were areas of basic rock exposure along both the north and south sides of the valley. The north-facing rocks had a luxuriant tall herb flora including *Geranium sylvaticum* Wood Cranesbill and *Saxifraga hypnoides* Mossy Saxifrage; *Asplenium adiantum-nigrum* Black Spleenwort was also recorded. The south-facing rocks were drier supporting species such as *Galium verum* Lady's Bedstraw, *Pilosella officinarum* Mouse Ear Hawkweed and *Thymus polytrichus* Wild Thyme.

Under a brighter sky we then proceeded to the eastern part of the Site - an area of broad-leaved semi-natural gorge woodland supporting a good diversity of tree species and a fairly rich ground flora. We returned late but contented to our cars after an interesting day's botanising.

We are grateful to Dr. Macdonald, Forest Enterprise and Fountain Forestry Ltd. for allowing access for this meeting.

Peter Cramb

4. Balquidder, 6th July 1997

Six of us set out from Rob Roy's grave to look at the limestone on the crags above the glen. The Forestry Commission have clear felled almost all the glen to conduct an experiment on water retention. We started in old woodland by the burn and continued up the sparsely clad forestry track to the edge of the former wood where felling was continuing in the small remaining stand of spruce. This made a comfortable lunch stop on logs until Margaret and Bill discovered they were either end of a huge seesaw.

Above the fence we followed increasingly interesting flushes to the giant boulders to the left of the cliff where many ferns including *Polystichum lonchitis* Holly Fern grew on the rock. Immediately before the lochan we enjoyed scrambling on a calcareous crag with *Veronica fruticans* Rock Speedwell just over and *Gentianella campestris* Field Gentian about to flower. Amongst other plants were *Potentilla crantzii* Alpine Cinquefoil, *Antennaria dioica* Mountain Everlasting, *Botrychium lunaria* Moonwort and *Thymus polytrichus* Wild Thyme.

Beyond the loch and the watershed fence (and also the VC87/88 boundary) we were surprised to find a delightful crag with pavement on top which has a good mixture of *Salix spp* willow, *Orchis mascula* Early Purple Orchid and *Saxifraga oppositifolia* Purple Saxifrage together with *Veronica fruticans* Rock Speedwell, *Potentilla crantzii* Alpine Cinquefoil and striking blue *Polygala serpyllifolia* Heath Milkwort. The mild day turned wet as we started back via the cliff foot where *Sedum rosea* Roseroot and *Solidago virgaurea* Golden Rod had a few footholds with ravens above.

It was late and wet so we were not encouraged to explore the lochans and more acid-looking crags, but we were hopeful we might have found more good crags or more surprises in the boulder field. *Bartsia alpina* Alpine Bartsia and wild cat were mentioned as possible.

Joanna Thomas

5. Little Ballo, 20th July 1997

A small party visited a small area of grassland, marsh and conifer woodland near Little Ballo to brush up on grass identification. As usual it did not always seem as clear as the leader might have wished. *Poas* in particular proved to be trying. No unusual species were found, but it is worth persevering with this difficult group from time to time, at least to get the easier species well known.

Neale Taylor

6. Glen Fincastle, 27th July 1997

Six members met to record this attractive glen. Our route started at the road junction at Chapelton, took us via Edintian to the watershed with Tulach Hill and returned just west of Fincastle House. The weather was ominous but except for one heavy downpour when we conveniently sheltered under a small plantation the strong breeze kept the rain at bay and later on the clouds dispersed.

The ground varied from dry grassland, with nice blue butterflies, through flushes and bogs up to rough grass with occasional evidence of the influence of limestone. The most interesting plants were *Eriophorum latifolium* Broad-leaved Cottongrass, *Koeleria macrantha* Crested Hair Grass and *Festuca arundinacea* Tall Fescue. On the return fine specimens of *Pimpinella saxifraga* Burnet Saxifrage and *Trifolium medium* Zigzag Clover were seen, together with a number of difficult rose hybrids in the hedgerows. In all 208 species were recorded for the quadrant 86SE - and a common lizard.

Richard Thomas

7. Glen Tye, 10th August 1997

The party enjoyed a warm summer's day not going very far! Glen Tye lies on the edge of Sheriffmuir at the west end of the Ochils. Heather moorland and grassland with small areas of flushes adjoin the burns which cross the area. An unusual feature are the disused 'limestone' workings which have been described by John Mitchell in a recent edition of the *Forth Naturalist and Historian*. These seemed to be the richest areas, with a rich flora developing on what are probably calcareous volcanic rocks rather than limestone

Amongst the more interesting species were *Carex paniculata* Greater Tussock Sedge (apparently in one of the limestone excavations), *Sedum villosum* Hairy Stonecrop, *Sagina nodosa* Knotted Pearlwort and *Epilobium alsinifolium* Chickweed Willowherb. John Mitchell is of the opinion that the mossy springs and flushes could yet yield *Saxifraga hirculus* Marsh Saxifrage, a species recorded in the Ochils in the last century.

Neale Taylor

8. Montrose Basin, 24th August 1997

No report.

Reports from 1998 Field meetings:-

1. Bridge of Cally, 31st May 1998. The garden of Professor and Mrs Geoffrey Dutton at Druimchardain

The first outing of the season proved to be a sign of things to come - it absolutely poured for the whole visit. Despite the weather forecast being unusually accurate 8 turned out, including a two year old. Geoffrey Dutton has been creating this 'garden' in Glenshee for 40 years or so. Starting from a hill side sparsely covered in birch and juniper with some heathland on either side of a rocky gorge, he has developed a seemingly mature, almost Himalayan, wooded retreat - the wooden house itself is deeply embedded within the trees. The winding climbing paths and constantly changing character of the area have produced a feeling of much greater size than the few hectares it is. Unfortunately the atrocious weather (umbrellas proved to be good protection against the drips) meant that it was difficult to hear what was being described as we were led round, but even if we had heard every word it would have been hard to absorb it all - there was lots to see.

It is difficult to describe the garden in a few words. It is densely wooded and 'shrubbed', with a framework of hardy trees to provide shelter, amongst which are more exotic and sensitive species each suited to the characteristics of glades and soils. In places the exotic merge with the native, particularly around the gorge. It is not really a 'garden' in the true sense - more a testimony to the perseverance of Professor Dutton in his attempt to show that it is possible to create an individual sanctuary even in the harshest climate through constant experimentation. The theme of the garden is 'the survival of the fittest' - the species which survive best have flourished and those which have not have been abandoned.

Professor Dutton has described his approach and the garden in his absorbing book *Some branch against the sky - the practice and principles of marginal gardening*. And if you are looking for examples of very hardy plants - ones capable of withstanding the cold and snowy continental climate of Glenshee - it is worth looking at.

Our thanks to Geoff Dutton and his wife for showing us round and treating some very soggy botanists to afternoon tea.

Neale Taylor

2. Ben Vorlich, 20th June 1998

A party of six had one of the few pleasant days of the summer to visit this hill. The objective was to visit a rarely botanised mountain and record for the Atlas 2000. A brisk walk up Glen Vorlich preceded lunch in upper Coire Buidhe where the recording began in earnest. Some moderately rich flushes yielded *Sagina x normaniana* Scottish Pearlwort and masses of prostrate *Saxifraga hypnoides* Mossy Saxifrage, *Saxifraga stellaris* Starry Saxifrage and *Epilobium anagallidifolium* Alpine Willowherb; *Phleum alpinum* Alpine Catstail and *Alopecurus borealis* Alpine Foxtail were searched for in vain.

The group then contoured to the west of the summit into Upper Coire Fhuadaraich where more calcareous areas yielded *Adoxa moschatellina* Moschatel, *Botrychium lunaria* Moonwort, *Chrysosplenium alternifolium* Alternate-leaved Golden Saxifrage, *Juncus triglumis* Three-flowered Rush, *Sibbaldia procumbens* and *Viola lutea* Mountain Pansy. The south side of Ben Vorlich looked dry and acid, but binoculars revealed *Trollius europaeus* Globe Flower on some of the crags on Creag Chasain north east of Stuc a' Chroin. These proved to be quite rich with *Potentilla crantzii* Alpine Cinquefoil, *Cerastium alpinum* Alpine Mouse Ear, *Polystichum lonchitis* Holly Fern, *Saussurea* Alpine Sawwort, *Sedum rosea* Roseroot and *Silene acaulis* Moss Champion. A look further east of Stuc a' Chroin might be worthwhile, perhaps the old Hutton Balfour record of *Dryas octopetala* Mountain Avens might be here.

By this time the ambitious plans of returning via Glen Ample were abandoned, and the group returned by the hill walkers' route in Coire Fhuadaraich (where there was *Tofieldia pusilla* Scottish Asphodel and *Saussurea* in flushes), and into west Coire Buidhe where *Equisetum pratense* Shady Horsetail and *Listera cordata* Lesser Twayblade were found.

Thanks are due to Ardvorlich and Glen Ample estates for permission to visit these areas.

Neale Taylor

3. Lurgan Wood, 28th June 1998

Six members met at Craggan Camp for a half-day meeting to survey this SWT Wildlife Site. We walked along the road and then up Lurgan Hill to the edge of the Site. We made our way through deep bracken and over some small crags which supported *Sedum anglicum* English Stonecrop - this was also present on the numerous rocky exposures.

We then reached a sizeable area of *Juniperus communis* Juniper which appeared quite healthy with a good number of young bushes. On our way down the hill we found an interesting area of marshy grassland with a large stand of *Carex disticha* Brown Sedge. We also came across a small wet pocket with *Brya media* Quaking Grass and *Platanthera sp.*, a Butterfly Orchid.

We returned to our cars satisfied that the wood remains of Wildlife Site standard.

We are grateful to Drummond Estates for allowing access for this meeting.

Peter Cramb

4. Ben More, 12th July 1998

This must rate as the wettest and briefest meet the Section has ever held! Hillwalkers in general are obviously wiser than botanists as we experienced no competition for the normally busy roadside parking. We did, however, see a lone individual heading purposefully up into the clouds at one point when we lifted our eyes from the ground.

Full waterproofs and waterproof notebooks were essential, and Richard cut a dash with his black umbrella as surprisingly wind wasn't a problem. We followed a line of moderately calcareous vegetation and in the two hours it took to get saturated the party of four recorded 106 species on the mountain's lower slopes. The list included *Gymnadenia conopsea* Fragrant Orchid, *Botrychium lunaria* Moonwort, *Plantago maritima* Sea Plantain, *Thalictrum alpinum* Alpine Meadow Rue, *Triglochin palustris* Marsh Arrow Grass and *Pedicularis palustris* Marsh Lousewort.

It was agreed that there should be another meet to this venue - but only on a fine clear day.

Barbara Hogarth

5. Glen Fernate, 26th July 1998

We had an excursion to this glen to add records for two under-recorded 5 km squares for the future Flora that we intend to write in due course and for the corresponding 10 km squares for Atlas 2000. Six members attended and we split into two groups to cover the ground. The weather was inclement, as has been the norm this summer, but we did see the odd speck of sunshine.

The day botanically was most rewarding, especially in the NE square where new or confirmed post-'86 records were obtained for a total of 57 species. The corresponding figure for the NW square was 24. New records for the 10 km square for Atlas 2000 included a pondweed from Loch Crannoch and *Vicia sylvatica* Wood Vetch which is only occasional in Perthshire. Despite the weather all six participants enjoyed the day. We are very grateful to Glen Fernate Estate for granting permission for access, use of their private road and their interest when we kept meeting them during the day.

Ros Smith

6. Dollar Glen, 30th August 1998

Thirteen of us met at the lower NTS car park from where we took a slow meander up the gorge towards Castle Campbell. Luck was with us - the weather was sunny and warm for once!

Armed with innumerable fern identification books and with Ros and Richard to assist us in looking at the more problematic species, we were able to identify a reasonable variety, including most locally-common large ferns and also several small ones, although typically there were the inevitable quandaries over *Dryopteris* species. Many of the ferns were easily accessible en route, although others cascaded down sheer-sided wet cliffs and could only be examined at a distance across the gorge with the use of binoculars. In consequence one particular fern proved too difficult to identify - *Polystichum setiferum* Soft Shield Fern - which if confirmed could be the first or second for Perthshire (the three vice-counties). At the top there were good sizeable examples of some of the smaller ferns such as *Cystopteris fragilis* Brittle Bladder Fern and *Asplenium adiantum-nigrum* Black Spleenwort on the lime-mortared castle walls and also within the garden there was a small grotto with some unusual introduced ferns and other species.

In addition, the uncommon *Festuca altissima* Wood Fescue was found approximately half way up on rocks on the western side of the path and also on the castle wall facing south there was plenty of *Parietaria judaica* Pellitory of the Wall - one of the only two sites in Perthshire.

It was an enjoyable day. The variety and accessibility of many of the ferns provided good scope for identification purposes; the views from Castle Campbell and the surroundings throughout added to the pleasures of the walk, as did the company; and finally the lack of rain was a most welcome bonus!

Harriet Lindsay

7. Torlum Wood, 19th September 1998

A small but select group of four members and one guest met at Craggan Farm for a half-day meeting to survey this SWT Wildlife Site. Barbara Hogarth had kindly visited the Site with two of us a few days beforehand to map the habitats and so we were able to concentrate on species listing.

We walked up from the road to the edge of the Site and started by examining the forest track, recording a good diversity of species including *Aira praecox* Early Hair Grass and *Aira caryophyllea* Silver Hair Grass. We then went into the wood itself which has a good age range of *Pinus sylvestris* Scots Pine with an excellent amount of regeneration. On a line of low crags we recorded *Asplenium adiantum-nigrum* Black Spleenwort and nearby were wet hollows with frequent *Carex vesicaria* Bladder Sedge. We finished our tour of the Site on some rocky slabs which had *Sedum anglicum* English Stonecrop and *Briza media* Quaking Grass, and returned to the road happy that the Site has retained its conservation interest.

We are grateful to Drummond Estates for allowing access for this meeting.

Peter Cramb

8. Kindrogan, 4th October 1998

Ten or so members met at Kindrogan on a damp cold autumn day to be shown something of the rich moss flora around the Field Centre by Martin Robinson. We hardly walked more than a quarter of a mile from the Centre but in that short distance covered a range of microhabitats with a large number of moss species painstakingly described and patiently named for us by Martin. After lunch we were shown the use of binocular microscopes to separate out difficult moss species. And a final saunter down to the river's edge added still more mosses. We were all grateful to Martin for a very interesting day.

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