

PERTSHIRE SOCIETY OF NATURAL SCIENCE

BOTANICAL SECTION

BULLETIN No 24 - 2001

Editorial

The year 2001 will be chiefly remembered by the rural community as the year of the devastating outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease. The disease itself attacked farm animals mainly in SW and N England and in S Scotland, leaving north of the Clyde-Forth line free of the disease itself - but not free of its effects. Of most significance to ourselves as a Botanical Society was the closure of most hill and agricultural land to public access in order to minimise the risk of spreading the virus. As a society and as individuals we accepted restrictions as a gesture of solidarity with the farming community, which was suffering huge financial losses. One day perhaps this epidemic will be researched including the full costs of the outbreak to all relevant parties and the risks of maintaining public access in areas well away from the infection sites. I would guess these risks would be very small, but then I suspect that even the smallest reduction in the probability of spreading the virus would be seen as justifying banning access. Anyway a special word of thanks must go to all those landowners who did give us permission to visit in the very difficult circumstances of 2001. *[The views here are the editor's and are not necessarily held by PSNS or its Botanical Section]*

The other matter to comment on more properly belongs to 2002. As most will already know, Jan 1st was the day Dr Ros Smith was awarded the MBE in the New Year's Honours list for services to nature conservation. Besides her professional career in the old Nature Conservancy and the current Scottish Natural Heritage Ros has always actively sought to assist the voluntary movement, notably the BSBI, SWT and PSNS. With her immense knowledge of Perthshire botany she has helped guide this Section - botanical recording and our summer Field Meetings programmes owe her a great debt. And if she wishes a testimonial to start now on a new career as a (well-paid!) sales-person (sorry, Marketing Executive), there is ample evidence from her very successful selling of the Perthshire Checklist. We congratulate her warmly on the well-deserved MBE and hope she will continue her services to nature conservation and this Section for a long while to come.

Thanks to all those who provided Field Meeting reports

Richard Thomas (Editor)

Reports from 2001 Field Meetings:-

1. Millhaugh Bridge, River Almond Saturday 9th June 2001

This should have been a pioneering and pleasant, if perhaps steep, walk along the River Almond but between the terrain and weather it became quite an endurance test.

On a dull and quite cold day for June seven of us (how nice to be joined by a charming new Junior member - the first I can remember for a long time) met near Millhaugh Farm. Setting off from the sheep farm, we chose to go up along the road to the N to avoid the fields with sheep, and then had to descend steeply down to the river level. The route was extremely muddy and slippery owing to recent rain, and in places covered with well-grown nettles. We eventually attained the river bank. This unfortunately had no path but was very rocky and heavily vegetated with all manner of prickly and obstructive vegetation of *Prunus spinosa* (Blackthorn) and indeterminate *Rosa* and *Rubus* species. Soon we had decided the route would not go and nor would we. Then the rain came on in increasingly heavy showers from which there was little natural protection for our lunch break. Of the final ascent back up to the road the less said the better - it was a fight through denser *Prunus spinosa* thicket and even steeper and muddier than on our descent.

Although the walk was curtailed, a handful of interesting plants were seen. Ferns were well evident, including *Cystopteris fragilis* (Brittle Bladder Fern) and *Polystichum aculeatum* (Hard Shield Fern). *Veronica montana* (Wood Speedwell) was frequent and contrasted well with the very similar and familiar *Veronica chamaedrys* (Germander Speedwell). *Meconopsis cambrica* (Welsh Poppy) might have been native but *Doronicum pardalianches* (Leopardsbane) and *Epilobium ciliatum* (American Willowherb) were not, though the latter is increasing fast and appears natural. And there was a *Nepeta* species.

[PS Joanna and I returned about ten days later to try and retrieve a white woolly hat which had got snaffled by *Prunus spinosa* somewhere. If the going had been difficult enough originally, it was now an almost impassable nettle jungle. And a waste of time!]

[PPS I see 2002's Excursion programme refers to 'gentle riverbank strolls'. I hope they live up to that description more than this outing would have!]

Richard Thomas

2. **Pole Hill, Sidlaws meeting of 24th June 2001**, to have been led by David Merrie, sadly did not take place owing to foot-and-mouth restrictions.

[the second year in succession our second meeting has had to be cancelled - third time lucky in 2002? Ed]

3. **Tummel Shingle Islands, Ballinluig Sunday 1st July 2001**

A lovely summer's day welcomed the party of 10 for this visit. Soon after we crossed into the reserve there was an inconclusive discussion on the identity of a plant which may have been the hybrid between *Potentilla erecta* (Tormentil) and *Potentilla reptans* (Creeping Cinquefoil). Going upstream we admired a large patch of *Cirsium heterophyllum* (Melancholy Thistle) just coming into flower and also the Chimney-sweeper moths with their white-edged wings close to their host plant of *Conopodium majus* (Pignut). In a side stream both *Carex rostrata* (Bottle Sedge) and *Carex vesicaria* (Bladder Sedge) were found and the differences between these often-confused species demonstrated, their hybrid was not however found. Lunch was taken on the shingle at the N end of the reserve where a Garden Warbler sang and a Goosander with her brood fished the Tummel. The shingle was bright with *Potentilla reptans* (Creeping Cinquefoil), *Armeria maritima* (Thrift), *Silene uniflora* (Sea Champion), a few late plants of *Teesdalia nudicaulis* (Shepherd's Cress) and a lovely large patch of *Linaria repens* (Pale Toadflax). The dominant species in the riverside scrub was *Salix myrsinifolia* (Dark-leaved Willow) but no decisions were reached on the identity of possible hybrid willows.

This 5km square is very rich and has 484 recorded species. So it was gratifying to add 3 new ones.

Bill Hay

4. **Perth Harbour Wednesday 11th July 2001**

A group of six plus canine assistant met at the South Inch and spent a pleasant evening moving from one waste area to the next, and poking round the edges of pavements and buildings, on roofs and in car parks. Most of the unusual species consisted of only one or two plants. More interesting species included *Lamium amplexicaule* (Henbit), *Fallopia convolvulus* (Black Bindweed), *Sagina apetala* (Annual Pearlwort), *Arabis hirsuta* (Hairy Rockcress), *Hypericum maculatum* subsp. *obtusiusculum* (Imperforate St John's Wort), *Scleranthus annuus* (Annual Knawel), *Mycelis muralis* (Wall Lettuce), and *Thlaspi arvense* (Field Pennycress). Many of these species are probably underrecorded. Top of the interest list was *Aethusa cynapium* (Fool's Parsley), which has not been recorded in VC 88 for quite some time. Cut stems of what appeared to be *Onopordum acanthium* (Cotton Thistle) were found, but not the actual plants.

Neale Taylor

5. Loch Freuchie to Amulree Saturday 14th July 2001

I place a great deal of faith in my notebooks, otherwise I would forget a lot of what I see. My notebooks also include an entry for the weather of the day, and for the 14th my notebook reads "rain most of the day from morning through night, often persistent". But that is not how I remember that day, a little damp, yes, but very rewarding botanically

Richard Thomas kindly provided us all with a checklist for tetrad NN83NE, and as we had geared down from *Atlas 2000* mode, all we had to do in the way of recording was to note down what was new. This meant that our excursion was quite relaxed, although we added just over 40 new records to the tetrad.

We started along the roadside on the south side of the loch. The vegetation was much richer than the fields just beyond the verges. We discovered that outlier of the fern world, *Botrychium lunaria* (Moonwort), and the heavenly scented *Meum athamanticum* (Spignel). Ferns and fern allies had been under-recorded, and we added seven more, including *Dryopteris carthusiana* (Narrow Buckler Fern) and *Oreopteris limbosperma* (Lemon-scented Fern). *Oreopteris* has no need to attract insects, so why does it have a scent? To ward off the midges?

This brings me to a type of gall we encountered three times on *Achillea ptarmica* – Bless You! – sneezewort. I haven't been able to find any reference to it in my book of plant galls, but it does say that a species of eelworm colonises the leaves of the close relative *A. millefolium* (yarrow).

Our bird watching was rewarding too and included a short-eared owl and a whopper swan [sic! - Ed] on Loch Freuchie.

As we proceeded along the banks of the River Braan we traversed an area of reed-swamp that graded into an area of bog. Now, I have had visions of Africa in such places before, and I am sure that I saw the back of a pith-helmet disappear as Bill Hay dipped out of sight and then re-emerged clutching some of the reed shouting "*Calamagrostis stricta*!" This plant was called *Deyeuxia neglecta* var *borealis* (Narrow Small Reed) in the 1898 *Flora of Perthshire*, which records "Discovered near Loch Tay in 1888; new to the Flora of Scotland". Annotations in my copy of the *Flora* say that the plants from this site were destroyed by a "sawmill operation", around the time of WW1 I think, but the species was discovered again within a mile of the original site.

A little weary, we returned to Amulree. Before leaving the river Richard pointed out some common club-rush, *Schoenoplectus lacustris*, (it was easier to spell when it was just plain *Scirpus*). It was so tall, and yet we stared right at it without seeing it. And there I saw a baby floating in a basket. Well, I did say we were a little weary!

Alistair Godfrey (led by Neale Taylor)

6. Meall na Dige, West & Mid-Perthshire (v.c. 87 & 88)

Sunday 29th July 2001

On the Sunday, we joined members of the Botanical Society of the British Isles to explore the calcareous schist flora of Meall na Dige, 966 metres, 3 km to the east of Stob Binnein. Shortly after leaving the afforested lower slopes we split up into smaller groups. Richard Thomas led a group over Stob Creagach, Clive Dixon led another group directly to the summit, whilst Lynne Farrell led a third group to the south-west slopes of Ben More, on the west side of the glen. As the day progressed, the driving rain gradually abated and the sun broke out but the continuing gale-force wind made hill-walking (never mind recording!) difficult. Despite this highlights included records of *Botrychium lunaria* (Moonwort), *Cerastium alpinum* (Alpine Mouse-ear), *Draba norvegica* (Rock Whitlowgrass), *Juncus biglumis* (Two-flowered Rush), *J. triglumis* (Three-flowered rush), *J. castaneus* (Chestnut rush), *Sagina x normanniana* (Scottish Pearlwort) - subsequently confirmed by Douglas McKean from the RBGE, *Salix lapponum* (Downy Willow), *Saussurea alpina* (Alpine Saw-wort), and *Sibbaldia procumbens* (Sibbaldia) in the vicinity of the summit.

I would like to thank the landowners for granting access permission and all those who attended this field trip, especially the group leaders.

Jim McIntosh

7. **Fingask Castle, Rait** **Saturday 11th August 2001**

Fingask Castle dates from 1674 and has been fully restored. In the grounds there is some spectacular topiary. The purpose of the visit was to survey an area earmarked for afforestation. The field in question had not been grazed for some time and was overrun with coarse grasses and *Cirsium arvense* (Creeping Thistle). There were however a few small areas where the bedrock broke the surface and there we recorded *Carex muricata* (Prickly Sedge), *Aphanes inexpectata* (Slender Parsley Piert) and the leaves of a violet which turned out to be *Viola odorata* (Sweet Violet)

Bill Hay

8. **Gannochy Farm & No. 3 Holding, Walnut Grove, Perth** **Saturday 18th August 2001**

These two nearby visits were repeats of surveys carried out on 15th Aug 1987 at the request of BSBI as part of its Arable Weeds survey (see BSBI News 87 (2001) p7).

At the time of the earlier survey the field at Gannochy Farm was organic, partly potatoes and the rest cattle-grazed ley pasture. There were a good variety of common annual weeds and also some *Fumaria densiflora* (Dense-flowered fumitory). The farmer has now ceased organic cultivation and it is now part of a much larger field of barley. However, on the field edge we found quite a lot of similar records to the earlier ones plus *Agrostis gigantea* (Black Bent). Missing were some of the annual ruderals including *Fumaria densiflora* and twelve other common weeds seen previously.

In 1987 Walnut Grove was cultivated as an organic smallholding. This ceased some years ago and the field has just been sold for housing. One part was now ungrazed and the other grazed by three ponies. The earlier survey found *Thlaspi arvense* (Field Pennycress) well spread; this year the *Thlaspi* was surprisingly restricted to the ungrazed area. The other general observation was that 21 annual weeds had gone and 16 perennial ones appeared.

Both these results reflect cessation of cultivation with a concomitant decline of annuals and increase of perennials.

Ros Smith