



PERTHSHIRE SOCIETY OF NATURAL SCIENCE  
BOTANICAL SECTION  
BULLETIN No. 35 – 2012

## Reports from 2012 Field Meetings

### 1. Shell Bay, Elie, Fife

Sunday, 1<sup>st</sup> April

This coastal area in Fife is particularly interesting as Kincaig Point is volcanic basalt and tuff, not the usual sandstone, and the area we explored was at the junction between the two. This of course gives rise to an interesting mixture of plants and a very different flora from the rest of the Fife coast. There was also some typical woodland and coastal habitats as well as a burn flowing into the sea. A fine and sunny day was an added bonus. Being in early spring, not many plants were flowering so this was an opportunity to hone our skills at vegetative identification!

Starting at the car park at the entrance to Shell Bay Caravan Park we went north-east through the woods to the coastal path which runs alongside the Cocklemill Burn. Although early in the year, there was plenty of interest. The woodland path had the usual variety of grasses and small plants, and not so usual *Helictotrichon pratense* (= *Avenula pratensis*) (Meadow Oat-grass), *Cerastium diffusum* (Sea Mouse-ear), and *Pimpinella saxifraga* (Burnet-saxifrage). The *Taraxacum* spotters were kept busy!

On the coastal path we found amongst others *Echium vulgare* (Viper's Bugloss), *Hippophae rhamnoides* (Sea-buckthorn), *Tragopogon pratensis* (Goat's-beard), *Thalictrum minus* (Lesser Meadow-rue), *Centaurea scabiosa* (Greater Knapweed), *Lupinus arboreus* (Tree Lupin) on the edges and plenty of *Primula veris* (Cowslip) in the shorter grass plus *Geranium sanguineum* (Bloody Crane's-bill). In the rabbit-grazed areas, *Valerianella locusta* (Common Cornsalad), *Astragalus danicus* (Purple Milk-vetch), *Agrimonia eupatoria* (Agrimony), *Gentianella campestris* (Field Gentian), *Helianthemum nummularium* (Common Rock-rose). We also found a plant of *Anthriscus caucalis* (Bur Chervil) and an *Ornithogalum nutans* (Drooping Star-of-Bethlehem) near the caravan site.

The coastal edge, Ruddons Point, was another tetrad, mostly grass and *Primula veris* (Cowslip). It is the many hundreds of Cowslips in this area which are such a grand sight later in the spring. Plenty of *Dactylorhiza purpurella* (Northern Marsh-orchid), some *Aster tripolium* (Sea Aster) and *Armeria maritima* (Thrift). More *Astragalus danicus* (Purple Milk-vetch) and a patch of *Scilla siberica* (Siberian Squill), presumably an escape. On the sea edge, *Honckenya peploides* (Sea Sandwort), *Triglochin maritima* (Sea Arrowgrass), *Suaeda maritima* (Annual Sea-blite), *Cochlearia officinalis* (Common Scurvygrass) and *Atriplex littoralis* (Grass-leaved Orache).

This whole area, especially the steep cliffs, is well worth a visit in the spring and summer as the mass of Rock-rose, Crane's-bills, Thyme, Scabious etc. is a fine sight.

The total count was 166 species.

Sandy Edwards

### 2. Romadie Wood, Bridge of Cally

Wednesday, 2<sup>nd</sup> May

The main purpose of this evening spring visit was to search for *Lathraea squamaria* (Toothwort) in this steep, deciduous woodland on the west bank of the Blackwater River. We confined ourselves to the main block of woodland, which actually lies outside the Romadie Wood SSSI, which occupies a narrower strip of woodland continuing to the north. The six of us present had a very enjoyable evening exploring this very mixed wood, the upper slopes of which were dominated by hazel and the lower by ash and alder. We recorded all the species present but never managed to find any *Lathraea*, despite the apparently suitable habitat. More surprising was the complete absence of *Allium ursinum* (Wild Garlic) and *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* (Bluebell).

*Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* (Opposite-leaved Golden-saxifrage) billowed magnificently down the many burns that descended steeply towards the river, flattening out into marshy bands of *Cardamine amara* (Large Bitter-cress) that cut through the *Mercurialis perennis* (Dog's-mercury) forming the main ground cover in the lower part of the wood. *Tolmiea menziesii* (Pick-a-back Plant) was also here, not yet in flower and so necessitating a pause for deliberation. Frequent tufts of *Carex sylvatica* (Wood Sedge) and *Carex remota* (Remote Sedge) added interest to the fairly uniform ground cover, but none of the more interesting woodland grasses were present, or at least identifiable at this stage. A small rocky outcrop jutting out into the river added some welcome variety, with *Melica uniflora* (Wood Melick), *Trollius europaeus* (Globeflower), *Galium boreale* (Northern Bedstraw), *Campanula rotundifolia* (Harebell) and *Solidago virgaurea* (Golden-rod) being recorded here and nowhere else.

Martin Robinson

### 3. Thistle Brig, Stanley

Wednesday, 9<sup>th</sup> May

Five of us set out on a rather fine evening to explore the banks of the River Tay at Thistle Brig. The area between the final set of steps to the riverbank at Thistle Brig down to the sands below the fishing bothy is a Site of Special Scientific Interest, and has rich calcareous grassland.

Highlights of this flora were *Astragalus glycyphyllos* (Wild Liquorice), *Geranium sanguineum* (Bloody Crane's-bill), *Hypericum hirsutum* (Hairy St. John's-wort), *Knautia arvensis* (Field Scabious), *Ononis repens* (Common Restharrow), *Origanum vulgare* (Wild Marjoram), *Pimpinella saxifraga* (Burnet-saxifrage), *Saxifraga granulata* (Meadow saxifrage) and *Thymus polytrichus* (Wild Thyme).

Wild Liquorice does taste like liquorice if you care to nibble a little of the leaf, although it is also bitter. The source of our edible liquorice is *Glycyrrhiza glabra*, which, if you come from Pontefract, you might have seen growing there in market gardens to provide the important ingredient for Pontefract cakes, as I have read. Our plants were not in flower, but I caught some in late flower and fruit in August (see [Photos](#)). This species was formerly recorded along the banks of the River Almond from Almondbank, and from there along the banks of the River Tay to Thistle Brig, but the site we visited is the only one that remains, and the species is quite rare now in Mid-Perthshire.

We saw five species of *Ranunculus*, including one now in a new genus: *R. acris* (Meadow Buttercup), *R. auricomus* (Goldilocks Buttercup), *R. bulbosus* (Bulbous Buttercup), *R. ficaria* ssp. *bulbillifera* (Lesser Celandine), now known as *Ficaria verna* ssp. *verna*, and *R. repens* (Creeping Buttercup). Goldilocks Buttercup with its celery-like basal leaves and finely-cut stem leaves can be seen at the steps, and Bulbous Buttercup on the patch of grass above; it has reflexed sepals. The bulbils on the subspecies of Lesser Celandine are tucked in at the base of the stem leaves, adjacent to the shoot.

Two North American natives we saw were *Tellima grandiflora* (Fringecups) and *Tolmiea menziesii* (Pick-a-back Plant). The two plants look very similar when not in flower, but the first has rounded teeth at the margins of the leaves and the second has more angular teeth. 'Fringecups' describes the separate white, spreading petals like tattered pennants within the shape of the flower; the other has chocolate-coloured tubular flowers.

Alistair Godfrey

### 4. Battleby, Redgorton

Wednesday, 23<sup>rd</sup> May

We had a beautiful sunny evening for our tour of Battleby's grounds in the capable hands of staff from Scottish Natural Heritage. Colin McLeod kindly provided each of us with a pack of information that included the history of Battleby House and grounds. The land was owned by the Grahams of Balgowan, and by 1827, 90,000 hardwood trees, mostly oaks, had been planted on their estates, the oaks having been raised from seed imported to Perth Harbour from London. In

time the estate passed to James Maxtone-Graham who had the present house built in the early 1860s. The planting of exotic trees and shrubs that we enjoy now took place from 1925 to '35 by Sir Alexander Cross, the owner of the estate at that time.

There are several species of *Rhododendron*, *Acer*, *Sorbus*, *Prunus*, *Berberis*, *Cornus* and *Malus*. They add colour in the spring with their flowers and the leaves of many bring a riot of colour in the autumn. The planting is architectural, with many different leaf forms – the symmetrical *Cercidiphyllum japonicum* (Katsura Tree) is a constant feature – and the smaller trees and shrubs are offset by taller broadleaves and especially conifers, including several unusual varieties of *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* (Lawson's Cypress) and *Cedrus atlantica* cv. 'Glauca' (Atlas or Blue Atlas Cedar).

Alistair Godfrey

## 5. Dunsinane Hill

Saturday, 26<sup>th</sup> May

Six of us met at the bottom of the footpath on the northern side of the hill on the most glorious of mornings. It was warm, sunny and cloudless, and remained so for the whole day, thus imprinting itself on my mind at least as one of the best botanical days of the summer. Many interesting species were found and some valuable tetrad recording carried out, all with the warm sun on our backs.

We walked uphill and skirted around the edge of Collace quarry. Some of the first flowering plants we studied were readily identified as *Taraxacum faeroense* (Faeroese Dandelion) from Spectabilia (Showy) Section. These are described by Stace as “possibly the commonest... in upland... damp or wet acidic grassy places” characteristically with “leaves scarcely lobed” – all appropriate here. Then, heading up Dunsinane Hill we noted a scatter of *Saxifraga granulata* (Meadow Saxifrage), both in grassland and on the crags, *Viola lutea* (Mountain Pansy) of all colours; and higher up on a rocky ledge, the strikingly different *T. lacistophyllum* (Cut-leaved Dandelion). It was purely fortuitous that this latter herb was the same as a population growing on a stone and mortar wall by the River Erich at Rattray that I had recently sent to have identified by John Richards. This is the first species described in his BSBI Handbook, from Erythrosperma (Red Seed) Section, has distinctive “deeply dissected leaves” and is “frequent on light, well-drained neutral to calcareous soils”.

Near the top there was a spring giving rise to a mire that drained along a runnel containing *Ranunculus hederaceus* (Ivy-leaved Crowfoot) and *Comarum palustre* (= *Potentilla palustris*) (Marsh Cinquefoil). Between Dunsinane Hill and Black Hill lay a small mire containing a range of common species, but notably lacking any orchids. After recording this we followed eastwards along the top of the Black Hill escarpment as far as a gully that formed the edge of the tetrad, returning along the bottom of the crags, though Sandy continued along to look at a pool at the head of the Den Burn, nearer to Little Dunsinane. The area at the base of the escarpment was very productive, with its very weathered, loose basaltic, skeletal soils, sometimes eroded and bare, and its broken, rocky ledges yielding most of the specialities we were expecting, including abundant *Astragalus danicus* (Purple Milk-vetch), some *Trifolium striatum* (Knotted Clover), the minuscule *Myosotis ramosissima* (Early Forget-me-not), plentiful *Arenaria serpyllifolia* (Thyme-leaved Sandwort), some *Vicia lathyroides* (Spring Vetch), a single plant of *Erodium cicutarium* (Stork's-bill) and a few bushes of *Rosa spinosissima* (= *R. pimpinellifolia*) (Burnet Rose) higher up. Along here was an extensive population of what we more tentatively identified as *T. argutum* (Sharp-toothed Dandelion), also from the Erythrosperma (Red Seed) Section as apparent in some ripe 'clocks'. More specific evidence was provided by their leaves having regularly deltoid lateral lobes, and involute ray-ligules in their reluctantly opening flowers.

A noisy Peregrine urged us to leave the area of the quarry and throughout the day a fledged family of Ravens monitored our progress. It was a fascinating excursion, with lots of older records updated.

Martin Robinson

## 6. Glen Farg

Sunday, 10<sup>th</sup> June

This meeting was due to be held at the Den of Invermay, but had to be postponed, and instead I arranged something of a similar nature. Seven of us gathered on a rather damp morning, one of many, and as I write this I read that in 2012 the UK had its second-wettest year since 1912, although the north-west of Scotland was considerably different. Could this have been a wetter year than 2011? The Met Office says of 2011 “overall, Scotland had its wettest year in the series from 1910”. I recommend the Met Office’s website [www.metoffice.gov.uk](http://www.metoffice.gov.uk) for accuracy and interest; the quote comes from the climate/UK pages.

The section of Binn Wood that we looked at from the lay-by car park to near the top of the wood changes from wetter, more basic soils below with *Fraxinus excelsior* (Ash) to drier, acid soils above with, among other trees, the hybrid oak *Quercus x rosacea* (*Q. petraea x robur*) which must have been planted. Included in the conifers that had been planted was *Abies alba* (European Silver-fir); two fine, mature specimens were seen.

There was nothing in the vascular plant flora that was outstanding, more the general variety that was interesting, the range of habitats, the varied topography and the occasional view down into the Glen from above the cliffs. There is a very good path through the wood. We did see all the species of *Geum*, *G. rivale* (Water Avens), *G. urbanum* (Wood Avens/Herb Bennet) and their hybrid *G. x intermedium*. The hybrid is often found in damp woods on more basic soils.

The second part of our excursion took us to the road to Binn Farm. Growing on the rock exposure beside the road was a beautiful display of *Silene viscaria* (formerly *Lychnis viscaria* etc.) (Sticky Catchfly) (see [Photos](#)). I counted 260 plants in flower; there was only one plant in flower where we had parked in the morning. In the following weeks I looked at the south entrance to the disused railway tunnel in the Glen, which used to have a good show, and found only one plant. This site is now overgrown, it has been cut back in the past and was said to have been kept open before then by burning embers pouring out from the funnels of steam engines passing out of the end of the tunnel and setting alight the vegetation at the entrance and reducing the competition for the Sticky Catchfly in the process.

*Geranium lucidum* (Shining Crane’s-bill), another interesting pink-flowered plant, was seen on damper rock than the Sticky Catchfly beside the Binn Farm road. Higher up beside field tracks were *Carex muricata* (Prickly Sedge) and *Juncus inflexus* (Hard Rush). This is a very handsome rush, with a long-pointed bract and expansive inflorescence. The species is found on fairly basic clayey soils on both sides of the River Tay below Perth and northwards to Stanley, but has been seldom recorded outside this area in Mid-Perthshire.

We were close to the Fife border at this point and crossed over to the car park at Balvaird Castle, but the mowers has beaten us to it, however we did enjoy a short back-and-sides view of *Helianthemum nummularium* (Common Rock-rose) and *Meum athamanticum* (Spignel) in flower.

Alistair Godfrey

## 7. Stare Dam lay-by and Mill Dam

Wednesday, 20<sup>th</sup> June

Six of us met on a beautiful evening (had summer begun at last?) to look at two highly contrasting habitats, just south of Byres of Murthly. Colin had very helpfully brought along SNH maps with the NVC habitats coloured and showing the modern map superimposed on a Victorian one.

We started in the old lay-by opposite Stare Dam, which has long been a dumping ground for local gardeners. I have been monitoring this site for about ten years, and many fascinating exotics have persisted for the whole of that time. Unfortunately, this spring the lay-by was used as a holding area for timber being cut nearby, so many of the plants had been wiped out. Those left, however, included *Potentilla argentea* (Hoary Cinquefoil), *Brunnera macrophylla* (Great Forget-me-not), *Astrantia major* (Astrantia), *Thalictrum aquilegifolium* (French Meadow-rue) and a beautiful but unidentified blue Iris (see [Photos](#)), so we were not too disappointed.

We then moved on to the Mill Dam area, which is a little-known SSSI, where we first saw some more aliens, including a large stand of Bamboo! In the slightly basic swampy area surrounding what must have been the old Mill Pond, we found some interesting sedges, including *Carex canescens* (formerly *C. curta*) (White sedge) and *C. diandra* (Lesser Tussock-sedge). Also *Hydrocotyle vulgaris* (Marsh Pennywort) and abundant *Comarum palustre* (= *Potentilla palustris*) (Marsh Cinquefoil).

In the more open water there was lots of *Menyanthes trifoliata* (Bogbean) and *Nuphar lutea* (Yellow Water-lily). A burn flows into the pond, apparently from Rohallion Loch across the road, and in its flushes we found a somewhat different habitat again, containing *Eleocharis quinqueflora* (Few-flowered Spike-rush), *Triglochin palustris* (Marsh Arrowgrass), *C. pilulifera* (Pill sedge) and *Drosera rotundifolia* (Round-leaved Sundew).

The evening concluded with the best find of all (first spotted by David Merrie): *Corallorhiza trifida* (Coralroot Orchid). We counted nearly thirty plants, but it was possible there were even more. So a very good end to an interesting evening.

Faith Anstey

## 8. Ben Lawers

Sunday, 24<sup>th</sup> June

This excursion was planned to look at the middle-range altitude plants that might be found in the Breadalbanes, to sort out sedges and similar-looking plants that lack petals which make them more difficult to identify and to try to find an old record for *Linnaea borealis* (Twinflower). Unfortunately, we did not find the latter, but we had a good day, with two newcomers who were keen to improve their identification.

Peaty pools near the new car park offered some useful finds like *Triglochin palustris* (Marsh Arrowgrass) whose dainty little flowers are arranged up the main shoot. We found eleven species of sedge in different habitats, including *Carex capillaris* (Hair Sedge), a small sedge of base-rich soils of middle to high altitudes, which is widespread across the Breadalbanes, but is found across few other ranges in Britain. We found six species of rush, including *Juncus triglumis* (Three-flowered Rush) which is found in similar places to *Carex capillaris*, only wetter.

A plant said to be found at higher altitudes we encountered was *Empetrum nigrum* subsp. *hermaphroditum* (Mountain Crowberry) which has both female and male flowers, but they are on separate plants in subsp. *nigrum*, the plant of lower altitudes that we also found. The montane subspecies was growing at about 500 metres above Ordnance Datum. At about this altitude we also found *Oxyria digyna* (Mountain Sorrel), *Galium boreale* (Northern Bedstraw), *Saxifraga aizoides* (Yellow Saxifrage), *S. oppositifolia* (Purple Saxifrage) and *Thalictrum alpinum* (Alpine Meadow-rue).

Along the track we followed we found *Botrychium lunaria* (Moonwort), *Tofieldia pusilla* (Scottish Asphodel) in flushes and *Rubus chamaemorus* (Cloudberry) on peaty soils among Heather.

Alistair Godfrey

## 9. Jamesfield, Abernethy

Saturday, 4<sup>th</sup> August

The main reason for visiting this area was that Jamesfield is an organic farm and it would be interesting to see if there was anything different in the distribution and occurrence of arable weeds. Certainly they were distributed more amongst the crops and into the field areas but did not seem to have any greater mixture than in a typical field. A greater quantity of arable weeds might have been expected on an organic unit, which was not the case, but we did find some rarely recorded and less common species, which may have been a reflection of reduced intensification.

Two less commonly recorded arable weeds we found were *Galeopsis speciosa* (Large-flowered Hemp-nettle) and *G. bifida* (Bifid Hemp-nettle). In addition to the ever-present *Fumaria officinalis* (Common Fumitory) and *F. muralis* (Common Ramping-fumitory) there was also a

patch of *F. bastardii* (Tall Ramping-fumitory) in one of the fields, which was only the second record for Mid Perthshire VC88. In comparison there were the common *Lamium album* (White Dead-nettle) and *L. purpureum* (Red Dead-nettle) but also *L. confertum* (Northern Dead-nettle) with only one other record in VC88 (see [Photos](#)). Another uncommon arable weed recorded was *Polygonum boreale* (Northern Knotgrass) with only two other records for VC88, and *Thlaspi arvense* (Field Penny-cress) with a respectable number of 17 previous records.

Planted in the pond near the shop was *Iris pseudacorus* (Yellow Iris) with less welcome invasives: *Lagarosiphon major* (Curly Waterweed) and some patches of *Crassula helmsii* (New Zealand Pygmyweed).

Nearer the shore was a patch of *Allium oleraceum* (Field Garlic) last recorded in VC88 in 1987 and not recorded in adjacent Fife VC85. The other *Allium*, *A. carinatum* (Keeled Garlic) is rare in VC85.

There was plenty of *Schoenoplectus tabernaemontani* (Grey Club-rush) (see [Photos](#)) – this again only just gets over into VC85, a large clump at Newburgh, presumably as it is more saltmarsh and mud than seaside. Conversely, *Bolboschoenus maritimus* (Sea Club-rush) is common by the seaside in Fife but not so much in this area of the Tay estuary. The change of species, both in occurrence and abundance, from estuarine to marine is always interesting to see.

A plant of saltmarshes is *Puccinellia distans* (Reflexed Saltmarsh-grass) which we found not by the shore, but in the car park at the shop, thanks to the spreading of salt along our roads in winter, which changes the nature of the muddy margins of the verges into a perfect habitat for this uncommon species in Perthshire and Fife.

Sandy Edwards & Alistair Godfrey

## 10. Ben Buck, Ochil Hills (Joint PSNS/BSBI excursion)

Saturday, 11<sup>th</sup> August

A small party of seven including Angus Hannah, BSBI Scottish Officer while Jim McIntosh was in Tristan da Cunha, drove to Upper Glen Devon Reservoir and walked in past Backhills Farm along the new highway made for the construction of Burnfoot Windfarm. The turbines were whirling slowly on a clear, cool summer's day as we climbed steadily towards them. On our way we stopped now and again to record, but began recording more consistently once we got onto the open hill. Here we were joined by Davie Black from Plantlife who had walked up the steep way over Ben Cleuch from his home in Tillicoultry. Our first find of note was made by Linda Robinson, Vice-County Recorder for NW Yorks, VC65 when she pointed out large patches of flowerless *Carex bigelowii* (Stiff Sedge) growing near a boundary fence leading to the summit of Ben Buck. This might have gone undetected without her expertise in identifying the vegetative parts of this sedge. Linda had driven from Yorkshire in the hope that we might find the long-lost, perhaps mythical, Ochil Hills' site for *Saxifraga hirculus* (Marsh Saxifrage) for which she has recently found a new site in her own Vice-County.

After lunch on the summit at 679 metres, we spread out to search for the main goal of the day, two montane flushes on the north-west flank of the hill where Rod Corner had discovered *Alopecurus magellanicus* (Alpine Foxtail) in 1992. On eroding peat hags we found *Rubus chamaemorus* (Cloudberry), a rare plant on the tops of the grassy Ochils. Roy Sexton led us straight to the flushes with a map he had constructed from a description of the location by John Mitchell who visited the site in 1998. In the lower flush at 608 m, NN 89199 01609, we counted 110 flowering heads of this beautiful, very rare alpine grass, growing in a wet flush with abundant mosses (see [Photos](#)), a tiny form of *Caltha palustris* (Marsh-marigold) and *Ranunculus hederaceus* (Ivy-leaved Crowfoot). Several plants of Alpine Foxtail were also growing in tall *Juncus effusus* (Soft Rush) at the base of the flush. In a smaller flush higher up the hill at 635 m, NN 89321 01564, we counted 21 heads. The flushes had many interesting plants; two colonies of the beautiful pink flowers of *Sedum villosum* (Hairy Stonecrop) (see [Photos](#)), *Saxifraga hypnoides* (Mossy Saxifrage) and under a mossy bank the lovely white flowers of *Saxifraga stellaris* (Starry

Saxifrage). Also present were *Juncus articulatus* (Jointed Rush), *Juncus bulbosus* (Bulbous Rush), *Carex echinata* (Star Sedge), *Triglochin palustris* (Marsh Arrowgrass) and *Epilobium palustre* (Marsh Willowherb). The montane flush community with Alpine Foxtail is very similar to where Marsh Saxifrage occurs in northern England and it is very possible Marsh Saxifrage may still exist in a flush somewhere in this area of the Ochils. A total of 163 species were recorded during the day.

Liz Lavery

## 11. Dollar Glen

Saturday, 25<sup>th</sup> August

(Joint PSNS/BSBI educational field meeting)

Tillicoultry Glen is closed because of rock falls, so the venue for this educational meeting was moved to Dollar Glen where 18 of us gathered in the main NTS car park. Again Angus Hannah joined us from Bute; Jane Jones, joint Vice-County Recorder for West Perth VC87, and a number of other botanists came to help enthuse about the wonders of plants. We split into small groups and spent the morning walking through the woods on the east side of the Glen to Castle Campbell. After lunch we explored an upland grassy track above the castle. A number of wise people left to walk the quick route back down to the car park and avoided the increasingly heavy downpour as the rest of us made our way down the path on the west side of the Glen. Katherine White acted as scribe and produced an excellent and very accurate list of records for the day.

Dollar Glen has been extremely well botanised in the past, the first expeditions being by botanists from Edinburgh in the mid-nineteenth century, and is well known for its ferns and woodland grasses. In April 2012 NTS rediscovered *Lathraea squamaria* (Toothwort) at two sites. There are also historical records for *Gagea lutea* (Yellow Star-of-Bethlehem) but despite searching in the spring this has not been seen for many years.

We recorded a total of 167 species during our walks. These included 13 species of fern. *Polystichum aculeatum* (Hard Shield-fern) was frequent in the wooded gorge and *Cystopteris fragilis* (Brittle Bladder-fern) on the outer castle wall. We identified the grass *Brachypodium sylvaticum* (False-brome), frequent in the damp woodland, the tall arching *Bromopsis ramosa* (Hairy-brome) and the lovely delicate flowering spikes of *Melica uniflora* (Wood Melick). On the western side of the gorge we saw tussocks of the rare woodland grass *Festuca altissima* (Wood Fescue) on cliff ledges in one of its few sites in West Perth and Clackmannanshire. The unusual *Parietaria judaica* (Pellitory-of-the-wall), a member of the nettle family, growing on the inner walls of Castle Campbell, is very rare this far north in Scotland. We alerted Historic Scotland to a patch of the invasive non-native *Acaena novae-zelandiae* (Pirri-pirri-bur) making its home in the Castle courtyard. On the upper track, leading to Glenquey, sharp eyes spied the minute rarity *Ornithopus perpusillus* (Bird's-foot). A small clump of *Lysichiton americanus* (American Skunk-cabbage), a potential invasive species along watercourses, was seen in the pond below the Castle.

Liz Lavery

## 12. River Ericht, Blairgowrie

Saturday, 8<sup>th</sup> September

We were delighted that Ros Smith was able to join us on this excursion, together with her trusty companion Gordon Berry. The seven of us walked upstream along the riverside path starting from the car-park just north of the bridge, heading towards the complex of ruined flax mills that make this area so interesting for its industrial archaeology. Before we got there we looked for *Polystichum setiferum* (Soft Shield-fern) without clambering up the Cuttle Burn Den, where it was found last year, and we did find some plants that looked like the hybrid between it and *P. aculeatum* (Hard Shield-fern) *P. x bicknellii*. The most likely candidate did not have any spores, even though it had sporangia, but confirmation is needed.

It proved to be a good site for the woodland grasses: *Schedonorus giganteus* (Giant Fescue) and *Elymus caninus* (Bearded Couch) were quite common and we noted that the *Festuca altissima*

(Wood Fescue) that grows on the steep slope above the lade was in very good quantity. Ros then picked out *Melica uniflora* (Wood Melick) near the Lornty Bridge, which everyone else had managed to walk past without seeing. That particular area, at the northern extremity of our walk, obviously had some base enrichment as, besides the *Melica*, it also rewarded us with lots of *Galium odoratum* (Woodruff) and *Sanicula europaea* (Sanicle). *Asplenium scolopendrium* (Hart's-tongue) grew in places in the side of the narrow, damp, shady lade. Having worked through a couple of areas of cleared ground and added a lot of common weeds of waste places we ended up with a very respectable list for the day, despite not having covered a huge area. The icing on the cake for the writer was seeing his first Perthshire Comma butterfly, which sat in a tree in full view while we were having our lunch.

Martin Robinson

### 13. Pitcairns Glen, Dunning

Saturday, 28<sup>th</sup> October

Eight foragers set off expecting to find a good range of fungi, because I thought this ancient semi-natural woodland would provide an interest to match its vascular plants, but alas this did not prove so.

<i>Armillaria gallica</i>	Bulbous Honey Fungus
<i>Bisporella citrina</i>	Lemon Disco
<i>Clitocybe</i> sp.	
<i>Collybia (Rhodocollybia) maculata?</i>	Spotted Toughshank
<i>Coprinus (Coprinnellus) micaceus</i>	Glistening Inkcap
<i>Crepidotus</i> sp.	
<i>Entoloma (rhodopolium?)</i>	Wood Pinkgill
<i>Hypholoma fasciculare?</i>	Sulphur Tuft
<i>Laccaria amethystea</i>	Amethyst Deceiver
<i>Laccaria laccata</i>	Deceiver
<i>Lactarius</i> sp.	
<i>Mycena galericulata</i>	Common Bonnet
<i>Nectria cinnabarina</i>	Coral Spot
<i>Plicatura crispa</i>	Crimped Gill
<i>Psathyrella candolleana</i>	Pale Brittlestem
<i>Scutellinia scutellata</i>	Common Eyelash
<i>Stereum gausapatum</i>	Bleeding Oak Crust
<i>Stereum hirsutum</i>	Hairy Curtain Crust

I think our modest list was more a reflection of the extended wet weather, and the potential of the wood was not revealed. Most of the fungi were small, and we managed to identify some. I took the ones we had collected and sent photographs of them to Keith Cohen and he identified more or suggested what others might be. We had identified the shrivelled remains of a Honey Fungus as *Armillaria mellea*, but Keith said that the greenish base of its stipe is very distinctive of *A. gallica*, “typical of the ‘bulbous’ honey fungus even when it is not very bulbous!”

Keith has led a number of fungal forays for us over a number of years and we are grateful for being able to share his knowledge and enthusiasm. He is moving to a new job and house in Banbury, Oxfordshire and we wish him well and hope to see him at future meetings. We will continue to organise fungal forays and I hope we can build up expertise and enthusiasm within our membership.

Alistair Godfrey

## Visit to Ben Ledi, near Callander (VC87) to find *Alchemilla wichurae*, 11 August 2012

*Alchemilla wichurae* (Rock Lady's-mantle) was one of the plants on the 2012 BSBI [Threatened Plant Project](#) list. A West Perthshire (VC87) record for *A. wichurae* was collected by Neale Taylor in 1999, when he found the plant on Pinnacle Ridge, Ben Ledi. This visit was to confirm the record and add further information on the site habitat and highlight any management issues. We decided the easiest way to reach this area was by taking the usual path up through the forestry plantations in Stank Glen and then going 'off piste' and following the burn which leads up into the eastern corrie below the summit of Ben Ledi. Once off the path, the going was steep and uneven, but led almost directly to the base of the ridge. As we walked up by the burn we found abundant *Oxyria digyna* (Mountain Sorrel) (see [Photos](#)) and one small patch of *Sibbaldia procumbens* (Least Cinquefoil). This area would have benefited from further investigation, but we felt we should focus on the main aim of the day, to find the *A. wichurae* site. When we reached the base of the ridge we worked our way round to the northern side and scrambled along underneath the crags. The *A. wichurae* was found in a flushed gravelly area at the base of the ridge at NN 5623 1024 (see [Photos](#)). The habitat resembled the U15, *Saxifraga aizoides*–*Alchemilla glabra* NVC community. This community is almost always confined to steep faces of basic rock with a copious supply of base-rich water dripping through the foliage, but stands can also occur on steep flushed gravelly ground below cliffs (as at this location) or on wet grassy banks. Other vascular plants of note apart from *Saxifraga aizoides* (Yellow Saxifrage) and *A. wichurae* were *Draba incana* (Hoary Whitlowgrass), *Epilobium anagallidifolium* (Alpine Willowherb), *Cystopteris fragilis* (Brittle Bladder-fern), *Polystichum lonchitis* (Holly-fern), *Asplenium viride* (Green Spleenwort) and *Saxifraga oppositifolia* (Purple Saxifrage). More usual plants found in these types of locations but not actually at the *Alchemilla* site were *Thalictrum alpinum* (Alpine Meadow-rue), *Sedum rosea* (Rose-root) and *Saxifraga hypnoides* (Mossy Saxifrage). We rounded the day off by climbing up onto Pinnacle Ridge and from there onto the main ridge to the summit of Ben Ledi, taking pictures to help give a feel for the location of the site. Another visit to this area would certainly be a worthwhile exercise, perhaps in 2013!

Jane and Arthur Jones

## Mystery sedge identified

During recording in VC87 West Perth, a mystery sedge was found growing precariously in the road gutter of a bridge on the Langside Moor road to Comrie. This was identified by Mike Porter, after collection of mature fruit, as *Carex muricata* subsp. *pairae*.

Liz Lavery

## Ash dieback...and other problems

The biggest botanical news story of the past year has been the discovery of Ash dieback already widespread in Britain, with nearly 50 confirmed locations in Scotland as far north as the Moray Firth, including sites in our area near Alyth, Bankfoot, Blairgowrie, Cleish and Scone. By coincidence, this subject was highly topical for several of the season's PSNS lectures, including two of the open meetings – Andrew Barbour's talk on managing a Perthshire estate, and Syd House's talk on famous trees of Perthshire – and two of our section meetings, Liz Holden's talk on fungi, and especially, Rick Worrell's talk in November, the subject of which was changed to give us an update on the speaker's own work on the disease (now published online at [www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/WorrellReport-ChalaraImpacts.pdf/\\$FILE/WorrellReport-ChalaraImpacts.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/WorrellReport-ChalaraImpacts.pdf/$FILE/WorrellReport-ChalaraImpacts.pdf)).

The disease is caused by a non-native fungal pathogen, *Chalara fraxinea*, the asexual life stage of a small cup fungus *Hymenoscyphus pseudoalbidus* which has been spreading rapidly across Europe and is already present from Scandinavia to the Adriatic. It is fairly likely that some of the outbreaks in south-east England originated from wind-borne spores that crossed the North

Sea from the Low Countries. However, the spread has been greatly assisted by the nursery trade, and most locations in Britain have been associated with nurseries or recent plantings of nursery or imported stock.

The great majority of Ash trees within affected areas are expected to die – young trees within 2-3 years, mature trees may take up to about 10 years, and are usually finished off by honey fungus or other pathogens (itself an issue of concern to foresters). Unlike Dutch elm disease, trees are killed to the root, so coppicing as either a precaution or a response is pointless. In Sweden, ash is now considered so endangered it has been added to the national red data list. In Denmark 60-90% are infected (not already dead, as widely reported), with most of the remainder in refugia that have so far avoided infection. A few trees (probably less than 5%) appear to show some genetic resistance or resilience, so may give rise to replacement stock. For this reason, wholesale precautionary clearance of ash is unwise, as these individuals would be lost along with the rest. Timber from infected trees is safe to use and transport, and dead trees are not a source of further infection, so need not be felled except where they are a danger to the public.

There are few pure ash woods in Scotland, but ash is an important component of many mixed woodlands, and supports a wide range of associated species including a rich ground flora as well as specialist lichens and bryophytes. The December 2012 issue of *British Wildlife* magazine reviewed the likely impact on some species groups, finding nine species of lichen and five flies for which ash is the sole or primary host in Britain: the future looks bleak for these and probably many more ash-dependent species. The long-term fate of the ground flora will depend on whatever replaces ash – if beech, sycamore, or conifers, many plants will eventually be shaded out. There will also be a major impact on the landscape, as individual ash trees are prominent in hedgerows, rocky places and around old habitations. One of these, the ancient Glen Lyon Ash, is famous as a Perthshire heritage tree. On the other hand, there is likely to be a temporary explosion in populations of fungi and invertebrates that benefit from deadwood habitats. BSBI hopes to run a survey of a sample of ash-dominated habitats nationwide in 2013 to provide a baseline from which future effects can be quantified – if you are interested in taking part, please email [kevinwalker@bsbi.org.uk](mailto:kevinwalker@bsbi.org.uk).

The Forestry Commission has an excellent web page [www.forestry.gov.uk/chalara](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/chalara) giving coverage of what is still a fast-moving subject. The one positive angle is that the crisis may at last prompt government to take plant hygiene seriously, as although this horse has well & truly bolted, there are plenty others to worry about. The second half of Rick Worrell's lecture looked at other emerging pests and pathogens threatening trees in Britain – there are nearly a dozen potentially serious ones already established in recent years, affecting a very wide range of species, and more than as many again that have not yet arrived here but are a genuine threat.

One of the most recent unwelcome arrivals is *Phytophthora austrocedrae*, which in 2012 was confirmed in Perthshire as the cause of die-back and mortality of Juniper at Glenartney Juniper Wood. Research is underway to see if site management can help reduce susceptibility to infection. This disease can be spread on footwear or vehicle wheels, so we should avoid visiting infected sites. If a visit is necessary, clean footwear and equipment thoroughly immediately after leaving the site, using a recommended disinfectant.

Colin R. McLeod

## Website update

As announced in Bulletin No. 34, all the Botanical Section Bulletins have been scanned and are now available to download from the PSNS website. The main Botanical Section page [www.psns.tsohost.co.uk/botanical/botanical.htm](http://www.psns.tsohost.co.uk/botanical/botanical.htm) still displays a link to the latest issue, while a new page [www.psns.tsohost.co.uk/bot\\_bulletins.htm](http://www.psns.tsohost.co.uk/botanical/bot_bulletins.htm) has been added to accommodate the archive of previous Bulletins, displayed in issue/date order.

Bulletin Editor: Colin R. McLeod  
[Colin.McLeod@SNH.gov.uk](mailto:Colin.McLeod@SNH.gov.uk)

**Photos**



Battleby main lawn, 23 May 2012.  
© Alistair Godfrey.



Viewing the Battleby Pond with Jim Carruthers, Battleby gardener, 23 May 2012.  
Photo by Colin R. McLeod © Scottish Natural Heritage.



Iris, Stare Dam lay-by, 20 June 2012.  
© Alistair Godfrey.



*Astragalus glycyphyllos* (Wild Liquorice), Thistle Brig, August 2012 revisit.  
© Alistair Godfrey.



*Silene viscaria* Sticky Catchfly (Sticky Catchfly), Glen Farg, 10 June 2012.  
© Alistair Godfrey.



*Silene viscaria* (Sticky Catchfly), Glen Farg, 10 June 2012.  
© Alistair Godfrey.



*Lamium confertum* (left) and *Fumaria bastardii* (right), Jamesfield, 4 August 2012.

In the first, the long sepals, broad amplexicaul leaf and very square stem are diagnostic; *L. amplexicaule* Hen-bit Dead-nettle is smaller and neater.

The upper petal of *Fumaria bastardii* is concolorous, without the darker tip of other *Fumaria* species.

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*Schoenoplectus tabernaemontani* (Grey Club-rush), Jamesfield, 4 August 2012.

© Sandy Edwards.



*Alopecurus magellanicus* (Alpine Foxtail) flush, Ben Buck, 11 August 2012.  
© Liz Lavery.



*Alopecurus magellanicus* (Alpine Foxtail), Ben Buck, 11 August 2012.  
© Mark Tulley.



*Sedum villosum* (Hairy Stonecrop), Ben Buck, 11 August 2012.  
© Mark Tulley.



Foxtailers' gathering on Ben Buck, 11 August 2012.  
© Liz Lavery.



*Coprinus micaceus* (Glistening Inkcap), Pitcairns Glen, 28 October 2012.  
© Alistair Godfrey.



*Oxyria digyna* (Mountain Sorrel), Ben Ledi, 11 August 2012, initially found at NN 5665 1049 in the burn flowing out from the corrie below Ben Ledi but frequent right up the burn and on the crags visited to find *Alchemilla wichurae* (Rock Lady's-mantle).  
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Main *Alchemilla wichurae* site, Ben Ledi, NN 5623 1024, 11 August 2012, with *Saxifraga aizoides* (Yellow Saxifrage).  
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View looking east from the main Ben Ledi ridge, down to Pinnacle Ridge and the prominent crag above and close to the *Alchemilla wichurae* site, 11 August 2012.

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