



PERTHSHIRE SOCIETY OF NATURAL SCIENCE

NATURE SECTION

BULLETIN No. 1 – MARCH 2023

Welcome to the first Bulletin of the new PSNS Nature Section, formed last year by the amalgamation of the Botanical and Ornithological Sections. The intention is to continue producing a Bulletin annually, to include the reports of the previous year's excursions that formerly appeared in the Botanical Section Bulletins, plus articles on ornithology and any other natural history subjects. We will also produce occasional shorter newsletters to keep members updated with more topical news. Both publications will appear primarily on the PSNS website www.psns.org.uk, but some printed copies will be produced for distribution to members without internet access, and to give non-members an idea of what we do.

Alistair Godfrey (1954–2022)

Alistair Godfrey, the long-standing Chair of the PSNS Botanical Section, died in December after



suffering declining health through much of lockdown. Alistair came to Perthshire in 1989 when he joined Perth & Kinross Council's Countryside Ranger Service, and remained with the Council until retirement as Countryside Management Officer in 2014. He had wide-ranging interests in natural history, but particularly plants, and was the Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland's co-Vice County Recorder for VC88 (Mid Perthshire) from 2003, serving on the BSBI's Scottish Committee for several years. He led countless PSNS botanical excursions, in particular specialising in introducing beginners to the delights of Botany. All are recorded in the PSNS Botanical Section Bulletins. It was always fun to go botanising with him and frequently gave new insights into how to identify even the commonest of species. He was a brilliant botanist with an eye for unusual and rare plants, willing to tackle the most difficult plant groups – dandelions, brambles, and especially roses.

< Alistair in Glen Lyon in 2018 © Tim Rich

Alistair should also be remembered for his outstanding conservation survey work. He was a fierce defender of local sites and sensitive priority habitats threatened by inappropriate development. He used his professional planning expertise to object to damaging planning applications, always based on meticulous rigorous research and written reports summarising the importance of these areas. His [submission](#) was key to the Scottish Government's refusal of a planning application for a quarry at Glenquey Moss in 2015: he proved the Moss was a perched raised bog in recovery, an exceptional habitat, yet described as 'impoverished pasture' in the official EIA. With the [Friends of the Ochils](#), he fought tirelessly to stop blanket afforestation of the Ochil Hills. He investigated the historical ecology of several local woodlands; particularly notable is his 2018 *Study of the Woods and Wetlands at Bertha Park, Redgorton*. In addition to leading the Botanical Section since 2000, he also served several stints on the Council of the PSNS Parent Body.

Lynnette Borradaile, Liz Lavery & Colin McLeod

Ornithological excursion reports

1. Lindores and Birnie Lochs

Saturday, 23 April 2022

Birnie and Gaddon Lochs

A walk round the two lochs revealed a good mixture of woodland and water birds. In many instances in woods, and at this time of year, a bird's presence is announced by song which would hopefully be followed up by a sighting. Seen and/or heard (running totals were not always maintained) were Chaffinch, Chiffchaff, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Robin, Wren, Rooks (4), Buzzard (2), Dunnock, Woodpigeon, and Willow Warbler. The lochs carried Mute Swan (1), Mallard (12), Greylag Geese (6), Black-headed, Common and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, Tufted Duck (14), Coot, Great-crested Grebe, Cormorant (2), and Goldeneye.

Lindores Loch

A walk round the southern shore was not always easy, the track being deeply rutted in places and retaining water. Sightings started as soon as the cars left the road, with an Osprey soaring overhead. The shrubs justified investigation, revealing Chaffinch and Blue Tit while Jackdaws (3) and a Buzzard flew. Many of the birds tended to collect at the quieter, west end of the loch, rendering it difficult to get an accurate count, particularly in trying to distinguish Tufted Duck and Goldeneye (75 total of both). The other birds were Coot, Mute Swan (10), Great-crested Grebe, Cormorant (8), and Lesser Black-backed Gull.

2. Kinnoull Hill

Wednesday 4 May 2022 (evening)

This was the opportunity to look for and identify, woodland birds. The evening was fairly quiet and a number of species were found, including tits, Willow Warbler and the Robin.

3. Doune Ponds and Argaty Red Kite Centre

Saturday 28 May 2022

Doune Ponds

Doune ponds have been worth a visit in the past, on the way to Argaty. This visit was no exception, though some of the birds were elusive or difficult to see. Around the ponds were a juvenile Cormorant, Grey Heron, Mute Swans (2), Lesser Black Backed Gull, and Mallards, amongst which was a Mandarin duck. While walking through the woods, Carrion Crows, Rooks, Robins, tits, Blackbirds, Wrens and Willow Warblers were seen with varying degrees of clarity.

Argaty Red Kite Centre

The car park, as usual, proved to be worthy of study, producing House Sparrows (8), Swallows (6), House Martins (8), Carrion Crows, Jackdaws, Magpies, and Willow Warblers. On the hillside, all attention was fixed on the 12 Red Kites, admiring the flying and the manoeuvring as they swooped at the carrion.

4. Loch Tullybelton

Wednesday 8 June 2022 (evening)

The evening was overcast but the rain of earlier in the afternoon had passed. A small number of members were rewarded with a fine list, including a couple of species less frequently seen. Once again, the sightings started in the car park with a Reed Bunting, and the Jackdaws and Rooks were audible from the stand of trees across the burn. Walking across the moor, Curlews, Lapwings and Red Grouse were heard more than seen. Also seen were Carrion Crow, Blackbird, Pied Wagtail, Black-headed Gull, Whinchat and Stonechat, Chaffinch, Willow Warbler, Wren, Pheasant, Woodpigeon and Swallows.

Switching our attention from the shrubs and trees to the loch, there were Little Grebe (2), Tufted Duck (4), Mallard (82), Canada Geese (3), Mute Swan (4), Oystercatcher (4), and there remains a question mark over Ringed Plover, so not included in our list.

Jeff Banks & Andrew Graham.

Farmland Bird Survey

7 February 2023

The Nature Section was contacted with a request for assistance in surveying the birds on a Perthshire farm where some wildflower strips had been sown. A preparatory survey was made on 7 February with a view to returning later in the year.

The farm occupies sloping land on the side of the Sidlaw Hills. There is some variation in habitat. The north-eastern and south-eastern sides with sown strips are open with fences or walls marking the boundaries, but with no higher perches in the form of hedges or trees. The south-western boundary is marked by walls and hedges with some trees, which increase in density towards the west. The northern edge is low in the valley, bounded by drainage ditches but stays damp.

A total count was made of the birds, including part of the uncultivated hillside beyond the farm boundary as this was within the tetrad that defined the area for the purpose of recording on BirdTrack. That extra added 1 of the 2 buzzards, and a raven, which I like to hear but which has a different meaning for the farmer. Blackbird (2), Blue tit (1), Carrion Crow (7), Chaffinch (12), Dunnock (1), Feral Pigeon (6), House Sparrow (6), Jackdaw (20), Rook (108), Linnet (46), Robin (2), Wren (4), Yellowhammer (20). Also Roe Deer and Brown Hare.

Jeff Banks

Murthly Wood

Murthly Wood (NO 09-39-) is on the south bank of the Tay just east of where the river is crossed by the B9099 to Caputh. In times of flood the Tay rises very dramatically resulting in the lower parts of the wood being inundated, especially where there remain old river channels. As elsewhere on the Tay, plants arrive from upstream, as seeds. These add to an already very diverse flora that deserves exploration. The land rises southwards towards Gellyburn and, beyond that, Murthly. The wood has a range of broadleaved species, many glades and a criss-cross of paths plus a winding stream that joins the Tay.

In spring, recently-deposited sandy soils provide ideal habitat for Yellow Star-of-Bethlehem *Gagea lutea*, discovered here only as recently as 2021. Elsewhere are Common Dog Violets *Viola riviniana*, Dog's Mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, Bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, Wood Anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, Wood Sorrel *Oxalis acetosella*, Ladies Smock *Cardamine pratensis*, Lesser Celandine *Ficaria verna*, Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolia* and, here and there, Moschatel *Adoxa moschatellina*. A good selection of birds can be seen and heard including frequent Blackcaps, with Nuthatches and Stock Doves more often heard than seen. During April and May, Orange-tip butterflies are frequent, laying eggs on the Ladies Smock. Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock butterflies, which overwintered as adults, are also flying then.

Later, as summer arrives, a great many more species of plants flower. Some unliked, even unwanted, ones include Pink Purslane *Claytonia sibirica* (NEVER plant it in your garden – it takes over!) and Himalayan Balsam *Impatiens glandulifera*. Bugle *Ajuga reptans*, Sweet Cicely *Myrrhis odorata*, three Stitchworts *Stellaria* spp., Primrose *Primula vulgaris*, Cowslip *Primula veris*, Dame's Violet *Hesperis matronalis*, Wood Sage *Teucrium scorodonia* and swathes of Melancholy Thistle *Cirsium heterophyllum*, that is surprisingly common along this part of the Tay, all add colour.

There is ample evidence of the activities of Beaver along the river here, and much else to be seen as the year progresses. Try it. Enjoy it!

Ron Youngman

Strathtay Botany Group

Early in 2022 there seemed to be a demand for a local botany group among people living in the north of Perth, roughly in the ward of Strathtay – hence the name. They were a diverse crowd who appreciated the local flora without – in some cases – having much knowledge or expertise in botany. We aim to be as informal as possible: we don't have an advance programme, there is no committee or constitution, and no website. We operate through a WhatsApp group on which people post interesting finds, ID queries, and general botanical questions. At the moment, for example, there is a discussion going on as to what counts as 'wild'. Of the current 18 members, three are (or were) Vice County Recorders, several are novices, the rest of us in-between.

Also posted on WhatsApp are suggestions for meeting up at a nearby place on a nearby date. These informal meetings can take any form, and we began on 1 April 2022 with a visit to Weem Meadow SSSI, a traditional hay meadow by the Tay in Aberfeldy. We were chiefly monitoring the state of Yellow Star-of-Bethlehem *Gagea lutea* because there had been concerns about the grazing management after a change of ownership of the site. However, the *Gagea* was in fine form – indeed, in places we could hardly move a pace without trampling some!



Yellow Star-of-Bethlehem *Gagea lutea*, Weem Meadow, 1 April 2022
© Faith Anstey

Several members joined BSBI Training meetings at the Tummel Shingle Islands and Ben Lawers, and we met in Glen Fender in July to look at orchids, finding five out of the ten orchid species recorded there.

In August, Caroline Bain, one of our least-experienced members, posted a rather distant shot of a plant that she said was abundant in a piece of forestry waste ground in Craigvinean Forest, and suggested it might be Common Centaury *Centaureum erythraea*. It looked possible – but in that habitat? But it was so: we counted at least 100 plants absolutely carpeting an area that was used for turning by forestry vehicles, so presumably it was brought in on their wheels and, finding no competition, simply took over the ground.



Common Centaury *Centaureum erythraea*, Craigvinean Forest, 7 August 2022
© Faith Anstey

Early in the year, another favourite activity is posting photos of 'firsts' – first *Tussilago farfara* (Coltsfoot) seen, first *Ficaria verna* (Lesser Celandine), and so on. Incidentally, we always add scientific names to the common ones, so that beginners and improvers get used to them.

New members always welcome!

Faith Anstey faithanstey@gmail.com

White Helleborine in Perthshire

White Helleborine *Cephalanthera damasonium* is an orchid found in woodland on well-drained soils on chalk and limestone in southern England. Until 2014, when a population was found in Scartho Cemetery in Grimsby, the most northerly recorded population was near Peterborough. However, in May 2022 nine plants appeared and flowered in our meadow at Newmill, 3 miles west of Blairgowrie.

It is reasonable to wonder how this could be possible. Part of the answer is that in March 2016 we were sent, and spread, seed of White Helleborine in our meadow. Where it appeared was under a Himalayan Birch tree *Betula utilis* in an area where we had previously spread c. 5 kg/m² of agricultural and dolomitic limestone. Another part of the answer is that over the past 50 years Scotland has warmed by c. 1.0°C.



White Helleborine *Cephalanthera damasonium*, Newmill, May 2022
© Dave Trudgill

Our meadow is also the most northerly outpost for Southern Marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* and Green-winged Orchid *Anacamptis morio*, both also grown from seed that we have introduced. The most northerly record for Southern Marsh-orchid is near the coast in Northumberland south of Amble, and that for Green-winged Orchid is near the coast in Ayrshire just south of Lendalfoot, where there is a cluster of populations. The next most northerly population of Green-winged Orchid is just south of Penrith.

In Scotland 28 species of orchids occur naturally. A further 20 species not found in Scotland grow south of the border with England. Currently, with the exception of Bee Orchid *Ophrys apifera*, none of these 20 species has significantly extended their distribution northwards. Many of these 20 species would probably grow well in Scotland but, without a helping hand, they are highly unlikely to colonise Scotland. Personally, I would like to think that, in the near future, species such as Lady's-slipper Orchid *Cypripedium calceolus* might grace some of the suitable woods in western Scotland, but for this to be a possibility would require a major shift in policy.

An 8-minute video of our meadow and the 14 species of orchids in it can be seen by Googling YouTube and searching for 'Newmill: creating and managing an orchid meadow' www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gqq6C-GQ4aU. Newmill will again be open as part of the Scotland's Gardens Scheme on Sunday 7 May 2023 from 14:00-16:00; for details see <https://scotlandsgardens.org/the-steading-at-clunie/?o=8688>.

Dave Trudgill davetrudgill@googlemail.com

Botanical excursion reports

The following BSBI field meetings were open to PSNS members, though only a couple of PSNS members attended each.

1. Tummel Shingle Islands

Saturday 28 May 2022

Twelve of us gathered at this unique and ever-changing habitat of shingle banks, sandy hollows, shallow channels, and more established grass and woodland, formed by constantly-shifting deposition, flooding and erosion by the waters of the River Tummel. The boundary between Vice Counties was originally marked out along the river, but it has changed its course over the years, so that part of the site – an SWT reserve and SSSI – is now in VC88 (Mid Perthshire) and part in VC89 (East Perthshire).

Vice County 88

We thus divided into two groups: some people accompanied Martin Robinson, Recorder for VC89, to record his section while also training. The rest – mainly the less experienced – came with me for training and practice in ID in this rich and varied habitat. A bitter north wind forced us to seek shelter at times, but at least it didn't rain.

My group started by distinguishing monocots from dicots. The former were mainly grasses and sedges, and we identified Meadow Oat-grass *Helictochloa (Avenula) pratensis*, Quaking Grass *Briza media*, Pill Sedge *Carex pilulifera*, White Sedge *C. canescens* and Bladder Sedge *C. vesicaria* among others. Dicots included Globeflower *Trollius europaeus* and Mouse-ear Hawkweed *Pilosella officinarum* which, because of the confusing vernacular name, had to be separated in the minds of the novices from Common Mouse-ear and an anonymous but genuine Hawkweed, which we also saw. Lupins *Lupinus* spp. – for which the riverbanks here are notorious – were just coming into flower. Both Milkwords are present and we found the one that is commoner in these parts, viz Heath Milkwort *Polygala serpyllifolia*. We also identified several species not yet in flower, including Common Rockrose *Helianthemum nummularium*, Common Restharrow *Ononis repens* and Goldenrod *Solidago virgaurea*. The meadow where we started and finished has been carefully restored by SWT from a state of neglect, and delighted us with an abundance of Cowslip *Primula veris*.

Vice County 89

A small but enthusiastic band set off straightaway to do some recording along the riverside. The 'island' is well-recorded, but this was the first visit during the new post-Atlas era. We headed along the anglers' path to investigate the shingle areas, which are gradually becoming more overgrown and developing towards scrub and woodland. This should suit the Wood Vetch *Vicia sylvatica* that we found in a couple of places, not yet in flower. Willows were in profusion, most noticeably Purple Willow *Salix purpurea*, which formed thickets along the upper shingles. Dark-leaved Willow *S. myrsinifolia* was abundant also, often in its pure state. Otherwise Grey Willow *S. cinerea* ssp. *oleifolia* was the main species, and there were occasional Goat Willow *S. caprea* and Osier *S. viminalis*, as well as hybrids. Occasionally our path was almost blocked by young trees that had been felled by beavers.

The expected plants of the upper shingle and grassy edge were found, notably Shepherd's Cress *Teesdalia nudicaulis*, Pale Toadflax *Linaria repens*, Heath Dog-violet *Viola canina*, Sea Campion *Silene uniflora*, Alpine Lady's-mantle *Alchemilla alpina*, Horseshoe Vetch *Anthyllis vulneraria*, naturalised Columbine *Aquilegia vulgaris*, Northern Bedstraw *Galium boreale*, Smith's Cress *Lepidium heterophyllum*, Hairy Rock-cress *Arabis hirsuta*, Common Restharrow *Ononis repens*, Common Milkwort *Polygala vulgaris*, which is not at all common here, and Globeflower *Trollius europaeus*, among many others. Several people remarked on the wonderful variety of plants revealed at every step.

We came upon a small damp hollow where Bladder Sedge *Carex vesicaria* and Bottle Sedge *C. rostrata* growing together provided a useful comparison. With them were White Sedge *C. canescens* and Common Sedge *C. nigra*. Water Forget-me-not *Myosotis scorpioides* was here too, and Creeping Forget-me-not *M. secunda* not far away.



Tummel Shingle Islands VC89 group with Martin Robinson (kneeling), 28 May 2022

Being just downstream of Pitlochry there have always been various garden plants washed up and established on these islands, but at the southern extremity of our walk, on the side of a backwater, there were several in a very small area: notably Japanese Primula *Primula japonica*, Martagon Lily *Lilium martagon* and *Crocsmia*. They were farther than anyone would go to casually dump things, and appeared to have been deliberately introduced.

We were regaled most of the day by the chattering song of Garden Warblers, several Orange-tips were on the wing and someone saw a Speckled Wood, which has only recently arrived in these latitudes.

Faith Anstey (VC88) & Martin Robinson (VC89)

2. Ben Lawers grasses, sedges & rushes (training) (Joint BSBI, NTS, PSNS field meeting)

Saturday 23 July 2022

The previous year's two-level meeting at Ben Lawers was so popular that we decided to do the same again in 2022, when it proved even more so. Some of the participants had attended the BSBI workshops on Grasses and/or Sedges & Rushes, either in 2022 or in a previous year. Most had studied the associated booklets. Some were old hands in a new setting. So everyone was keen to get stuck into identifying GSR species in the flesh, in the wonderful setting of Ben Lawers – a place that is often described as 'a botanists' paradise'.

Car parking at Ben Lawers on a summer weekend being something of a nightmare, the first group, led by Dan Watson, met at 8 am in the main car park. This group comprised, by and

large, the more experienced and fitter members. The second group met at the more civilised hour of 10 am at the low level car park at Kiltyrie, leaders Faith Anstey and Martin Robinson. In contrast to 2021, the weather was overcast and, for Group One at any rate, decidedly wet, yet everyone enjoyed their day and learned a lot in the process.

Group One

Eight intrepid souls met at 8 am in mist and drizzle in the Ben Lawers car park and were promptly assaulted by midges. We soon got going and were pleased to leave the midges behind, although not the less-than-perfect weather. We started by running through the differences between sedges, grasses and rushes, using the examples of Green-ribbed Sedge *Carex binervis*, Tufted Hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa* and Soft Rush *Juncus effusus*. We made our way up through the nature trail, looking at a few examples of some more common graminoids before climbing up through Coire Odhar and investigating some of the many flushes which cross the path. Typical species in these included Dioecious Sedge *Carex dioica*, Few-flowered Spike-rush *Eleocharis quinqueflora* and Common Yellow-sedge *Carex demissa*, although Scottish Asphodel *Tofieldia pusilla* attracted more attention! The bealach between Meall Corranaich and Beinn Ghlas has a population of Water Sedge *Carex aquatilis*, and farther on into the north corrie of Beinn Ghlas, a short detour uphill from the path led to Russet Sedge *C. saxatilis* and Chestnut Rush *Juncus castaneus*. The boulders there provided some shelter for lunch, after which we continued to Creag Loisgte, the botanical paradise below the summit of Ben Lawers. Alpine Meadow-grass *Poa alpina* was easy to spot with its proliferous inflorescences and a GPS was used to navigate through thick mist to find a massive boulder with around 100 Black Alpine-sedges *Carex atrata* growing on it. Inevitably a bit of time was spent looking at some of the other arctic-alpines to be found on Creag Loisgte, including Mountain Sandwort *Sabulina rubella*, Alpine Gentian *Gentiana nivalis*, Alpine Forget-me-not *Myosotis alpestris* and Rock Whitlowgrass *Draba norvegica*.



Ben Lawers Group 1, 23 July 2022

The inclement weather didn't encourage us to potter for too long, so we actually made it back to the car park not long after the planned finish time, after a short detour into a bog to see a good population of Broad-leaved Cotton-grass *Eriophorum latifolium*. Despite the weather it was a very enjoyable day, helped by the good humour and enthusiasm of all participants.

Group Two

(NB: Regarding common names of species, I make no apology for the lack of hyphens!)

Eleven of us in the lower (geographically speaking!) group gathered in Kiltyrie car park. Car parks are famous for detaining botanists much longer than planned and sometimes coming up with surprising finds as well. The one at Kiltyrie is satisfyingly rich in grasses, sedges and rushes – all pretty common ones that might individually be found anywhere, but here all available for study within a few square metres. So we were able to spend the whole morning studying several representatives of each group in a systematic way, with lots of pointers as to what characters were most useful for ID.

After an early lunch we set off northwards, looking at graminoids in particular, but also at anything else interesting that caught our eyes. Among the latter we were pleased to see Mountain Pansy *Viola lutea* (in purple, not the yellow of the epithet), Grass of Parnassus *Parnassia palustris*, Yellow Saxifrage *Saxifraga aizoides*, and four different orchid species of the *Dactylorhiza* genus. These were Heath Spotted *D. maculata*, Common Spotted *D. fuchsii*, Northern Marsh *D. purpurella* and probable Early Marsh *D. incarnata* (uncertainty due to its having gone over). There were also several which looked to be hybrids between *D. purpurella* and one of the others.



< Ben Lawers Group 2, 23 July 2022
© Faith Anstey

We recorded 48 graminoids in all – 20 grasses, 19 sedges and 9 rushes. It was good to find both sexes of Dioecious Sedge *Carex dioica* growing close to each other, so that a mental connection could be formed between them. We also saw Bottle Sedge *C. rostrata* and Bladder Sedge *C. vesicaria* intermingled in a bog, providing an exercise in distinguishing them by colour before looking at leaves and fruits. Last year we were not certain if we had found Broad-leaved Cottongrass *Eriophorum latifolium* but Martin demonstrated how the peduncles are felt to be rough (especially to the lips), and so this species was confirmed, and in fact discovered to

be extremely common here. (If some of what we could see in the distance was Common Cottongrass *E. angustifolium*, we never found out.) We also had the opportunity to distinguish

Common Spike Rush *Eleocharis palustris* from Few-flowered Spike Rush *E. quinqueflora*. Having learnt to do so last year, we examined many specimens of very tall Yellow Sedges but none turned out to be Long-stalked Yellow Sedge *C. lepidocarpa* with its down-twisted utricles – all were judged to be Common Yellow Sedge *C. demissa*.

Towards the end of the afternoon we could see heavy rain clouds gathering (the ‘higher’ group could have told us all about it!) but we just got back to the car park as the rain began to fall in earnest. Some of our group were – as far as GSR were concerned – almost complete beginners at the start of the day, while others were considerably more experienced; indeed, the first choice of the latter was often the ‘higher’ group, but that had fewer spaces, which were filled very quickly when booking opened – take note for next season! However, we all felt that we had learnt a lot and enjoyed our day tremendously – leaders included!

Dan Watson (Group 1) & Faith Anstey (Group 2)

3. Composite Flowers Workshop, Kinghorn Loch

Saturday 6 August 2022

The latest in BSBI Scotland’s series of ID workshops for beginners and improvers, ‘Start to Identify Composite Flowers’, was eventually held in August after Covid delays. The venue was The Ecology Centre at Kinghorn Loch in Fife and the original plan was to have around 20 participants. However, layout changes at the Centre cut this to only seven. The upside was that we could all sit round one table and have hands-on access to every feature of the plants under discussion, which plants having been abundantly supplied by the two tutors, Matt Harding and Sandy Edwards.



Composite Flowers Workshop, Kinghorn Loch Ecology Centre, 6 August 2022
© Faith Anstey

The majority of participants had a professional interest in learning about plant ID – as ecologists, students, an organic farmer and so on – and the opportunity to study fresh specimens and, later on, to practise their new skills in the field, was much appreciated.

The course was structured around the booklet '*Start to identify Composite Flowers*' (Anstey 2021) which is based – as are all these workshops – on the concept of homing into ID via a dedicated flowchart, rather than by exhaustive keys, and by using field characters that avoid the need for microscopic examination. We passed fairly quickly over the Daisy and Thistle sections, as the yellow composites – the dandelion-like ones in particular – were the plants that students most fervently wanted to get a handle on. All agreed that the flowchart method gave them great help in getting to grips with this tricky group.



When we went outside to do some fieldwork, we were delighted to discover, among all the common composites featured in the booklet, two much lesser-known ones that required really close attention to ID: Scented Mayweed *Matricaria chamomilla* and Bristly Oxtongue *Helminthotheca echioides* – the latter not recorded in Fife for nearly 60 years.

Faith Anstey

< Examining Bristly Oxtongue
Helminthotheca echioides,
Kinghorn Loch Ecology Centre,
6 August 2022
© Faith Anstey

Articles and photos for next year's Bulletin are welcome at any time. They can cover any aspect of nature and the natural heritage, including geology and weather phenomena, as well as plants, birds and other wildlife.

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