

PERTHSHIRE SOCIETY OF NATURAL SCIENCE

NATURE SECTION

BULLETIN NO. 2 – MARCH 2024

It's good to report that the PSNS Nature Section enjoyed a successful first full year, with some well-attended lectures and excursions. Gratifyingly, audience sizes at most meetings have been higher than the usual attendances for our two predecessor Sections combined. One talk unfortunately had to be cancelled due to non-arrival of the speaker, but the rest were well-received, including several that couldn't neatly have come under the previous categories of either 'plants' or 'birds', for example Clive Mitchell's talk 'Earth: a user guide', while Steve Urquhart's sound presentation 'Doing Bird' about the archive sound recordings project in HMP Perth could hardly have been more different from most ornithology talks!

We are still a very small Section, though, in need of more members, so if you know anyone with an interest in wildlife or nature, please tell them about PSNS. We are a busy Society, offering at least one talk almost every week through the winter months, between the fortnightly flagship 'Curious Minds' science lectures on Friday evenings, and the Wednesday meetings of the Nature and Archaeological & Historical Sections, as well as excursions – so membership is extremely good value. The Society has leaflets that you can take to meetings of kindred bodies, or even keep one or two in the car, in case you meet enthusiasts while out & about. And if someone is already a member of PSNS, but hasn't attended Nature Section activities before, do encourage them to come along. We welcome people whatever their level of knowledge.

Excursion reports

1. Dollar Glen

Wednesday 26 April 2023

A group of seven met in the Quarry car park halfway up the hill to Castle Campbell on a dry, bright, very chilly, afternoon. The NTS display board opposite the car park, describes Dollar Glen as ancient woodland notable for Toothwort *Lathraea squamaria*, rediscovered by NTS rangers in 2012, previously thought extinct in the glen as not found for over ten years.

Toothwort is a very strange-looking plant: its one-sided, quite hairy spikes of pale pink, two-lipped flowers look like molar teeth. They have no green chlorophyll to process energy from the sun, only colourless leaves at the base of the flower-spike or underground, and rely for nutrients on parasitizing tree roots, usually hazel *Corylus avellana*, elm *Ulmus* spp., Alder *Alnus glutinosa* or Beech *Fagus sylvatica*. It is a rare plant in Scotland, usually lowland with only one site known north of Perthshire.

We set off down the steep winding path through leafless Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur* woodland with a blue haze of Bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* just emerging from a carpet of orange-brown dead bracken, with uncurling green fronds of Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and patches of fresh pale-green Creeping Soft-grass *Holcus mollis*. At the bottom of the slope, we turned south towards Dollar village. There is a Victorian viewpoint built out over the burn where we were able to appreciate in safety the many ferns and moss species growing on the rocky sides of the gorge. A little farther on, a boardwalk bridges a near-vertical drop. Here we found the first plants of Toothwort.

In all we found three populations within about 200 metres above the Filterhouse Bridge, the point where the main path diverges and goes up the west side of the burn to Castle Campbell. On the east side of the path: 33 plants at NS 96195 98968 beside the boardwalk under Hazel;

70 spikes under a fallen Wych Elm *Ulmus glabra* at NS 96259 98889 with Hazel; and 32 spikes on the river side of the path under Hazel at NS 96245 98888. The pink flesh-coloured flowering spikes were hard to spot among a thick cover of dead leaves, with only a few flowers of Lesser Celandine *Ficaria verna* and Opposite-leaved Golden-saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* nearby.



L: Toothwort *Lathraea squamaria*; R: Slope with Toothwort, Dollar Glen, 26 April 2023 © Matt Harding

With help from Matt Harding, who took over from Jim McIntosh as BSBI Scotland Officer in November 2022, we identified 136 plant species in monad (kilometre square) NS9698 during our walk, the majority not yet in flower. Notable grass species not in flower were the woodland grass False-brome *Brachypodium sylvaticum* and a patch of Wood Millet *Milium effusum*. Celandines, Opposite-leaved Golden-saxifrage, Ramsons *Allium ursinum*, Dog's Mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, Wood-sorrel *Oxalis acetosella* and Barren Strawberry *Potentilla sterilis* were all in flower beside the path.



< Wood-sorrel *Oxalis acetosella*, Dollar Glen, 26 April 2023 © Matt Harding

As evening came, birdsong filled the woods; Jeff and Matt identified 17 bird species by their song and we were then able to locate them with binoculars, un-obscured by leaves which were only just appearing on the trees. We heard chiffchaff and willow warbler, both recently-arrived migrants. Excitingly, Matt identified the song of a Nuthatch, whose range is extending north, and Blackcap. More usual birds heard or seen were Coal, Great and Blue Tits, Blackbirds, Wrens, Chaffinch, Jackdaw and Woodpigeon. We saw a Treecreeper hiding behind an oak trunk and a Great-spotted Woodpecker. A Dipper was bobbing on stones in the burn, and a Grey Wagtail zigzagging upriver.



We warmed-up walking back up the tarmac road to the car park, admiring several unfurling clumps of Scaly Male-fern *Dryopteris affinis* agg. Young fern sporophytes are particularly beautiful in early spring. Many thanks to Matt for his lovely photos.

Liz Lavery

◀ Scaly Male-fern *Dryopteris affinis* agg.,
Dollar Glen, 26 April 2023
© Matt Harding

2. Moncrieffe Island, Perth

Sunday 14 May 2023

With just four people meeting at Rodney Gardens at 7am, the first discussion was whether it was too early for some people, or should it have been earlier? The aim of the excursion was to listen to birdsong as an aid to identification, and a Song Thrush was in full voice as we crossed the Tay to Moncrieffe Island. Two more seen later were behaving typically, probing the undergrowth. More song met us at the island. Easy to identify were Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler and Chaffinch, the former two remaining unseen. Prime sightings included a pair of Bullfinches and Long-tailed Tits, all of which were too busy foraging to worry about our presence. Other species, such as Great Tits, Blackbirds, Robin and Dunnock, were revealed by their song before being spotted. Later, the bright splashes of colour from some Goldfinches and a Grey Wagtail (bright yellow is rather more prominent than grey) helped in revealing their presence. A Treecreeper was spotted due to its foraging behaviour rather than its plumage. In all, 28 bird species were seen or heard by the time the event finished at 10:30; all were recorded on the BTO's BirdTrack database www.bto.org/our-science/projects/birdtrack.

3. Birnie, Gaddon and Lindores Lochs

Saturday 27 May 2023

The primary intention was to look for the birds on Birnie and Gaddon lochs and in the surrounding woodland, but we also looked at the plant life, mostly when the birdlife was quiet.

Some Mallard and gulls weren't shy and stood about the car park area, presumably a reflection of the inclination of visitors to feed them. The walk enters the woodland margin where the water is not always seen but there the song was most persistent and amongst the better-known species, including a one-legged Robin, several Wrens and many Willow Warblers; a Blackcap could be clearly heard while remaining unseen. A Red Squirrel bounded up a Scots Pine, corkscrewing the trunk and pausing to check whether it was far enough from us yet. A Roe Deer was also seen. Had there been an entomologist in the party of five, we might have noted more than the Orange-tip and Small White butterflies and the damselflies. One fungus was noted, April Pinkgill *Entoloma aprile*, its name reflecting its unusual time of fruiting, and making it easy to pin down the ID. Amongst a lot of common plants that were noted was Heath Groundsel *Senecio sylvaticus*, identification helped by the trial use of an app which couldn't give the species name but provided the genus as a clue.

Bird life on the lochs was quiet, in contrast to a previous visit a month earlier in the year. As we were to find at Lindores Loch, that month made all the difference. A Moorhen called, a Grey Heron stood rigid, a few Lesser Black-backed Gulls and a Black-headed Gull flew and two Mute Swans carefully herded seven cygnets. Altogether, 21 species of birds and 30 plants were recorded.

The return homewards was interrupted by an unscheduled stop at Lindores Loch, where it was recalled that a previous visit had been very fruitful. But as noted above, that was not repeated, with just ten bird species seen, though we did enjoy watching and listening to the keeping-in-contact chatter of Long-tailed Tits, and watching the Great-crested Grebes.

Jeff Banks

4. Glen Fender

Saturday 3 June 2023

(Joint meeting with the Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland)

Fifteen of us met at the unexpected large new car park at the top of the Monzie road by Loch Moraig. Also unexpected were miles of electric fencing that weren't there last year, so that we had to detour back to the road to proceed from one field on to the next. However, there was so much to see that we were in fact never far from the car park all day.

We divided into two groups: those who had come principally for the training aspect were assisted and encouraged by Faith Anstey and Marion Moir, while those whose interest was more in the rarities and special plants of the Glen were expertly led by Matt Harding. However, both groups covered more-or-less the same ground one way or another. The sun shone all day, but there was a gentle breeze that made for very pleasant weather. The preceding dry weather made it fairly stable underfoot, too, in contrast with the usual squelchy boot-sucking bog.

Glen Fender is a mosaic of acid, neutral and calcareous soils, wetter and drier areas, peat bog and spring-fed fen, with upland heath, scrub and semi-improved grassland all within a small compass. Thus it is botanically extremely rich and varied. The area we concentrated on is an alkaline mire of National Vegetation Classification type M10 *Carex dioica* – *Pinguicula vulgaris* type, and indeed those were among the very first plants that we found. Our final species count was 127, all in a single monad NN9067.

We soon came across Scottish Asphodel *Tofieldia pusilla*, a tiny Arctic-Alpine plant confined to the Scottish Highlands (with an outlier in Teesdale). Close by was Hair Sedge *Carex capillaris* – another small and delicate specialist of upland calcareous grassland. Alpine Meadow-rue *Thalictrum alpinum* is another denizen of similar habitats, one of the few seen by Matt's group but not the others. Alas, the rarest species False Sedge *Carex simpliciuscula*, formerly known as *Kobresia* (and I can't be the only person who regrets the change of name, which was so easy to remember – and to spell!) and Brown Bog-rush *Schoenus ferrugineus*, known only from this vice county and the neighbouring vc89, eluded us.



L: Scottish Asphodel *Tofieldia pusilla*; R: Hair Sedge *Carex capillaris*,
Glen Fender, 3 June 2023. © Faith Anstey

Other plants of interest were Moonwort *Botrychium lunaria* (5 or 6 tiny specimens within a few inches of each other), Alpine Bistort *Bistorta vivipara*, Common Twayblade *Neottia ovata* and Grass of Parnassus *Parnassia palustris* – neither of the latter flowering yet – with Heath Spotted, Early Marsh and Northern Marsh Orchids *Dactylorhiza maculata*, *D. incarnata* and *D. purpurella*, with a possible hybrid between the last two. Altogether 13 *Carex* species were found, and the area we were in had abundant Broad-leaved Cottongrass *Eriophorum latifolium*, as well as the more usual – and extremely similar – Common Cottongrass *E. angustifolium*.

So rich was this small part of the Glen, with something fresh turning up every few minutes, that I think there might have been a group-wide wish that we had been spending the whole weekend there. Perhaps next year...

Faith Anstey

5. Caputh

Sunday 2 July 2023

Thirteen of us parked behind Caputh Village Hall to start our walk along the farm track towards Sparrowmuir and Braecock Mill. We were a happy band of birders and plant hunters, a reunion for many who had not been on a walk together since Covid curtailed most excursions. Margaret Chapman kindly recorded plants in my notebook, while Ron, our leader who lives nearby and knows the area well, made his own list also recording birds, butterflies and insects. The track led east through arable fields to the north bank of the River Tay and eventually to a botanically-rich expanse of river shingle.

The crops on either side of the track seemed not to have been intensively sprayed, although parts of the riverbank had been sprayed to control invasive Japanese knotweed *Reynoutria japonica*. Some of the fields had lovely displays of Scentless Mayweed *Tripleurospermum inodorum* amongst green stems of wheat. There were a good number of arable weeds around

the edges of fields and farm buildings, with some quite rare ones; small patches of Corn Marigold *Glebionis segetum* and Corn Spurrey *Spergula arvensis* (both listed as vulnerable on the UK IUCN Red List), Wild Pansy *Viola tricolor* (listed as near-threatened), and, in several field corners, the odd-looking Common Fiddleneck *Amsinckia micrantha*, a member of the Borage family. I got quite excited about this one as I have never found it in my vice-county, West Perthshire. It is not regarded as native in Britain, described by Stace, the botanists' bible, as a neophyte, introduced since 1492, when Christopher Columbus arrived in the New World.

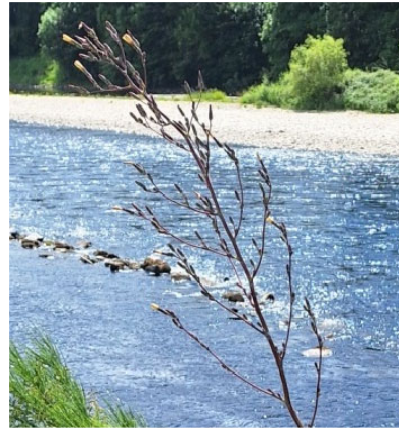


Our lunch spot beside the River Tay, 2 July 2023. © Liz Lavery

We sat on the riverbank to eat our lunch with botanical highlights both behind and in front of us. In the unmown grass behind were tall yellow spikes of Agrimony *Agrimonia eupatoria* with sweet-smelling clumps of Wild Marjoram *Origanum vulgare*. Nearby was a patch of Wild Thyme *Thymus polytrichus* spreading over the path; all prefer base-rich soils. The most impressive plant of the day was scattered along the riverbank here, enormously tall plants of Great Lettuce *Lactuca virosa* growing out of boulder rip-rap protecting the riverbank. It is a relatively rare plant in Scotland, with only 215 records, mainly found on the east coast as far north as Angus. A few grey woolly stems of Great Mullein *Verbascum thapsus* were rooted in stone-filled gabions. Nearby were some plants of Large-flowered Evening-primrose *Oenothera glazioviana*.

After lunch it was a short walk to the large area of river shingle, the main object of our walk. River shingles can have some very unusual plants washed down from higher in the catchment, and these shingles were no exception. Near the woodland edge was a large area of Kidney Vetch *Anthyllis vulneraria*. It grows on upland basic outcrops and by the sea, and is the food plant for the larvae of the Small Blue Butterfly *Cupido minimus*.

On the bare shingle were spreading clumps of Heath Dog-violet *Viola canina*, many scattered patches of Northern Bedstraw *Galium boreale* and Sea Campion *Silene uniflora*. The star on the shingle was discovered by Les Tucker, a sprawling patch of Stone Bramble *Rubus saxatilis*. Most unusual were blue flowers of dwarf Milky Bellflower *Campanula lactiflora* washed across the river from Murthly. Other remarkable plants growing on the shingle were Gypsywort *Lycopus europaeus*, Corn Mint *Mentha arvensis*, dwarfed flowers of Monkeyflower *Mimulus* agg., a few flowers of Goldenrod *Solidago virgaurea*, several sprawling patches of Creeping-Jenny *Lysimachia nummularia* and a few plants of Purple-loosestrife *Lythrum salicaria*. Dwarfism of several species reflected the low level of nutrients in the shingle.



Great Lettuce *Lactuca virosa* beside River Tay.
Bottom: 6 June 2023 © Lynette Youngman. Top: Flowers, 2 July 2023 © Liz Lavery



< Dwarf Milky Bellflower *Campanula lactiflora* on River Tay Shingle,
2 July 2023
© Maciej Brzeski



River Tay Shingle with Stone Bramble *Rubus saxatilis*, 2 July 2023

© Maciej Brzeski

Lupins *Lupinus x pseudopolyphyllus* (*L. nootkatensis* x *polyphyllus*) of all shades and colours provided a stunning show along the riverbank. Good weather and sightings of a dozen or so bird species plus some butterflies and other insects all contributed to a very enjoyable walk. Two roe deer ran off through a field of wheat. Colin saw a dead common shrew but no signs of rabbits, beavers or otters. We recorded in monads NO0839, NO0939 and NO1039, a total of 166 plant species.

Ron Youngman and Liz Lavery

6. Ben Lawers

Saturday 22 July 2023

(Joint meeting with the Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland and National Trust for Scotland)

This year's meeting was the third in what seems to be becoming an annual event at this Scottish mecca for botanists, such is its popularity with both leaders and visitors, and for all levels of expertise. As usual, we were divided into two groups. I report first on the lowland group, for participants especially wanting to learn more about graminoids and to improve their ID skills. Dan Watson's report on the upland group for more experienced botanists follows.

Lowland Group

Martin Robinson and Faith Anstey met eleven other keen (and mostly young) ecologists and other enthusiastic novices at Kiltyrie. We spent the whole morning in the car park area, which is furnished with a great variety of graminoid species. Using the '*Start to Identify...*' booklets and various other field guides, we were able to pinpoint the differences between the three graminoid groups and then to study the finer points of ID for each individual species we found. While we were studying these earthbound specimens, suddenly someone pointed to the sky and there was an awed hush for a minute or two as we watched a pair of ospreys circling high above.



Studying species-rich grassland, Ben Lawers, 22 July 2023
© Faith Anstey

After lunch we went on to the lower slopes of the hill, which was much less waterlogged than in previous years, so made for easy walking. The weather was pleasant – little sun, but no rain either. In total we identified 20 species of grasses, 8 rushes and 16 sedges. In one particularly rich patch (see pic), we counted 15 different graminoid species in an area about 30cm x 100cm.

As far as the sedges were concerned, we were again pleased to find Bottle Sedge *Carex rostrata* and Bladder Sedge *C. vesicaria* in close proximity for comparison, the Cottongrasses *Eriophorum angustifolium* and *E. latifolium* similarly, and both sexes of Dioecious Sedge *C. dioica*. As in previous years, we examined a good many rather tall yellow sedges and found them all to be Common Yellow-sedge *C. demissa*, none Long-stalked Yellow-sedge *C. lepidocarpa* as formerly recorded.

As we walked back to the car park – on an interesting old drove road that must once have gone up the hill, but now disappears into a mire – everyone agreed that it had been a most enjoyable day and one on which we had all added to our knowledge of grasses, sedges and rushes.

Upland Group

A smaller group of eight visited the high ground at the east end of the Ben Lawers range. Participants had intermediate to good skills in graminoid identification, and it was clear that most had come to see montane species at the best location for them in Scotland. We ascended the southern slopes of Meall Garbh, soon finding Hair Sedge *Carex capillaris*, Russet Sedge *C. saxatilis*, Sheathed Sedge *C. vaginata*, Broad-leaved Cottongrass *Eriophorum latifolium* and Three-flowered Rush *Juncus triglumis* along with a few spikes of False Sedge *C. simpliciuscula* and Chestnut Rush *J. castaneus*. Many more common species were picked up as we ascended the slope, soon getting into the high altitudes where Stiff Sedge *C. bigelowii* and Spiked Wood-Rush *Luzula spicata* become common, although we failed to find any Three-leaved Rush *J. trifidus*.

After lunch at the summit, we dropped down to the single location where Close-headed Alpine-sedge *Carex norvegica* is found on the Ben Lawers range, before heading towards the flushes in the bealach between Meall Garbh and Meall Greigh where other highlights included Scorched Alpine-sedge *C. atrofusca*, Bristle Sedge *C. microglochin*, vegetative Rock Sedge *C. rupestris*, Two-flowered Rush *Juncus biglumis* and Alpine Rush *J. alpinoarticulatus*. We also came across more *Eriophorum latifolium* at 946 m, a new altitudinal record for this species.

In total we identified 10 species of grass, 11 rushes and 25 sedges over the course of an enjoyable and tiring day.

Faith Anstey



Upland group, Ben Lawers, 22 July 2023
© Dan Watson, NTS

7. Birnam grasses workshop

Saturday 29 July 2023

(Joint meeting with the Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland)

We met in Birnam Guide Hall, which was perfect for our needs. Sixteen people attended and it was immediately striking how low the average age was. Twelve were in the 20-39 age bracket and eleven worked for ecological consultancies and four in other environmental sectors. It felt very satisfying to be giving them something they needed and couldn't get elsewhere, as we explored the identification of grasses from the very beginning. The course was based on Faith's booklet '*Start to Identify Grasses*' which features 20 common species of neutral grassland. The attendees worked in four groups, with Martin Robinson, Faith Anstey, Sandy Edwards, Robin Payne and Neale Taylor as tutors.

After a basic introduction to the subject, nailing down what a grass is, how it differs from a sedge and a rush, we then used handouts to look at the parts and different forms of inflorescence and the whole structure of a grass. The tutors had all brought in freshly-gathered material of a range of species, which helped with demonstrating the use of the flow-chart in the booklet.

In the afternoon we started with an identification session, using all the material that had been brought in, and then we walked a circuit from the hall to look at live plants. Just down the road was a wide unmown verge, where many of the 20 species could be found in flower or fruit. The route then returned along the riverside where some additional woodland species were added. Feedback afterwards indicated that we had got it just about right and the objectives of the course had been well met.

Faith Anstey

8. Dalguise

Sunday 13 August 2023

On a very wet morning nine of us gathered in the angler's car park beside the River Tay at Dalguise. We were on the west bank of the River Tay in VC 88, Mid Perthshire for this outing, a few miles upriver from Caputh; the boundary between Mid and East Perthshire, VC88 and VC89 runs down the middle of the River (as mapped in 1852!). This time our leader was the botanical author and teacher, Faith Anstey, who lives nearby. She had arranged parking for us with the ghillie at Dalguise Fishings but, like Cinderella, we had to be away by 5 pm when he locked the gate. For a little while we sheltered under the railway bridge which crosses the Tay there and we found several plants of Wall Lettuce *Mycelis muralis* amongst the rubble under the bridge. The torrent of rain eased to a persistent drizzle and we ventured south along the riverbank, mown for easy access by anglers but still with interesting plants on the steep slope down to the river's edge and trees and bushes on the landward side.

Faith took this opportunity to explain some of the intricacies of identifying plants to Kirstie, my Identiplant student. We were delighted she had joined us for this excursion. Identiplant is an online course in plant identification, written by Brenda Harold and now administered by BSBI (Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland) <https://identiplant.bsbi.org>.

We recorded over 100 plant species in NN9947 in our wanderings during the morning. Some goodies on the unmown river slope were Northern Bedstraw *Galium boreale*, Goldenrod *Solidago virgaurea* and two separate small populations of the relatively rare Shady Horsetail *Equisetum pratense*. The bank was colourful with flowers of Lupin *Lupinus x pseudopolyphyllus* (*L. nootkatensis x polyphyllus*) which is ubiquitous along the River Tay, white heads of Oxeye Daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*, pink Common Restharrow *Ononis repens* and blue Field Scabious *Knautia arvensis*. Notable grasses were False-brome *Brachypodium sylvaticum*, a woodland species, Soft-brome *Bromus hordeaceus* and tall stands of Reed Canary-grass *Phalaris arundinacea*. Meadow Crane's-bill *Geranium pratense* and Wood Crane's-bill *G. sylvaticum* were growing almost side-by-side, showing the differences clearly between these lovely plants. Martin was excited when he spotted a tiny Lady's Mantle growing in mown grass along the track and thought it could be the rare *Alchemilla wichurae*. He collected some and sent it to the BSBI referee, who sadly was not convinced, and Martin will have to go back and collect more next summer.

Colin took us to a point where a narrow inlet separated us from a wooded part of Dowally Island. In the bank opposite was a beaver lodge with evidence of much activity. From here we retreated to the car park for lunch. It stopped raining and the sun came out. While munching our lunch Les showed us an impressive collection of willow twigs he had gathered along the river bank, and explained how we could tell them apart. He later sent me a list; this included Crack-willow *Salix euxina*, an introduction frequently found along rivers, Dark-leaved Willow *S. myrsinifolia*, Purple Willow *S. purpurea* and the hybrid *S. x pontederiana* (*S. cinerea x*

purpurea) as well as the commoner Osier *S. viminalis*, Goat Willow *S. caprea* and Rusty Willow *S. cinerea* subsp. *oleifolia*; special thanks to Les for these records.



Dalguise, 'the rain has cleared', River Tay looking south, NN9948, 12 August 2023
© Liz Lavery



Botanists at work, Dalguise, 12 August 2023
L. © Liz Lavery, R © Faith Anstey

After lunch, drying out and in sunshine we walked north of the fishing hut, firstly along a wide mown area then through a patch of woodland to a narrow path by the riverside. Unusually, at the edge of the mown area were two or three mature Monkey-puzzle *Araucaria araucana* and two trees of Plum *Prunus domestica* subsp. *domestica* laden with delicious fruit. In the woodland we were able to identify a few spreading clumps of Wild Basil *Clinopodium vulgare*. Farther on, beside the river was an area of herb-rich grassland with Lady's Bedstraw *Galium verum* and nodding bells of Harebell *Campanula rotundifolia*. Hidden in the grass were a number of beaver slides leading into the water, making walking treacherous in places. A large puddle near the car park was another indication that beavers are very active along this stretch of the Tay. The most unusual plant we found was a long-established stand of the introduced Chinese Ragwort *Sinacalia tangutica* on the edge of woodland, a new plant to me. The invasive non-native Himalayan Balsam *Impatiens glandulifera* was frequent in places both north and south of the fishing hut. Over 65 species were recorded in NN9948 during the afternoon. A total of 157 plant species (taxa) were recorded during a very enjoyable day in good company.



L: Chinese Ragwort *Sinacalia tangutica*, with pink flowers of Himalayan Balsam *Impatiens glandulifera*; R: Beaver trail leading to the River, Dalguise 12 August 2023 © Liz Lavery



Flooding under the railway bridge caused by beavers, 12 August 2023
© Liz Lavery

Liz Lavery

9. Loch Leven

Sunday 3 September 2023

Twelve of us met at RSPB Loch Leven on a beautiful sunny day to look at the birds and plants on the south side of Loch Leven. This is the largest natural freshwater loch in lowland Scotland, internationally important for its birdlife and home to a number of nationally rare plants.

Ron Youngman pointed out some interesting birds to be seen on the loch, including Osprey, Tufted Duck, Willow Warbler and Grey Wagtail, but we were just too early to witness the autumn migration of Pink-footed Geese for which the loch is famous. Red Admiral, Peacock, Large White and Speckled Wood butterflies were also seen. Many people commented on the attractive Common Darter dragonflies to be seen in several places along the path.

Loch Leven is such a great habitat for plants, it was hard to know what to concentrate on in just one day. Along the shoreline – where the water level was very low, exposing lots of rich mud – we saw the eponymous Loch Leven Spearwort *Ranunculus x levenensis* in a number of places and Lesser Water Plantain *Baldellia ranunculoides*, both of which are Red List species. We also found Mudwort *Limosella aquatica*, which hasn't a very thrilling name, but this little plant is nationally rare. We could have explored the Findatie Meadow more thoroughly, but we stopped only to admire the peerless Grass of Parnassus *Parnassia palustris* – possibly every botanist's favourite flower?



< Loch Leven Spearwort *Ranunculus x levenensis*, Loch Leven, 3 September 2023
© Faith Anstey



Lesser Water Plantain *Baldellia ranunculoides*, Loch Leven, 3 September 2023
© Faith Anstey

After lunch we were eager to get to the Levenmouth Pools, but then dismayed to hear that the area was now fenced off, complete with barbed wire and nailed-up gate. Admittedly since the last time I was at Loch Leven – at least 20 years ago – casual visitor numbers, including many cyclists, have increased enormously, so one can understand such a sensitive site being protected. However, the three most intrepid and single-minded botanists among us made light work of defying the defences (as pre-sanctioned by NatureScot), and were rewarded with an abundance of exciting plants. These included the very rare (Red List) Threadrush *Juncus*



filiformis, Nodding Bur-Marigold *Bidens cernua*, Marsh Speedwell *Veronica scutellata* and many others.

< Marsh Speedwell *Veronica scutellata*,
Loch Leven, 3 September 2023
© Faith Anstey

One plant for which Loch Leven is widely and justly famous is Holy Grass *Hierochloa odorata* which is said to have been planted around nearby churches for its pleasing scent. Yet although everyone kept their eyes open for it everywhere we went, we shamefully never caught a glimpse (or a sniff) of it! However, Liz is planning a trip in April, when it begins to flower, to check that it is still in all the known places. Apart from that omission, we had a great day, and I know that those of us who spent time at the Pools could happily have stayed there all week.

Faith Anstey

10. Birnam fungus foray

Saturday 16 September 2023

(Joint meeting with Tayside and Fife Fungal Group and Dundee Naturalists' Society)

Naturalists from Dundee, Perth and TaFFG met in the Beatrix Potter Garden in Birnam. The keen walkers went up the hill into Birnam Wood, and later reported several interesting fungal finds, including a small clump of the scarce Green Earth-tongue *Microglossum viride* in leaf-litter beside the path – not easy as it was small and well-camouflaged.

The fungal forayers and TaFFG members were led along the bank of the River Tay by Jim Cook. They discovered rich hauls of species, from caps to brackets and crusts. One famous species that we hoped to find, Death Cap, *Amanita phalloides*, unfortunately proved elusive. Several brittlegills *Russula* spp. and milkcaps *Lactarius* spp. were recorded, along with numbers of bonnets *Mycena* spp., and a single specimen of Meadow Waxcap *Hygrocybe pratensis*.

Fungi on wood included Southern Artists' Brackets *Ganoderma australe*, Honey Fungus *Armillaria* spp., and other smaller ones such as Hairy Curtain Crust *Stereum hirsutum*, Turkeytail *Coriolus versicolor* and Oak Curtain Crust *Hymenochaete rubiginosa*. Among several trees admired were one of the original Birnam Oaks and a very large and old sycamore. Between them the groups recorded a total of more than 60 species of fungi and greatly enjoyed the day.

Jim Cook, TaFFG

Precious persistence: the ecological legacy of Shetland botanical writing

A postgraduate research project by Rebecca Cornwell at UHI Perth is investigating how historical writings about Shetland wild plants shape our modern understanding of rare plant ecology, how we experience rare plants today, and how we feel about rare and vulnerable plant species especially in the face of climate change. Information on Shetland wild plants is being collated from various sources including books, archives, botanical databases, herbaria, and stakeholders and community members, to explore the changing relationships between people and nature. If you have experience of wild plants in Shetland, especially rare plants, please share your stories. For more details see www.perth.uhi.ac.uk/subject-areas/centre-for-mountain-studies/phd-students/rebecca-cornwell/precious-persistence-project.

An early nineteenth-century Flora of Fife

One positive aspect of the pandemic was that researchers had time to pursue 'lockdown projects' that otherwise might never have been written-up for publication. One example, by Henry Noltie, is a fascinating detective story investigating a copy of Thomas Hopkirk's *Flora Glottiana, A Catalogue of the Indigenous Plants on the Banks of the River Clyde, and in the Neighbourhood of the City of Glasgow*, published in 1813 and heavily annotated by an early owner. Through diligent research, Henry was able to attribute the annotations to James Heriot or his wife Margaret, owners of the estate of Ramornie, near Ladybank in Fife. The marginalia turn the volume into an early local Flora for Fife; many of the localities are estates that belonged to Heriot's relations. Some of the more interesting species records and their localities are discussed in *Archives of Natural History*, Vol. 50 Issue 2 (2023), while a separate supplement lists *all* the records. The Journal sits behind a paywall, but readers in Scotland are able to obtain free online access by joining the National Library of Scotland <https://auth.nls.uk/join>, and logging in. *Archives of Natural History* is published by EUP, so can be found in NLS e-resources under the 'E' tab <https://auth.nls.uk/eresources/browse/title/E>.

Butterfly Conservation activities

Butterfly Conservation has arranged two events in Perthshire in 2024: a Rare butterfly and moth workshop to look for Pearl-bordered Fritillary butterfly and Small Dark Yellow Underwing moth at Dun Coillich Community Woodland near Aberfeldy on 20 May; and a Northern Brown Argus recording workshop at Tummel Shingle Islands SWT Reserve near Pitlochry on 5 July. More activities should be organised later in the year – for information, see <https://butterfly-conservation.org/events/scotland>. To join a mailing list of people in Perthshire interested in these events, email Anthony McCluskey, Conservation Manager amccluskey@butterfly-conservation.org.

Articles and photos for the Bulletin, covering any aspect of nature and the natural heritage, are always welcome. Suggestions for potential speakers or excursion venues for future years will also be welcome.

Bulletin Editor: Colin R. McLeod

Colin.McLeod@nature.scot