



New Flora of the Isle of Man Newsletter

Newsletter Vol 3, November 2010

Welcome to the third edition of this newsletter for all those who are involved or interested in the Island's New Flora project to map and publish an atlas of the Island's flora. We have made lots of progress this year with more training days (see inside) and more tetrads begun. We are also starting to get more finished tetrads (nearly 20% of the total so far). So thank you everyone for your

help.

For those who have not done so please let me have your 2010 records, or if you have had a 'year out' do let me know. Also do send in any interesting incidental flora records of plants you see around the Island.

AD



Wood Horsetail

DEFA (Dept of Environment, Food and Agriculture) are currently consulting on species to add to the Wildlife Act's Schedule 8. This is the bit of the Wildlife Act that says which plants should definitely not be introduced into the wild.

This is the reason for the gallery of unwelcome plants at the top of the page. From left to right are—

Hotontot Fig: a plant that has carpeted miles of Cornish cliffs smoothing all in its path. So far on the Island, only found in the wild at Summerland.

Himalayan Balsam: a familiar thug from Asia that is spreading rapidly around our waterways and wetlands.

New-Zealand Pigmyweed: Still sold as an aquatic in Manx garden centres despite years of awareness raising about the dangers of this species getting into native wetland habitats. It is spreading fast on the Island, and pictured here spreading on bare gravel at Cregneash

Car-park, a site that is only wet for a few months of the year.

Lastly **Giant Valarian:** which will be familiar to people in Laxey as it seems to have taken a liking to the local Glens.

Pink oxalis, just as pretty as our native oxalis, the wood sorrel, yet not valued in the same way.



Which of these species end up on Schedule 8 remains to be decided, but also in the running are cotoneasters, montbretia and many more besides.

The Flora survey will be seen for decades to come as the benchmark

for the distribution of these invasive and occasionally troublesome plants. Most of them seem to be increasing, but I suspect at least the giant hogweed at may at last be decreasing, thanks to weed control

efforts (shows it can be done!).

How much of a problem most of these invasive species are is a contentious matter of debate in ecological circles, with many respected ecologists claiming their harm is greatly overstated and others taking a precautionary approach.

For example a rapidly spreading shrub on the Island is

Himalayan

cotoneaster, which

while no doubt invasive, it is hard to pinpoint actual harm it is doing to the native flora, and yet somehow it does not seem to belong.

What is widely agreed however is the need to monitor the situation and naturally this is what we are so actively doing.

AD

Grasses, Sedges



For what was surely the most intensive training course to date for the Flora project, we invited Chris Walker, a respected botanical trainer over to the Island for a two and a bit day course from the 9th to 11th July.

The course began with an evening session in the classroom looking at some of the basics of ID of this difficult group of species.

The second day began with a splash. The venue was Creglea, Niarbyl, on an outstanding ASSI wetland. The site visit was not declared over until everyone was soaked down to their bones from the deluge.

After drying off and having some lunch we proceeded to a more sunny Mullen-e-Cloie wild-flower nursery, where we saw



the captive bred grasses.

After a full day we proceeded to the pub for an evening meal only to go out to the Raggat for the third session of the day.

Day three started with a trip to Dalby Mountain MWT reserve to look at upland species. We were blessed with sunshine all day however and this certainly made note taking somewhat easier.

and Rushes Too



Chris showing us the most valuable lesson of the weekend —
never trust *Agrostis*!

The final session was at Ballachurry meadows in St Jude's, another ASSI, this time one of the Island's finest wildflower meadows. By this time we were taking baby steps into grass sedge and rush ID ourselves and were able to identify a dozen or more species from the meadow before stopping for a picnic lunch. The course ended as it began in the classroom, though by now most of us were brim-full of knowledge and hopefully ready to take on some solo field work.

For the participants of the course who now despair at remembering all the hard won knowledge, don't worry we shall hold at least one refresher course in the spring, and give those who were not able to come on this oversubscribed course a chance to catch up. Thanks go to Chris Walker for his excellent and value for money training and to Peter McEvoy for facilitating the course.



The Status Of Water Figwort (*Scrophularia auriculata*) on the Island.

Water figwort was considered in David Allen's 1984 flora to probably be introduced to the Island with just one known site by a farm house. In the past twenty years however the occasional record around the Central Valley has cropped up. Indeed



this year a good 2+m high brute (pictured with Aline Thomas) was found at the Raggatt. It is very similar to common figwort but as well as its greater size, look for winged stems (not just sharply four-angled) and winged leaf-stalks. Its fair to say this species is probably native to the Central Valley.

AD

How will The Flora Data be used

If you think the data you are collecting is just contributing to the Isle of Man Atlas, think again, it will be used in many varied ways.

- The BSBI tetrad atlas
 - The next British Atlas flora
 - New field and ID Guides
 - Plant distribution research
 - Identifying potential ASSIs
 - Identifying potential Wildlife Sites
 - Rare Species Action Plans
 - Planning enquiries and appeals
 - Wildlife Act Schedules
- And probably much more

AD

A fresh look at Isle of Man lichens: British Lichen Society visit April 2010

While we've been trying to crack the grasses and sedges, others have been tackling another quite tricky aspect of the Island's biodiversity. In April, a visit to the Isle of Man by members of the British Lichen Society (BLS) not only brought us updated information on this group of enigmatic organisms but also revealed, to yours truly at least, their complexity and beauty.

Lichens may look a bit like plants, and do have the capacity to make their own food from photosynthesis, just like the vascular plants, mosses and liverworts. However lichens differ in that each one is actually a mutually dependent association of a green or blue-green alga and a fungus. Fungi are not plants at all, but are in their own separate taxonomic group or Kingdom. They provide structure for the lichen, retain moisture and sometimes extract nutrients from the substrate. The algal component may be a species of green or blue-green alga, and contributes food through photosynthesis. The combination obviously works as lichens are able to survive in very tough environments, such as sea sprayed cliffs, bare rock or roof tiles, where they have a colonising advantage over higher plants. Some tiny, unassuming species can even live in fresh water.

Sixteen BLS members came over for the visit, led by Emeritus Professor Mark Seaward of Bradford University. They were joined at various points around the Island by about six local people either interested in learning how to identify lichens or attending out of curiosity about these intriguing organisms. Lichen hotspots such as The Ayres and Ballaugh Curragh were explored, and different kinds of habitat studied, such as the limestone exposures of the Poolvaish coast compared with the acid Manx Group rocks at the Sound. A trip to The Raggatt revealed a surprisingly diverse lichen 'flora' in the Congary Curragh area, attributed to lack of disturbance and, more importantly, the lack of agricultural chemical air pollution in this part of the Island.

A report of the visit and up to date species lists will be produced in the BLS Bulletin and probably also in Isle of Man Natural History and Antiquarian Society Proceedings.

Advance notice: To mark the end of the International Year of Biodiversity, Professor Seaward will visit the Island again to deliver a public lecture about lichens and their place in understanding the natural world. The talk will be in Manx National Heritage's new iMuseum, Kingswood Grove, Douglas on Wednesday 19th

January at 7.30pm. All welcome.

KH

New Publications

2010 has seen two new wildflower ID books published. Both are technical (i.e. expensive) volumes and strictly only for the most dedicated enthusiast.

The third edition of Stace's 'New Flora of the British Isles' has been well received by the botanical community. This is the authoritative account of how to ID wildflowers and what latin names to use for them. More than a handful of plants have had their names changed, (eg hart's tongue fern is now grouped with the spleenworts, *Asplenium*) and some sub-species have been promoted to species, but the major difference is that the plant families have been radically altered to reflect the genetic not just phenotypic differences. Don't worry too much about this as it will not effect the survey, but expect the name of some species you record to be quite differently labelled in the finished Flora.

The second book is the new BSBI 'Grasses of the British Isles'. Those of us that used it at the grasses training day did not find it a huge advance to previous guides and it is technical. Its lack of distribution maps is also unhelpful, however it is the most up-to date and comprehensive publication on the subject and I have certainly used it as my grass ID book of first choice this year.

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This newsletter was written and produced by the New Flora of the Isle of Man Working Group.

Elizabeth Charter (LC)
Liz.Charter@gov.im
Andree Dubbeldam (AD)
andree@manxwt.org.uk
Kate Hawkins (KH)
Kate.Hawkins@gov.im
Stephen Jeffcoate (SJ)
sjeffcoate@btinternet.com
Peter McEvoy (PM)
peter.mcevoy@gov.im
Linda Moore (LM)
ecotype@manx.net
Philippa Tomlinson (PT)
philippa.tomlinson@gov.im