



Botanical Newsletter for
South Northumberland.
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This photograph of the Stone Bramble, *Rubus saxatilis*, celebrates a distinguished but rather underrecorded native of rocky calcareous woods and cliffs. Stone Bramble still occurs in several localities in the south-west of our county, for instance Gilderdale and Gelt Dale, Allendale, and the Irthing. However, this May the 'Wednesday Botany' Group of the Natural History Society of Northumbria were impressed to find it carpeting large tracts of a private wood near Bickerton, just south of the Coquet, our vice-county boundary to the north. This wood seems not have been visited by botanists before, and we were amazed by the hundreds of thousands of *Paris quadrifolia*, good populations of *Trollius europaeus* and *Orchis mascula*, and just-emerging Birds-nest Orchid, *Neottia nidus-avis*.

Northern Hawksbeard bonanza

2019 will perhaps be best remembered for impressive numbers of many butterflies, not just because it was a 'Painted Lady year', but scarce residents such as Dark-green Fritillaries, Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries and Large Heaths also appeared in unprecedented quantities. Appropriately, Butterfly Orchids also surpassed themselves, and most known populations of *Platanthera chlorantha* in Hexhamshire and Allendale emerged in large numbers. At least one site boasted more than 100 spikes and several others exceeded their half century.

Nevertheless, to this botanist at least, 2019 will be remembered as the '*Crepis mollis* year'. Readers of earlier editions will remember a report in Newsletter 3 (autumn 2017) concerning the discovery of several new populations south of Allendale town, where sites for this rare plant were already well-known. This was particularly significant because this species has lost most of its localities away from north-east England and is now probably extinct in Scotland and most of its previous range in Cumbria and Yorkshire. In fact, research for a note I have recently prepared for the BSBI suggests that in 2019 South Northumberland held 50-70% of British localities and 90% of British plants.

Nevertheless, back in 2017 we only recorded about 160 flowering individuals in vc 67 and they had finished flowering by July 16th. In 2018 both Lizzie Maddison and Ruth Starr-Kettle reported significant new finds in Allendale. When I investigated these in the last week of June 2019 (the peak season in 2018), I found four plants at Lizzie's site and none at Ruth's. Nothing daunted, I went to Kitty Green at the start of

July 2019 where about 100 plants were in flower. At this point, Lizzie emailed to say that another new site she had become aware of post-flowering in 2018 had 537 flowering plants!! She kindly took me to see this amazing site which is on private land near West Studdon. On the same morning I revisited Ruth's site and found about 100! Lizzie's Prospect Hill site now boasted over 30, there were 37 at Spartylea, and I found a new site at St. Peters Cottage. In total, over 900 flowering plants were seen in Allendale this summer, and most were in full flower at a date when all had finished in 2018. There are several morals to this story including the importance of Allendale to this beleaguered species, but also that it has a very short and variable season and several visits may be necessary in a year to establish its presence (or absence). It is almost certainly underrecorded elsewhere; hopefully the rest of the country does in fact hold more than 10% of the total number of individuals! Incidentally, one of the two North Northumberland sites is also still surviving strongly. Here is a small part of the W. Studdon population.



New records.

Of two (or three) new county records this year, perhaps the most interesting is a report by Sophie Webster of *Vicia dumetorum* at Low Hauxley Nature Reserve. This large scrambling vetch has bright purple flowers and is most closely related to *V. sepium* amongst British species, but is a much brighter green and has semicircular dentate stipules. Although *V. dumetorum* occurs from Denmark right across northern and central Europe and into Asia, remarkably this seems to be the first British and Irish record and Sophie and her colleagues are to be congratulated for identifying it correctly.

Sophie and her colleagues also reported Dropwort, *Filipendula vulgaris* from Hauxley where it seems to have been overlooked before. This is still well-known as a native on the Whin Sill at Riverhill Farm, where it remains quite abundant, but it is clearly a recent introduction at Hauxley where it joins *Vicia dumetorum*, *Dipsacus laciniatus* and several other curious occurrences. Doubtless, some such as the teasel and *Senecio inaequidens* have resulted from the extensive use of bird-feeders there. Others may have resulted from the incautious use of 'amenity seed mixes' years ago when the Reserve was being set up.

When Lydia Koelmans visited the lane which runs past Arcot Hall ponds last May, she found a rather rich annual flora on hard-core heaps which had been used to block traffic from the footpath. She collected a lambs-lettuce which seemed to key down to *Valerianella carinata*, although the fruits were immature. Six weeks later I visited the site and after detailed searching was able to identify a few withered scraps of *Valerianella* which bore a few dried fruits. These were isodiametric, long and deeply grooved and clearly were indeed from *V. carinata*. Remarkably, although this can be a frequent weed in southern England and is recorded north into Scotland, there is no previous record from vc 67.

Lydia was 'square-bashing', recording for the new 2020 Atlas, as was Mark Welfare when he visited Newbiggin Church Point. Finding Bird's-foot, *Ornithopus perpusillus*, in the trodden sandy pathway must have been a hands and knees job, but square-bashing not only stimulates us to visit new areas, but to examine them closely! This tiny legume still hangs on in a couple of similar sites in North Northumberland, but according to the BSBI Ddb, and the 'Flora North-east' website, it has never been recorded in vc 67. However Swan (1992) notes that Wallis reported it from 'sand-hills, Seaton Sluice', which seems a very plausible record. In any case, it is the first record for vc 67 for nearly two centuries.



Look at your inland scurvy-grasses!

The taxonomy of British and Irish *Cochlearia* is complex, has changed in recent years, and may still not have settled down. In South Northumberland, we have known for some time that the coastal plant is *C. officinalis* and the plant on inland streams and heavy-metal sites in the hills is *C. pyrenaica*. They can look very similar although they have different chromosome numbers. It is interesting to note that *C. pyrenaica* descends the Tyne at least as far as Close House, while *C. officinalis* occurs on tidal mud inland to Newburn! Of course, the abundant roadside annual is *C. danica*, but that is not part of this story, and neither is *C. anglica* which is very rare, or perhaps now extinct, on vc 67 salt-marshes.

In the mountains of Scotland, the Pennine Fells, and North Wales is a neat rosette-forming plant with small round deeply cordate leaf-blades. This is the tetraploid offspring of *C. pyrenaica* but has a different ecology, growing on well-drained alpine sites. It was previously known as *C. alpina*, but is now treated as *C. pyrenaica* ssp. *alpina*. It has never been certainly recorded in South Northumberland, although the Rev. J.E. Hull did record 'C. alpina' in 'Allendale' in 1916. Possibly this could be the site referred to below. However in vc 68 it is well-known on Cheviot. It is best identified by the short, orbicular fruits.

In August I visited the county boundary between Northumberland and Cumberland above Coalcleugh to investigate the moonworts there (at over 2000 feet this is a distinctly alpine site!). Whether

they might be *Botrychium nordicum* (Newsletter 6) is not yet clear (and they are in vc 70, darn it!). However, close to the road in well-drained metal-rich deposits just inside Northumberland I found a small scurvy-grass with tiny cordate leaves and orbicular fruits which is clearly *C. pyrenaica* ssp. *alpina*, a distinguished addition to the rather feeble alpine flora of vc 67!

