

Ballyhordan

15th August 2015

Leader Graham Day



Aster tripolium



Riparia riparia



Crambe maritima



Papaver dubium



Tringa totanus

On a sunny morning members gathered at **Ballyhordan** to walk along the beach towards **Killard**. Graham is the BSBI Recorder for Co. Down and with his wife, **Julia Nunn**, is recording the flora of the county in 1 km squares.

On the grass above the shore were typical seaside plants like the yellow **Lady's Bedstraw** (*Galium verum*) and the pinkish **Rest-harrow** (*Ononis repens*) – its tough woody stems can “arrest a harrow” and **Long-headed Poppy** (*Papaver dubium*). On the shore were the spinach-like **Sea Beet** (*Beta vulgaris*) and two of the many **Oraches** – **Frosted** (*Atriplex laciniata*) and **Spear-leaved** (*Atriplex prostrata*). Where water was seeping through the crumbling mud cliffs were **Watercress** (*Rorippa nasturtium-aquaticum*), **Marsh Horsetail** (*Equisetum palustre*) and **Sea Club-rush** (*Bolboschoenus maritimus*).

We admired the bluish-lilac **Field Scabious** (*Knautia arvensis*) which is uncommon in N.Ireland except on the south Co. Down coast and the blue of the rare **Bugloss** (*Anchusa arvensis*) which we had seen in June at the Dundarave sand-dunes. Large blocks of the glacial drift had fallen onto the beach during winter storms but we watched **Sand Martins** (*Riparia riparia*) feeding their young - apparently their nests can be dug over a foot deep into the sandy cliffs. The bird watchers also identified a **Stonechat** (*Saxicola torquata*) and **Dunlin** (*Calidris alpina*), **Redshank** (*Tringa totanus*) and **Oystercatchers** (*Haematopus ostralegus*) along with various gulls on the beach.

We thought we had spotted a Wall Brown butterfly (*Lasiomata megera*) which occurs at nearby Sheepland Harbour, but on closer inspection we decided it was a **Meadow Brown** (*Maniola jurtina*). The chilly wind so common this summer prevented other butterflies appearing.

After a picnic lunch we rounded a promontory into **Benderg Bay** to look in vain for the poisonous **Henbane** (*Hyoscyamus niger*). This was the main site for the plant but Webb describes it as “often impermanent”. However Graham was delighted to find at least 12 plants of the rare **Sea Kale** (*Crambe maritima*). The south Down coast is its most northern site and we had seen it in 2014 at Kearney. Graham reckons it rarely flowers at this latitude so must spread vegetatively.

A grassy area was reminiscent of nearby **Killard** with many plants of **Spring Squill** (*Scilla verna*) in seed. **Brookweed** (*Samolus valerandi*) belongs to the Primrose family and is a plant of marshy shores. **Sea Aster** (*Aster tripolium*) a relative of the North American Michaelmas Daisy, was coming into flower. We normally now only see **Corn Marigolds** (*Chrysanthemum segetum*) as part of “wild-flower” sowings, but here they were actually in a field of Oats! We were amused to see **Wild Carrots** (*Daucus carota*) growing in a field of **Edible Carrots** (*Daucus ssp. sativus*). The low-growing **Field Woundwort** (*Stachys arvensis*) is another “weed” of cultivation.

On BNFC excursions we benefit from the expertise of many members. Julia Nunn is a marine biologist and as the tide had gone out, she showed us **Thick-lipped Topshells** (*Monodonton lineata*) grazing on rocks. Their age can be calculated by counting the growth lines on the shells and one she had collected was 11 years old. **Nora Mc Millan** had studied their distribution which can be affected by cold winters. South County Down had been their northern Irish limit but climate change could encourage their moving northwards.

Graham will have a complete list of all the plants seen on the enjoyable visit to these varied habitats.

He and Julia were thanked for sharing their knowledge with us.

Margaret Marshall