

Victoria Park, Connswater

27th July 2015

Leaders Pamela Thomlinson Zoology and Margaret Marshall Botany



Centaurea cyanus



Chrysanthemum segetum



Ardea cinerea

Victoria Park was opened in 1906 on reclaimed land beside Belfast Lough and was landscaped by **Charles McKimm** who built the **Tropical Ravine in the Botanic Gardens**. The boating lake was formed when soil was dug out and piled up in banks to prevent flooding at high tide. It is an oasis for wildlife and an **ASSI** because of the bird life. Maritime plants grow beside the tidal stretch of the Connswater.

Wild flowers were sown in 2014 for the opening of the pedestrian and cycleway Sam Thompson Bridge which links the area to the Titanic Quarter as part of the **Connswater Community Greenway** project. Kyleen Clarke had sent photographs of these colourful banks of bright yellow **Corn Marigolds** (*Chrysanthemum segetum*). White **Ox-eye Daisies** (*Leucanthemum vulgare*), **Red Poppies** (*Papaver rhoeas*) and **Yarrow** (*Achillea millefolium*) were also present. On a dull Tuesday evening there was a good turn-out of members in their wet-weather gear, so needed this wet summer.

Annual wildflower seed mixes are often swamped by grasses after the first year, but there were still some Corn Marigolds, bright blue **Cornflowers** (*Centaurea cyanus*) and deep purple **Tufted Vetch** (*Vicia cracca*) in flower.

We walked along the embankment beside the Connswater where tall clumps of **Mugwort** (*Artemisia vulgaris*) were examined. It is related to **Wormwood** (*Artemisia absinthe*) used to make absinthe and is called after a queen of Asia Minor. The Vikings flavoured stews with Mugwort and it was supposed to ward off evil spirits during pagan mid-summer ceremonies. Maritime plants included **Sea Aster** (*Aster tripolium*) and **Sea Mayweed** (*Tripleurospermum maritimum*). **White Stonecrop** (*Sedum anglicum*) had been planted on the Lookout wall. Nearby are wooden boxes for park-users to leave and borrow books. Unfortunately while we were sheltering from a thundery shower, some of our members were at the receiving end of sodden books being used as missiles by a group of teenagers. The rain at least gave us a fine double rainbow to photograph.

An unusual tree was later identified by Maureen Dibble as being the **Bastard Service Tree** (*Sorbus thuringica fastigata*). It is a hybrid between Rowan and Common Whitebeam and has been grown since the late 18th century.

Along the river we saw **Grey Herons** (*Ardea cinerea*), **Black-headed gulls** (*Larus ribundundus*) and **Common Terns** (*Sterna hirundo*) from the nearby nesting area in the RSPB lagoon –WOW. Ivor Mc Donald pointed out the **Mallards** (*Anas platyrhynchos*) in their eclipse plumage in the lake where we also saw a pair of **Mute Swans** (*Cygnus olor*) with 10 fluffy cygnets.

In spite of the rain we had all enjoyed the evening walk in the park with a variety of plants and wildlife to enjoy.

Pamela Thomlinson and Margaret Marshall



Achillea millefolium