

Plants in Vice-County 104: A Review of January – June 2009

A Flora of Raasay and Rona was published on the Web at www.users.waitrose.com/~suisnish/ and an article on its production was written for the August SWT North Newsletter.

This year's **Threatened Plants Project** requires populations of *Cephalanthera longifolia* (Narrow-leaved Helleborine), *Dactylorhiza viridis* (*Coeloglossum viride*) (Frog Orchid), *Vicia orobus* (Wood Bitter-vetch) and *Gnaphalium sylvaticum* (Heath Cudweed) to be surveyed. The first three are best seen in the first half of the year or early in the second half. I agreed with the organisers not to do *C. longifolia* as I have visited all the sites in the vice-county in the past three years and my time is better spent elsewhere. Limited reports will be constructed based on these earlier visits.

Of the twelve populations I was given as suggested survey sites, 7 were on Rum, 1 on Eigg and 4 on Skye. Kevin Walker agreed to undertake the Rum ones, as this was the only one of the Small Isles that I had no plans to visit this year whereas he had a visit planned. Also, the Eigg site was one I had visited in 2008 and in the absence of a minibus service on Eigg when I was there this year, it was out of reach in the time available. Two of the Skye sites were *C. longifolia*, which leaves two Skye sites for *G. sylvaticum* - best done later in the year.

I have chosen my own sites and visited *D. viridis* sites on Sanday (Canna), Eigg, Raasay and Skye and *V. orobus* sites on Canna and Skye. Some very fine specimens have been found but in some cases I failed to find any plants of the target species. Maybe the best way to continue this project is simply to let the vice-county recorder select the sites to be visited. This will lead to some bias but surely not as much as the current system where 7 out of 12 sites in total, and all 6 *V. orobus* sites selected were on the island of Rum, which accounts for 5% of the land area in VC 104 – and it does not have a monopoly of any of these species.

Skye

- Perhaps the best record so far this year is James Merryweather's *Lycopodium annotinum* on Skye. Whilst quite plentiful on Scalpay, the only previous records for Skye were old and dubious – they were not accepted for Atlas 2000.
- The possible *Equisetum x mildeanum* (*E. pratense* (Shady Horsetail) x *E. sylvaticum* (Wood Horsetail)) from Portree mentioned in the H2 2008 report has not been confirmed.
- I forgot to say in the H2 2008 report that *Veronica agrestis* (Green Field-speedwell) was spotted as a weed in a Breakish garden, the first VC record for 12 years.
- The H1 2008 report shows *Senecio x ostenfeldii* as a new vice-county record. I have since learned of three 1985 records on Skye.
- Also from 2008, the willow hybrid *Salix x tetrapla* (*S. myrsinifolia* x *phylicifolia*) at Breakish in a planted row and as a single tree near the shore at Broadford, is new to vice-county 104.
- Two sites for *Cirsium x wankelii* (*C. heterophyllum* (Melancholy Thistle) x *C. palustre* (Marsh Thistle)) were found this year, though expert confirmation has yet to be sought.

- The *Peltaria* at Armadale has finally been determined definitively as *P. alliacea* (Garlic Cress). A short note has been prepared for BSBI News as this appears to be a first occurrence of it in the wild in the British Isles. Specimens have been deposited at the herbarium at RBGE.
- As a result of publishing my Flora of Raasay and Rona, Philip Samsun got in touch to send me a record of *Neottia nidus-avis* (Bird's-nest Orchid) from the same tetrad on Skye as one recorded in 1987. I had tried to find it in 2006 but failed. This year, I went to look for it in early June armed with Philip's grid reference and found twelve flowering spikes plus some old fruiting spikes.
- *Convolvulus arvensis* (Field Bindweed) and *Carlina vulgaris* (Carlina Thistle) were both spotted near Glendale. The former is very rare in the vice-county but had been recorded previously from this location. There are more records for *Carlina* but this is the first post-Atlas 2000 record on Skye. (Many records have been made on Eigg and Rum this decade.)
- A visit to Wiay off the west coast of Skye with Bill and Deirdre Peppe confirmed the presence of cranberry, one of only two locations recorded in VC104. It has minutely pubescent pedicels making it clear that the species is *Vaccinium oxycoccos* (Cranberry) rather than *V. microcarpum* (Small Cranberry). There has been some confusion in the past over which species was present.

Eigg

- Pat Cottis spotted *Cardamine pratensis flore pleno* the double-flowered form of Lady's-smock during an SWT visit – this is new to Eigg.
- *Hypericum perforatum* (Perforate St John's-wort) was added to the Eigg list during the same visit as a weed in a vegetable garden. However, it had all been weeded out when I returned six weeks later.
- The putative *Ajuga x pseudopyramidalis* (*A. pyramidalis* (Pyramidal Bugle) x *A. reptans* (Bugle)) found in 2008 has been confirmed.
- The odd-looking *Carex paniculata* (Greater Tussock-sedge) or *Carex arenaria* (Sand Sedge) found in 2008 is now confirmed as *C. paniculata*. This is a first record for Eigg, though it is plentiful just across the water on the north side of Muck.
- The *Epilobium x vicinum* (*E. obscurum* (Short-fruited Willowherb) x *E. ciliatum* (American Willowherb)) recorded in 2008 turns out not to be a first record for the vice-county as I have now been sent records for several places in Sleat (Skye) in 2006.

Canna

- A June visit to Canna produced records for *Anchusa arvensis* (Bugloss), *Beta vulgaris* subsp. *maritima* (Sea Beet), *Erodium cicutarium* (Common Stork's-bill), *Hypericum elodes* (Marsh St John's-wort), *Ranunculus sceleratus* (Celery-leaved Buttercup) and *Scilla verna* (Spring Squill), all rare or absent elsewhere in the vice-county. I failed to find *Apium inundatum* (Lesser Marshwort) at its only confirmed site in VC104 – though there are a couple of dubious records from Skye.

- A sand dune/machair area on Sanday had all sorts of goodies like *Elytrigia juncea* (Sand Couch), *Carex arenaria* (Sand Sedge), *Ammophila arenaria* (Marram), *Arenaria serpyllifolia* (Thyme-leaved Sandwort), *Dactylorhiza incarnata subsp. coccinea* (the red form of Early Marsh-orchid) and *Thalictrum minus* (Lesser Meadow-rue), again all rare or absent elsewhere in the vice-county.
- A first Canna record was made for *Epilobium brunnescens* (New Zealand Willowherb),

Raasay

- A 2008 hangover: *Astilbe japonica* (False-buck's-beard) as a garden throw-out was new to Raasay

Rona

- *Ophioglossum vulgatum* (Adder's-tongue) and *Solanum tuberosum* (Potato) were added to the Rona list.

Stephen Bungard

4 July 2009