

Dumfriesshire Botany at Glenairlie Bridge and Coshogle wood SSSI Sunday 5th May

On a day with a forecast of occasional rain eight of us met in mid Nithsdale. In the morning we parked at the rest area by Glenairlie Bridge and recorded along a stretch of the river from the edge of the car park. In the afternoon we combined cars and drove to Coshogle from where we were able to explore Coshogle Woods SSSI by kind permission of Buccleuch Estates.

As it happened it was dry as we started recording in NS8305 straight from the cars. The car park is close to the riverside. The Nith here cuts through rocks as it falls from Menzies down to Thornhill creating a gorge that is largely wooded. The rocks are mostly Greywacke and create a river with many pools and rapids much loved by canoeists. Some were using the car park on the day we were there.

Around the car park there were weedy species including plenty of **Hedge Bedstraw** *Galium album*, a common plant south of the border but not so frequent here.



Rough Horsetail

The first exciting plant encountered was **Rough Horsetail**, *Equisetum hyemale*, a good sized patch growing under trees in a seepage area only 20m or so from the edge of the CP. This was a refind of a record from 1976 by Mary Martin the previous vice county recorder. Given the stand straddles a riverside path one concludes that no botanist has walked this route in the 48 years since!

The riverside path is probably used by fishermen but runs through natural woodland along the rivers edge which also includes rocks and rocky bluffs. It was quite colourful with much **Marsh Marigold** *Caltha palustris* and patches of **Bluebell**, *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*. Here we found typical old woodland or stream species like **Sanicle**, *Sanicula europaea*, **Three-nerved Sandwort**

Moerhingia trinervia, **Large Bitter-cress** *Cardamine amara* and **Alternate-leaved Golden saxifrage** *Chrysosplenium alternatifolium*.

Along the path we came across a patch of **Betony**, *Betonica officinalis*. This part of Dumfriesshire has a reasonable population of this associated with the old coal and carboniferous limestone exposure around Kirkconnel and Sanghar. We saw it in the Euchar Water in 2022. It is otherwise a scarce plant. On the rocks the nicest things were good populations of **Globeflower** *Trollius europaeus* already in flower and a scattered growth of **Northern Bedstraw** *Galium boreale* which was yet to flower. For both species this part of the Nith and other Nith tributaries with rocky gorge like sections such as the Mennock water and Scaur are a stronghold.



Globeflower

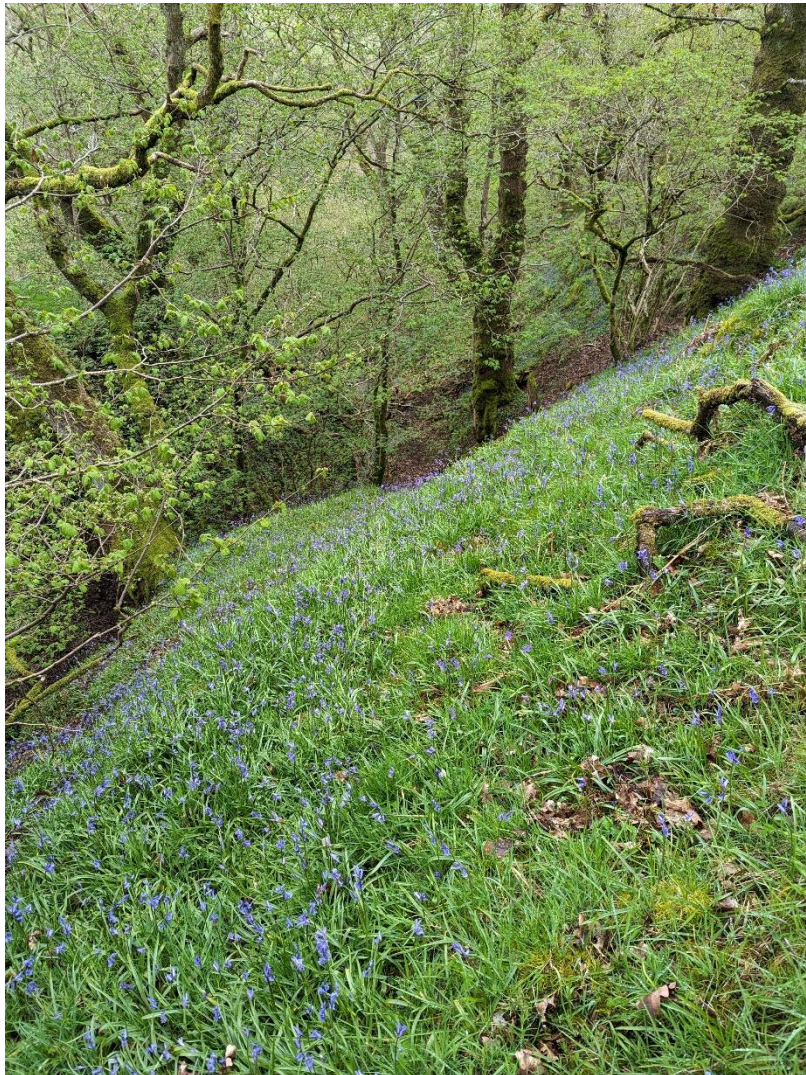


Northern Bedstraw

Along the rivers edge in silty sediment there was quite a lot of early growth of **Wood Club-rush** *Scirpus sylvatica*. At this stage it does resemble **Greater Wood-sedge** *Luzula sylvatica* growing close by but lacks the hairs on the edges of the leaves. In one location an early growth of sedge attracted attention. While the flowers were just emerging the length of the male floret, scale of the plant, habitat and particularly the shiny green back of the leaves indicated that this is **Water sedge** *Carex aquatilis*. Again both of these species have particularly strong populations along the main Nith channel and **Water Sedge** is not currently known elsewhere in the county. There is more riverside in the square that were not visited including on the opposite bank so more work to do. Total species recorded 133.

After lunch on the picnic tables by the CP we took two cars up to park near Coshogle. We had permission to park near the farm buildings in order to visit Coshogle Wood SSSI. The notified feature of Coshogle Wood is an Upland oak Woodland. The notification notes its acid-neutral sessile oak dominated woodland is on steep valley sides. It covers just short of 21 hectares.

The Valley sides were very steep and run down to the Enterkin Burn at the bottom. Our task was to find a way to get in to explore the site. We walked up the farm track from Coshogle and entered where the SSSI reaches the track. We followed one of the hillside burns that enter the site down to the core of the site. Just as we entered the wood a barn owl flew out from a tree on the edge and down into the deeper woodland. We were soon among impressive old **Sessile Oaks** *Quercus petraea* with carpets of **Bluebell**. There were many fallen trees as well contributing a healthy dead and decaying wood component that must be good for invertebrates. Malcolm found a slug indicative of ancient woodland for which there are few records in SW Scotland.



Coshogle Wood SSSI

Under the oaks on acid soils the understory is grassy with **Bluebells**, a few patches of **Anemone** *Anemone nemorosa*, **Greater woodrush** *Luzula sylvatica* and **Pignut** *Conopodium majus*. There were plentiful ferns like **Male Fern** *Dropteris filix-mas*, **Golden Scaly Male-fern** *Dryopteris affinis*, **Broad Buckler-fern** *Dryopteris dilatata* and **Lady Fern** *Athyrium affinis*. **Bracken** *Pteridium aquilinum* was present where canopy gaps occur. On many oaks there were good growths of **Common Polypody** *Polypodium vulgare*. Along the hillside burns the damper situation gave us both **Opposite-leaved Golden-saxifrage** and the less common **Alternate-leaved Golden-saxifrage** *Chrysosplenium alternatifolium*. The latter is

more restricted to old woodland either along riversides or in old woodland. In the damper areas there was also **Upland Enchanter's-nightshade** *Circaea x intermedia*. This has a darker fleshier leaf cordate at the base with more marked teeth and with hairs only on the upper side of the petiole than the commoner **Enchanter's-nightshade** *Circaea lutetiana*. Both were present in the wood. Another plant of acid soils seen on a follow up trip was **Common Cowwheat**, *Melampyrum pratense*.

As the wood reaches the lower slopes and down the hill burns and wet seepages there is a change to a more mixed Oak Ash woodland type with a richer ground flora. This is marked by the

appearance of **Dogs Mercury** *Mercurialis perennis* and **Wild Garlic** *Allium ursinum*. Amongst this there is **Sanicle** *Sanicula europaea*, **Woodruff** *Galium odoratum*, **Wood Melick** *Melica uniflora*, **Primrose** *Primula vulgaris* and the two handsome old woodland ferns **Beech Fern** *Phegopteris connectalis* and **Oak Fern** *Gymnocarpium dryopteris*.



Alternate-leaved Golden-saxifrage showing kidney shaped leaves

We finally made it down to the Enterkin Burn some 100 meters below the track. Here there was some rock and further good populations of **Woodruff**, **Alternate-leaved Golden-saxifrage** and **Sanicle** with the addition in a few place of **Large Bitter-cress** *Cardamine amara*. On rocks there was **Guelder-rose** *Viburnum opulus*. In a follow up visit Drew and Chris found one extensive patch of **Stone Bramble** *Rubus saxatilis* in a wet flushed area.

Total species for the SSSI 116 species.

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