

Dumfriesshire Botany at Stenhouse Wood SSSI Friday 2nd May

Our first field meeting of the year saw eleven of the group meet on a warm day at Stenhouse Wood SSSI and SWT Reserve. The reserve is an ancient woodland notified as an SSSI as an upland mixed ash woodland with additional interest from breeding birds and bryophytes. It has a mature canopy, a good shrub layer and a well developed ground layer of typical old woodland species. These all reflect a neutral or slightly calcareous geology and the naturally damp or even wet (but not this spring) sloping ground on the lower slopes of Stenhouse Hill. The wood slopes down to the Shinnel Water just below the road.



Looking down on Stenhouse Wood and the Shinnel valley from the hillside above

We made our way up the track through the woodland from near the cottage. Under the dominant trees of **Ash** *Fraxinus excelsior* **Wych Elm** *Ulmus glabra* **Sessile Oak** *Quercus petraea* and **Alder** *Alnus glutinosa* there were well grown shrubs like **Hazel** *Corylus avellana*, **Bird Cherry** *Prunus padus* and **Black Current** *Ribes nigrum*. Under these grew a typical mix for an upper Nithsdale woodland. For example we saw **Dogs Mercury** *Mercurialis perennis*, **Wild Garlic** *Allium ursinum*, both **Enchanter's-nightshade** *Circaea lutitiana* and later **Upland Enchanter's-nightshade** *Circaea x intermedia* and **Wood Anemone** *Anemone nemorosa*. **Bluebell** *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* was coming into flower in places. The fresh pale green of the new leaves on the trees was only casting a light shade. This colour was also the colour of sheets of emerging **Beech Fern** *Phegopteris connectalis* and **Oak Fern** *Gymnocarpium Dryopteris* which were particularly extensive.

Other ferns emerging included **Male Fern** *Dropteris filix-mas*, **Broad Buckler-fern** *Dryopteris dilatata* and **Lady Fern** *Athyrium affinis*. It was too early though to determine which **Scaly Male-fern** *Dryopteris affinis* agg was emerging.



As a diversion we left the wood and the reserve to explore the hillside which lies above the wood. Ranald had previously recorded **Fragrant Orchid** *Gymnadaenia borealis* on this slope. It was too early to see this but it is normally found in good habitat. And so it proved. We soon found that a large flush down the hillside had a population of **Globeflower** *Trollius europaeus* though not quite in flower at the time. Accompanying this there were typical calcareous flush community members like **Dioecious Sedge** *Carex dioica* and **Lesser Clubmoss** *Selaginella selaginoides*. Nearby on the slope we saw the very dissected leaves of **Goldilocks Buttercup** *Ranunculus auricomus* showing that it can be an open ground plant as well as a typical old woodland species which was seen later back in the woods.

We had lunch once we got back in the wood. The occasional call of Green Woodpecker was part of the background bird song. After this we had to leave the path to explore the northern end of the wood. This was more challenging as we weaved around fallen trees and dense shrub growth. All the time we were continuing a search for **Toothwort** *Lathraea squamaria*. This had been recorded here in 2006 but without a specific grid reference. All we knew was that it grows on the roots of several trees and shrubs which were plentiful in the wood. We

added more woodland specialists like **Woodruff** *Galium odoratum*, **Remote Sedge** *Carex remota* and along the edge of the wood **Wood Cranesbill** *Geranium sylvaticum*.



Toothwort Stenhouse Wood at the base of Hazel

We dropped down the wood towards the road and some of the party got out and onto the road to make their way back to the cars. Low down in the wood we finally found some **Toothwort**. This was growing at the base of three **Hazel** stools. The following day I met Jim McCleary who last recorded it in Stenhouse. He said it was on the base of a large **Elm** so there are almost certainly other populations of it in the wood. In total there were over 30 flower spikes. Elsewhere in Dumfriesshire it has also been seen on **Bird Cherry**, **Ash** and **Lime** *Tilia x europaea*. This plant has no chlorophyll and is an obligate parasite depending on the host tree for all of its nutrients. However it does not seem to harm its host. This is a scarce species in Dumfriesshire. In Nithsdale there have only been 4 sites recorded. Only

two of these including this population in Stenhouse have been seen recently. But it is hard to find have a short season and soon disappearing.

We finished back at the cars after a very pleasant day in this lovely woodland.

Total species recorded: 94 in Stenhouse Wood and 34 outside the reserve

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