

Updating the Flora of Anglesey

Anglesey's flora has been ably documented by generations of botanists, amateur and professional since the visit of Thomas Johnson in 1639. In 1813 Hugh Davies published 'Welsh Botany', a masterly summary of the distribution of the plants of the island and the first regional account of the flora of any part of Wales. It stands as a benchmark for subsequent surveys and a vivid scientific snapshot of the botanical landscape of Ynys Mon over 200 years ago.

J.E.Griffith's '*Flora of Anglesey and Carnarvonshire*' (1895) and R.H. Roberts's '*The Flowering Plants and Ferns of Anglesey*' (1982) provide more recent comparable accounts and a good deal of information is available by consulting '*New Atlas of the British and Irish Flora*' published by the Botanical Society of the British Isles in 2002.

The last few decades have seen significant changes to the flora at national and regional levels. Some species have been lost through marked changes in agriculture and forestry as well as the expansion of built up areas. Plants introduced from other parts of the globe now outnumber the native flora of the British Isles. Pests and diseases threaten many familiar species and the effects of climate change are revealing themselves by hastening degree.

It would therefore appear timely to review the flora of Anglesey and publish a new work. To this end members of the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland have been busy recording plants right across the island at monad level. In other words, compiling comprehensive lists of plants, native and introduced, for every 1km x 1km square of the National Grid covering Ynys Mon. With almost 800 monads and a known flora of over 1700 species the island offers a significant challenge in this respect. However over 250,000 records have now been entered into a database towards a new Anglesey Flora.

The town and environs of Menai Bridge have long been botanised and hold a very good range of plants. SH5571, the monad covering Menai Bridge South has c. 365 species and is one of the top 10 monads on the island. SH5572 covering Menai Bridge North has so far yielded 283 species. In an attempt to add to those totals and update some of the older records for Menai Bridge the local Flora Group held its first field trip of the season in early March. Below I have attached an account of the day to give you a flavour of what we do. If this tweeks your interest then please contact me for further information about recording plants on the island or Anglesey's botany in general. As a recording group we are keen to hear from landowners who would like to know what plants grow on their land. We are always keen to visit new areas and are happy to advise how best to manage sites for plant and wildlife interest.

'What a damp start to our 2019 recording efforts but Menai Bridge's plants still managed to delight and surprise us yesterday. 10 stalwarts gathered in the wind and rain and immediately took refuge in the conveniently close Anglesey Arms Pub where we ordered coffee and perused Ivor's carefully prepared monad lists which highlighted those taxa not recorded post 2000. Despite Menai Bridge being well botanised we noted that there were 40 taxa in need of updating to the post 2000 category. Hugh Knott then guided us knowledgeablely through SH5571, past *Myosotis ramosissima* (Early Forget-me-not) flowering (new for the monad) with *Saxifraga tridactylites* (Rue-leaved Saxifrage) in the cobbled, landscaped perimeter of Waitrose before dropping down to the Belgian Promenade where we noted how widely New Zealand's *Griselinia littoralis* is naturalising under the high canopy of Coed Cynol's pines and oaks. At the foot of the wood Hugh showed us putative *Spergularia rubra* (Sand Spurrey) - best to wait till it flowers before entering that record but it looked a good candidate for this rather local spurrey on Anglesey. A little further on just

before the wooded bank gives way to Summercourt's landscaped garden we admired a fine flowering bush of *Daphne laureola* (Spurge Laurel) in what looked like a native situation. And this was quickly followed by 5 more mature flowering bushes in the pretty dell beneath the Suspension Bridge, first recorded there in 2010 and all still accounted for. Here too grew *Carpinus betulus* (Hornbeam) new for the monad and easily overlooked in dense stands of other trees until you happen upon a catkin bearing specimen such as this individual. Nearby in the Dell Hugh proudly revealed a spectacular 2m x. 2m colony of *Viola odorata* (Sweet Violet) of the most intense gentian blue imaginable - superb even in the rain and dreariness of the day, it's perfectly shaped leaves reflecting the rain drops beautifully and providing the perfect foil for those astonishingly attractive blooms.

Debbie expertly explained the rust fungus *Puccinia smyrnii* which formed spectacular yellow lesions and outgrowths on *Smyrniolum olusatrum* (Alexanders) flowering strongly along the promenade. On under the Bridge into *Erysimum cheiri* (Wallflower) and *Ceterach officinarum* (Rusty-back Fern) territory but no luck with either so those two taxa remain in need of updates. In their place we saw large quantities of *Erinus alpinus* (Fairy Foxglove) populating the lime-rich walls and on the sea wall we spotted a single plant of *Campanula portenschlagiana*, new for the monad. Menai Bridge Town is rich in rock outcrops of the most attractive foliated, metamorphosed Precambrian schists adding much interest for the botanist. Some outcrops are base rich and support a good range of calcicoles including *Geranium columbinum* (Long-stalked Cranesbill) which Hugh expertly identified from its pert, upright, finely cut leaves arranged somewhat radially in lax rosettes. He explained how plants at road level are vulnerable to herbicide application by the Council and how he had assisted the species survival by collecting seeds and distributing them in suitable outcrops at higher level. Clearly his efforts were succeeding as we saw a good number of vegetative plants of this charming cranesbill, a very local species on the island. Nearby a fine flowering group of 3 *Viola reichenbachiana* (Early Dog-violet) was persisting in shaded roadside scrub under Hugh's watchful eye. They seemed to be thriving despite the vigour of ivy all around them. Martyn Stead found *Veronica agrestis* (Green Field-speedwell) last recorded in this monad in 1999 and so a useful update and it was instructive to see the early vigorous basal rosettes of *Barbarea verna* (American Winter-cress) along some of the gravelly road margins.

The rain continued as we walked over to Ynys Faelog by way of the elevated causeway across the sheltered intertidal bay. This small island is owned by Bangor University which gave us the go-ahead to botanise. The island is dominated by a somewhat derelict garden but also accommodates a small area of mixed woodland. The native flora seemed somewhat limited though the presence of *Ligustrum vulgare* (Wild Privet) and *Asplenium scolopendrium* (Hart's-tongue Fern) hinted at some base influence. We recorded a wide range of planted trees and shrubs 4 of which proved new Vice County (VC) records (*Choisya ternata*, *Pseudosasa japonica*, *Veronica brachysiphon* and *Brachyglottis x. juba*) and one (*Cordyline australis*) new for the hectad (10kmx10km grid square). I realise it's debatable whether to include such introduced ornamentals but a number were spreading naturally. On the way off the island we noted a nice flowering plant of *Helleborus foetidus* (Stinking Hellebore) just beyond the perimeter of a cottage garden.

The final treat which Hugh had in store for us was a splendid colony of *Anemone apennina* in Coed Marquis which has doubled in size since Hugh discovered it in 2015, new for Anglesey. It formed a very pretty ribbon of flowers running down a wooded slope between schistose rocks ably competing with abundant ivy. In the persistent rain its delicate mid blue flowers were bowed and campanulate, adding to its charm, the perianth parts elegantly elongate - a fine sight to finish on!

Our botanising in the rain had yielded 24 new monad additions in SH 5672 as well as the afore-mentioned new VC and Hectad records. In SH5571, which already boasts 363 taxa, we added 3 new species for the monad and updated 3. We felt quite pleased! The combination of adding to the data base, seeing some species at their best, learning how to recognise other taxa in the vegetative state, and such good knowledgeable company easily out-did the rain!

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The Anglesey Flora Project is co-ordinated by Ian Bonner and Nigel Brown who act as Joint Recorders for Anglesey (Vice County 52) on behalf of the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland.