





I have just arrived back from the SRGC Botanical Expedition to Golspie in the north of Scotland where a group of us enjoyed searching out some of the wild flowers. Golspie, left, was a great base for us to stay with plenty of accommodation as well as places to eat and drink – I stayed in the Golspie Inn at the north end of the village and a five minute walk from the beach.



The night we visited the garden of Dunrobin Castle it was pouring with rain so I took no photographs but a few days later I walked along the beach from Golspie to the castle where I took some pictures of this massive building.

Although we went by car the nature reserve at Balblair Wood and the salt marsh are only about a two mile walk along the coast from Golspie: there we were hoping to see some of the scarcest plants in Scotland.



The group arrived and got kitted up for the typical Scottish summer weather of mist and rain intermixed with spells of sunshine



Moneses uniflora

Within fifty metres of the carpark we found one of our first targets, **Moneses uniflora**.

Once we got sight of this plant we spread out and soon found a good number in full flower. I think the cool moist atmosphere that hindered our attempts at photographing this wee gem is a large part of why it can grow here.

It grows through the low growing undergrowth favouring mosses and compact grasses that do not compete too much for the space.





Linnaea borealis



Linnaea borealis was another plant high on the list of those we hoped to see in flower and indeed there it was, growing very close to the Moneses. This was a very healthy colony spreading by runners reaching out over hummocks of moss and heathers with the twin flowers dancing like fairy caps over the new green growth. This was the best I have ever seen this plant growing in Scotland.



Neottia cordata

Less impressive and easy to miss is the well named Lesser Twayblade, *Neottia cordata*. This plant is a challenge to spot never mind photograph but we did find quite a number some growing in groups like the one above.



In more open habitats we also saw the larger **Neottia ovata**



Orchids were everywhere but were very difficult to pin down to a species. *Dactylorhiza maculata* and *fuchsii* are two of the more common species we saw and as these species hybridise freely we concluded that we were mostly looking at hybrid swarms.



This is a pale, almost white, form that was forming a clump not something we see very often in the wild populations of these plants.



Platanthera chlorantha

At the edge of a field we found a few plants of *Platanthera chlorantha*.

I made a number of short video clips of our expedition which I will be posting on the forum in due course.



Dactylorhiza purpurella was more easily identified as it seemed to be less inclined to hybridise in these sites.



I was very pleased to find **Trientalis europaea**, a plant I think is very attractive – we do have a small group of this plant growing in the garden established from seed and now showing some signs of spreading out.



Euphrasia officinalis is a tiny plant that we mostly saw growing through short grasses but this group was colonising a recently disturbed gravel area at the edge of the road and was looking absolutely beautiful – how I wish we could grow this in a trough.



Euphrasia officinalis



**Astragalus
danicus**

Plants of Astragalus danicus varied in size depending on the competition so in short grasses it was very low growing and compact but when growing with taller grasses it would grow a bit larger.



Astragalus danicus



I could happily have explored this saltmarsh all day it was full of many interesting plants including the pink *Armeria maritima* and *Plantago maritima*.



Armeria maritima* and *Plantago maritima



Armeria maritima is an amazing plant that can tolerate both salt and exposure so we can see it in mountains as well as the seaside locations – it is also one of the salt tolerant plants that we increasingly see along roadside verges.



These plants would be under water on a regular basis and yet they still flower.



Dactylorhiza purpurella was growing by the thousands on the steep slopes above this beach.



A natural rock garden formed as the plants took advantage of the eroded sedimentary cliff formations.

The plants included **Armeria maritima** and **Silene maritima** - as I knew it before it became a synonym of **Silene uniflora**.



Silene uniflora

To allow us to see as much variety as possible we visited two or three sites per day but I could easily have spent an entire day exploring each of the sites – a good reason to go back again. It was not just the land plants that interested me or displayed colours, as this lurid green growth exposed at low tide shows.





More seaweeds on the barnacle encrusted limestone rocks.



We did not see as much **Mertensia maritima** as we expected; at this site we only found a few plants. I suspect that the winter storms have buried the plants under about a metre of gravel and it will take a few years for them to work back to the surface or perhaps another storm will uncover them.



Fantastic caves and formations have been created as the limestone sediments are worn down by the action of the wind and sea forming stunning natural rock gardens.



Armeria maritima and **Silene uniflora** were flowering alongside the yellow **Lotus corniculata**, towards the top of the picture, and the softer yellow clumps of **Anthyllis vulneraria** at the bottom.



Oxytropis halleri

Oxytropis halleri flowers on these base rich cliffs sometimes forming large mature plants with purple flowers, clinging on to the edge.





Botrychium lunaria, commonly called 'Moonwort' is an interesting small fern that we found both in the mountains as well as along the seaside cliff tops





A shaggy sheep grazes on the short coastal grasses, fortunately leaving most of the other plants untouched for us to enjoy. Masses of very short *Armeria maritima* plants grow scattered through the grasses as does the very compact *Lychnis flos cuculi*.



Lychnis flos cuculi



Lychnis flos cuculi



I was especially delighted to see one of the few bulbs that are native to Scotland, **Scilla verna**.



Scilla verna

As well as growing among the short turf I also found it in a wet gravel area where the ground had eroded allowing me to see clearly the coiling of the leaves that lie flat on the ground.





Even the pouring rain could not dampen our enthusiasm as we searched the short turf for another treasure, an endemic, found only in Scotland – once you got your eye in you started to spot the tiny rosettes all over the place - then we found them in flower



Primula scotica



Primula scotica



Dramatic lighting and clouds over the Forsinard flow country reserve.



I returned from Golspie back to Aberdeen by train and as I walked up our road from the bus stop I could smell the scent drifting down the road from *Corydalis* 'Craigton Blue' then I was greeted by the sight of the drive in full flower complete with *Dactylorhiza* hybrids flowering through the *Geranium sanguineum* .



That is a brief review showing some of the plants we saw in the north - I and others will post more pictures on the forum where I will also add links to the video clips that I took.....