

BBS Summer Meeting 2013

Raasay: 29 June-6 July 2013

The second part of the summer meeting took place on the small island of Raasay. **Nick Hodgetts** reports on the weeks findings

 View from Manish Beg at the tip of the island. **J. Denyer**

The BBS loves an island. There is something uniquely satisfying in spending a week on a small and circumscribed piece of land to get a grip on its flora. Raasay is ideally suited for this, being just the right size for such a trip. The idea was to cover the island systematically tetrad by tetrad in order to get a really good idea of its bryophytes, and luckily a sufficient number of people turned up to make this possible. While the BBS has visited Skye on a couple of occasions (1968 and 2001) it had never been to Raasay. Indeed, Raasay has been a remarkably poorly recorded island. Hilary and John Birks did not include it in their Skye Flora (Birks & Birks, 1974), and made few records there. A small number of bryologists have visited over the years, but have made very little impact, and most of the island was *terra incognita*. It was always likely to be rich, though, with a great diversity of geology and habitat within a small area, including the famous east coast limestone cliffs at Hallaig and Screapadal, rich in flowering plants and immortalised in the poetry of Sorley MacLean.

Accommodation for most of us was self-catering in the Old Manse, a large and comfortable 'holiday home' in the village of Inverarish that also acted as our headquarters for the week, but others stayed in bed and breakfast accommodation, the YHA, tents or vans.

Twenty-four members attended: Jeff and Joyce Bates, David Bell, Tom Blockeel, Charles Campbell, David Chamberlain, Jo Denyer, Tom Edwards, David Freeman, Gordon Haycock, Valerie Heppel, Mark Hill, Rory Hodd, Nick Hodgetts, Liz Kungu, Mark Lawley, David Long, Andy McLay, Oliver Moore, Sean O'Leary, Mark Pool, Gordon Rothero, Julie Smith and Sharon Yardy, most of whom were there for the whole week. Fortunately the presence of four Davids, three Marks, two Toms and two Gordons was not unduly confusing. My plan was to divide people into small groups so that as many tetrads as possible could be covered. Meanwhile Jeff and Joyce spent the week doing BRECOG quadrats, but we bumped into each other occasionally.

* indicates a new VC record or debracketing



SATURDAY 29 JUNE

We arrived in dribs and drabs during the day, occasionally occupying most of the available places on the smallish Raasay ferry. Gordon Rothero was one of the earliest to arrive and spent a useful afternoon on a preliminary excursion in the middle of the island north of Dun Caan, where he picked up quite a diverse flora on the NE-facing high cliffs of Meall Daimh, including *Glyphomitrium daviesii*, *Grimmia funalis* and *Plagiobryum zieri*. For the rest of us, the meeting began properly with an excellent introductory talk in the evening by Dr Stephen Bungard, the BSBI recorder, who lives on Raasay and knows its vascular plant flora intimately.

SUNDAY 30 JUNE

We split into four groups and tackled some of the island's central tetrads. Mark Hill's group tackled the rather bleak moorland north of Brae, which produced *Solenostoma paroicum*. Extensive tufa springs and flushes near Screapadal were a total contrast, with *Didymodon spadiceus*, *Orthothecium rufescens*, *Philonotis calcarea* and *Plagiomnium elatum*. Nearby limestone cliffs added *Gymnostomum calcareum*, *Isopterygiopsis pulchella*, *Metzgeria pubescens* and *Orthothecium intricatum*. *Pleurozia purpurea* was, of course, ubiquitous on the open moorland, and turned up regularly during the week.

Meanwhile, Nick led a party to the west coast at Inver via the woodland near Brae,

△Above: View over Manish, in the northern most part of the island. J Denyer. ▽Below left: *Sphagnum russowii* at Manish. J Denyer. ▽Below right: Admiring the only hummock of *Sphagnum austinii* found during the week, at Manish Beg. J Denyer





where they found a reasonable Atlantic flora including *Aphanolejeunea microscopica*, *Drepanolejeunea hamatifolia*, *Frullania teneriffae*, *Grimmia hartmanii*, *Plagiochila bifaria* and *Ulotia calvescens*, plus *Cephalozia leucantha*, *Cololejeunea calcarea*, *Harpantus scutatus*, *Molendoo warburgii* and *Solenostoma paroicum*. Some surprise was expressed at finding *Ptilium crista-castrensis* this far west, but it is actually not all that uncommon in the area. David Long, the two Gordons, Julie and Rory were a bit to the north, in a tetrad with a rather small terrestrial component at Manish Mor, and a similar flora, with *Aphanolejeunea microscopica*, *Colura calyptrifolia*, *Drepanolejeunea hamatifolia*, *Frullania teneriffae*, *Harpalejeunea mollerii*, *Hygrohypnum eugyrium*, *Lepidozia pearsonii*,

Plagiochila bifaria and *Radula aquilegia*. The northernmost party (David Bell, Jo, Oliver and Sharon) went to Manish Beg, where they were rewarded with a long list of species that included *Lophocolea fragrans* and *Radula aquilegia* above the splash zone in the shelter of north-facing cliffs, and the only hummock of *Sphagnum austinii* seen all week in a valley mire, with *Cephalozia loitlesbergeri* creeping through it. Back at Inverarish, Tom Blockeel found *Riccia subbifurca** growing on moist gritty soil in the driveway of his B & B.

MONDAY 1 JULY

The main target for the day was the eastern limestone, so everyone drove to Brochel to

△Above left: Eastern limestone cliffs in the Creag na Bruaich area. G Haycock. △Above right: *Marchesinia mackaii* at Creag na Bruaich. J Denyer. ▽Below: Lunch amongst the eastern limestone. J Denyer



approach the cliffs from the north. We split into groups according to how far folks were prepared to walk, with the youngest and most energetic group (Charles, David Freeman, Jo, Oliver, Rory and Tom Edwards) tackling the remote central tetrad south of Druim an Aonaich, the middling group (David Bell, David Long, Gordon Haycock, Gordon Rothero and Julie) going for the one just north of this in the Creag na Bruaich area, and the laziest (Andy, Mark Lawley, Mark Hill, Nick, Sean, Tom Blockeel and Valerie) staying relatively close to the cars at Screapadal. All of us were rewarded with an excellent day's bryology, the spectacular limestone cliffs proving very rich. Highlights included some shaded limestone rocks in a gully at Screapadal with *Amblyodon dealbatus**, *Distichium inclinatum* (2nd county record), *Plagiochila britannica* and *Seligeria acutifolia**; *Rhynchostegiella teneriffae* on a shaded rock; *Hymenostylium recurvirostrum* var. *insigne* on rocks south of Druim na Aonaich; some rocks and damp crevices at Creag na Bruaich with *Hypnum hamulosum*, *Mnium marginatum*, *Solenostoma confertissimum* and *Platydictya jungermannioides*, and *Orthotrichum striatum* on a tree branch; lots of *Leiocolea bantriensis*, *L. collaris*, *Metzgeria pubescens*, *Marchesinia mackaii*, *Neckera crispa* and *Orthothecium rufescens*, and, slightly strangely, *Leptobryum pyriforme* in abundance on damp soil on a limestone ledge. David Long did his usual trick of finding *Haplomitrium hookeri* on the track (new to Raasay), and Mark Hill found *Trichocolea tomentella* along a burn, surprisingly the only record of this species during the week. One of the energetic group accidentally left their wallet at the lunch stop at the most remote point of the walk, but fortunately was able to retrieve it later in the week by walking back to it from the south. A smaller group (David Chamberlain, Liz, Mark Pool and Sharon) tackled some birch



woodland and boggy ground at Brochel, where they accumulated a sizable list that included *Calypogeia neesiana*, *Lepidozia cupressina* and *Harpanthus scutatus*, and a stand of *Campylopus shawii*, a plant that is locally common on Skye but apparently rather rare on Raasay.

TUESDAY 2 JULY

The forecast was poor, and the day did turn out pretty wet, so we restricted ourselves to tetrads in and around the village, although two parties braved the elements to the extent of going up Dun Caan, the highest point of Raasay – the David Long/Gordon Rothero group headed straight for the top, while Oliver's group went up via Inverarish Burn and some old mine workings. Between them they did some valuable tetrad-bashing in rather unpromising territory, producing long lists of mainly common species that however included delights such as *Douinia ovata*, *Kiaeria blyttii*, *Pleuroidium acuminatum* and *Seligeria recurvata*. Oliver managed to navigate his group back to the low ground, in spite of a refusal to use GPS technology and mistaking the sea for a loch. The most remarkable records were of *Barbilophozia lycopodioides* from turf in scree east of the summit of Dun Caan, and *Odontoschisma elongatum* 'in gunge' on the shore of Loch na Mna. Meanwhile the rest of us were pottering about in the lowlands, also recording mainly 'common' stuff, although ruderal species unremarkable in the south are notoriously under-recorded in the Scottish Highlands and Islands.



△Above left: Bryologists arrive at Rona. J Denyer. △Above: Hiking into the heart of Rona. J Denyer. △Above right: Sean seeks bryological advice from the local inhabitants. J Denyer

Tom Blockeel's group went north from Clachan to Holoman Bay, finding *Glyphomitrium daviesii*, *Grimmia lisae*, *Hedwigia integrifolia*, *Reboulia hemisphaerica* and *Weissia perssonii* on rocks and in soily crevices, *Bryum imbricatum* on gravelly soil, and *Drepanocladus polygamus* in a tussock at the edge of the island's only salt marsh. Liz, David Chamberlain, Julie, Mark Pool, Gordon Haycock and Nick went south through Inverarish, investigating the village itself, the old ironstone quarry and associated post-industrial detritus, and ending up in two tetrad fragments on the south coast. The village was mostly of limited interest but Stephen Bungard's garden yielded *Marchantia polymorpha* subsp. *ruderalis* by the poly tunnel, *Bryum pallescens* next to a Calor gas canister and *Dicranoweisia cirrata* on an ancient wooden wheelbarrow, all good records in a VC104 context (and thanks for the coffee and biscuits Stephen!). The old quarry had *Campylopus gracilis*, *C. subulatus*, *Grimmia lisae*, putative *Gyroweisia tenuis**, *Tortella bambergerei* and an enigmatic moss resembling *Cirriphyllum crassinervium* that has yet to be identified.

WEDNESDAY 3 JULY

This was the day fixed for our boat trip to Rona. Luckily the weather was fine again, so we drove north along 'Calum's Road' to Arnish, and most of us made the longish walk to the northernmost

tip of Raasay, where we were picked up by Bill Cowie and ferried over to Rona. We split into two parties, one disembarking at An Teampull, tackling the south end of the island, the other going to the main harbour (Acairseid Mhor) to bryologise the central part. The north end of Rona will have to wait for another day! It is a difficult island to explore, with the lack of grazing animals leading to a thick and tussocky blanket of vegetation. This meant that progress was rather slow, and the rewards rather few. However, *Pseudocrossidium hornschurchianum*, not common in the vice-county, was found on gritty soil near the pier, and *Dicranoweisia cirrata*, also generally rare in this part of the world, was seen on rock. *Grimmia funalis* and *Glyphomitrium daviesii* proved to be widespread and frequent on the island. David Long found *Riccia subbifurca* on bare soil by the mission house, and Mark Hill had *Grimmia decipiens* on a sunny rock. Nick found *Cephalozia macrostachya* amongst *Sphagnum*. The best record of the day was *Cynodontium jenneri*, found by Mark Hill on a wall, only the second time this has been found in VC104. We also recorded the north end of Raasay as we were passing through, where we found a reasonable selection of mainly common species, but also *Grimmia funalis* and *Ulota hutchinsiae*. One member of the mid-Rona party lost his rucksack for an hour but eventually managed to find it again. Three small



◁Top left: Branches festooned with diverse epiphytes, near Hallaig. J Denyer

◁Centre: *Pleurozia purpurea*, a fairly common occurrence around the island. J Denyer

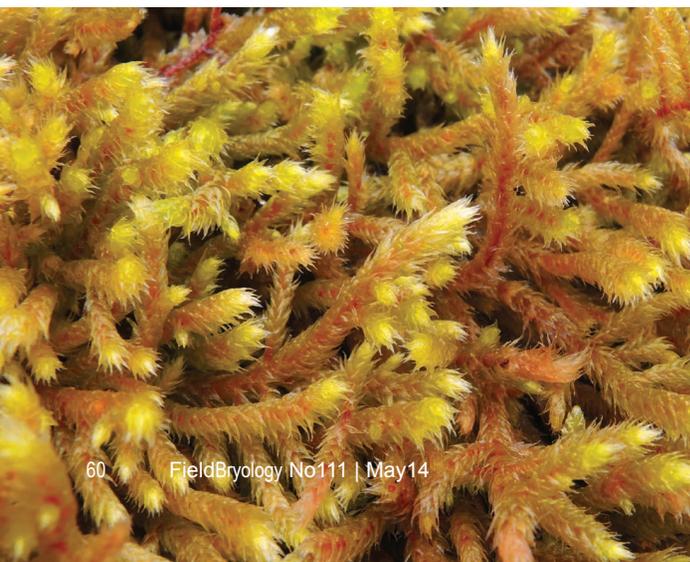
◁Below left: *Antitrichia curtispindula*. J Denyer



groups decided they didn't mind not going to Rona, so Liz, Mark Pool, Sharon and Valerie tackled the woodland and wet heath around Torran, where they accumulated a long list of species that included *Campylopus shawii* and other Atlantic specialities. *Marsupella funckii* and *Riccia sorocarpha* were found on tracks near the parking place. Tom Blockeel, David Chamberlain and Gordon Haycock tackled some ground east of Torran, where there was *Herbertus aduncus* subsp. *hutchinsiae* and some other Atlantic species but nothing unexpected. The other group, of Julie, Andy and Gordon Rothero, had a look at the Beinn na h-Iolaire area, where they found *Campylopus atrovirens* var. *falcatus*, *C. setifolius*, more *C. shawii* and *Grimmia longirostris*, amongst a long list of other species.

THURSDAY 4 JULY

The day started rather damply but the weather improved sufficiently for it not to hamper us. We went back the eastern limestone cliffs, but this time making a southern approach from North Fearn. Many of the same bryophytes seen on Monday were seen again, including lots of Atlantic species and calcicoles. Gordon Rothero's group headed for the ground below and to the north of Hallaig village, where there were *Isopterygiopsis pulchella*, *Marchesinia mackaii*, *Orthothecium* spp., *Scapania aequiloba* and (a rare plant in these parts) *Rhynchostegium confertum*. Tom Blockeel,



David Long, Sean, Oliver, Tom Edwards and David Bell went to the higher cliffs above Loch a' Chadha-charnaich: *Campyliadelphus elodes* and *Tortella bambergieri* occurred on boulders by the loch, and there was an example of mixed hepatic mat vegetation with *Plagiochila carringtonii* unexpectedly joining *Herbertus aduncus* subsp. *hutchinsiae* and *H. stramineus*. A rowan tree with five species of *Ulota* generated a bit of excitement, but not as much as finding *Plagiopus oederianus* on limestone ledges at only its second VC104 locality, the other being on the lower slopes of Blaven, where it was last seen in 1968. The rest of us worked the cliffs of Beinn na' Leac. There were fruiting *Hypnum callichroum* in the damp woodland, looking very different from any other *Hypnum*, *Jungermannia borealis*, *Marchesinia mackaii*, *Metzgeria pubescens* and *Seligeria pusilla*. Nick collected a specimen of *Platydictya jungermannioides* growing on a shaded limestone bank for confirmation, and was later delighted to find it contained a few small shoots of *Geocalyx graveolens*, last seen in VC104 near Ord in 1968. Mark Hill led us in an enjoyable session of tobogganing down a steep wet grassy slope in our over-trousers. In the evening most of us went to Raasay House for a pleasant dinner.

FRIDAY 5 JULY

This last day of fieldwork was a 'mopping up' day, in which I became slightly more dictatorial and directed groups towards various tetrads that had not yet been covered. Gordon Rothero, Tom Blockeel, Jo, Julie and David Freeman went north to Manish Point, where there was a selection of Atlantic species such as *Herbertus aduncus* subsp. *hutchinsiae*, *Lophocolea fragrans* and the usual suite of small Lejeuneaceae. They also found *Odontoschisma elongatum* on another loch margin. David Long, Liz, Nick, Charles,

David Bell and Rory explored another patch in the middle of the island, working up a long basalt burn to a flush complex and ending up on some spectacular limestone exposures at the top of Druim an Aonaich. As well as many of the same Atlantic and calcicolous bryophytes seen before, there was an excellent population of *Scapania aequiloba* on flushed basalt terraces, and we were all astonished by Rory's find of *Tomentypnum nitens** in the extensive flush complex, along with *Rhizomnium pseudopunctatum*, *Sphagnum contortum*, *S. teres* and *S. warnstorffii*. Sean, Mark Lawley and Mark Pool went to Eyre and South Fearn in the south of the island, recording *Fissidens celticus* and a good selection of Atlantic and calcicolous species. Oliver and Tom Edwards were the last to turn up at the morning get-together, so they had no choice but to be sent, somewhat reluctantly, to the remote tidal island of Fladday near the north end of Raasay. However, they were rewarded by one of the best finds of the week – a good stand of *Geocalyx graveolens* on the northern cliffs of the island, as well as a wide variety of other species, including *Cephalozia leucantha*, *C. pleniceps* and *Lepidozia cupressina*. Some of us had to leave on Friday evening, but others enjoyed a final evening of Raasay hospitality with Stephen Bungard and his whisky.

Conclusion

The weather was mainly good, the company excellent and the bryology at times outstanding, so I would say these factors alone made the meeting a success. The recording effort by everyone was tremendous: we managed to cover nearly all the tetrads on Raasay and most of those on Rona, leaving only a few outliers to be mopped up by me at some future date. As expected, the east coast limestone was the richest area bryologically, with



△ Top: Manish Point. J Denyer

△ Below: *Campylopus shawii*, an atlantic speciality at Manish Beg. J Denyer

most members seeing plenty of the limestone flora, including *Marchesinia mackaii*, *Metzgeria pubescens* and *Orthothecium rufescens*. Atlantic species were also abundant, and most of us saw at least some of *Aphanolejeunea microscopica*, *Colura calyptrifolia*, *Drepanolejeunea hamatifolia*, *Harpalejeunea mollerii*, *Herbertus aduncus* subsp. *hutchinsiae* and *Radula aquilegia*. The Hallaig tetrad was the richest, achieving a remarkable 262 taxa, and that in spite of it being half sea! This is now officially the richest tetrad in the vice-county. It is not particularly surprising that there were few new VC records, but those we did find were of high quality. We also found that *Conocephalum salebrosus* was very nearly as common as *C. conicum*, that *Dicranoweisia cirrata* was surprisingly frequent for this part of Scotland, and that Mark Pool has a very good eye for *Barbula convoluta* var. *sardoa*.

My thanks to all who attended the meeting for putting in such a sterling effort. Thanks are especially due to Liz Kungu for booking the Old Manse and taking care of the logistical side of accommodation and catering there, and to everyone who provided food and drink and took part in the cooking. Thanks also to Bill Cowie for permission to bryologise on Rona. I would also like to give sincere thanks to Stephen Bungard for help with planning the meeting and for his introductory talk, and to all the islanders for putting up with an invasion of bryologists that must at times have been baffling.

References

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