



Summer Field Meeting (2)

Isle of Lewis

22–28 July

2007

Liz Kungu

Following the successful week on Mull a small, select group headed on to Lewis to record some of the under-recorded hectads for the next edition of the *Atlas*. Richard Fisk, Maren Flagmeier, Liz Kungu and Mark Pool continued on from Mull and were joined by Nick Hodgetts, Gordon Haycock and Brendan O'Hanrahan to form the group of seven for the week. The journey over from Uig set us off in fine form as we were entertained with live music from the excellent Skye Ceilidh Band.

Headquarters for the week was a very comfortable holiday cottage on the outskirts of Stornoway provided by Angus Morrison, where four of the group stayed and we had our evening identification sessions. We met up there on the Saturday evening to formulate a plan of action for the week.

△ Assembled company admiring the population of *Myurium hochstetteri* on the coast of Great Bernera near Bostach.
Gordon Haycock

SUNDAY 22 JULY

On the Sunday we decided to explore the blanket bog that covers most of the centre of Lewis and set off as a group of six to work the area of NB33 to the north of the Pentland Road. After exploring the streams and banks near the road, and having found *Schistidium crassipilum*, we set our sights on an area of patterned bog and lochans nearby. Much of the blanket bog was very uniform with a limited suite of species that included both fertile *Kurzia sylvatica* and *K. pauciflora*, substantial *Pleurozia purpurea*, *Campylopus brevipilus* and *Campylopus atrovirens* var. *falcatus*. The patterned



△ *Pleurozia purpurea* and *Racomitrium lanuginosum* on Mullach nan ròn. Gordon Haycock

▷ Magnificent *Sphagnum austinii* hummocks west of Neapabhal. Gordon Haycock



bog had a large 2 m long hummock of **Sphagnum fuscum* and careful searching by Nick also located some small **Sphagnum austinii* hummocks. The shores of the nearby lochan at NB327360 had *Fossombronia* sp., **Ephemerum serratum* var. *serratum* and *Nardia compressa* along the shore. Having hunted assiduously for, and eventually finding *Sphagnum magellanicum* on the blanket bog, we were reminded of the vagaries of bryophyte distribution when we found it growing happily by the roadside ditch on the way back to the cars.

To increase the range of habitats surveyed, the next stop was some rock outcrops and a dug out pond and banking near the road, followed by the rock outcrops and a track up to the sheep pens. This proved a productive area, being the only location for **Antitrichia curtipendula* that we found all week, and **Pohlia drummondii* was located by the edge of the road.

MONDAY 23 JULY

The following day, we set out to explore the west coast, looking first at both the coastal edge and the inland bogs of NB22. We were fortunate in that our party included Brendan who had recently lived on Lewis, and was able to provide some local ecological knowl-

edge. In true BBS fashion a quick scurry round the vicinity of the car park (the cut off section of the old road) yielded over 50 species before we set off for the mornings recording. This south-west coast of Lewis has a more varied topography than the central blanket bog, with many rocky ridges separating small valley bogs and marginal flushes. These proved rich areas for *Sphagnum*, with 15 species recorded, including carpets of *S. inundatum* and both *S. contortum* and *S. strictum* on the bog near the road. We also found several populations of *Campylopus shawii*. The highlight of the morning was undoubtedly the three magnificent hummocks of **Sphagnum austinii*, which could be seen from the crags some distance away, growing with **Sphagnum fuscum*, in a small area of patterned bog. *Rhabdoweisia crispata* and *Racomitrium ellipticum* were found on the crags above the valley bog and *Odontoschisma elongatum* by the loch.

After lunch the assembled party decided it was time for a change of habitat and we all headed down to the coast of Great Bernera at Bostadh. The small area of dunes and blown sand was mostly disappointing except for a scattering of **Brachythecium glareosum*. However, the higher ground to the west proved far more interesting. We were pleased to find a substantial population of *Myurium hochstetteri*. This, the only species previously recorded for this hectad, was last recorded near here in 1901 by Braithwaite from Little Bernera. The hillside above the bay had short turf and coastal heath overlying rocks with *Drepanolejeunea hamatifolia*,



Harpalejeunea mollerii and **Microlejeunea ulicina*, and intervening flushes with *Sphagnum platyphyllum* and *Dicranum bonjeanii*. A small area of slumped cliff provided some interesting open ground where Richard found *Dicranella varia* and **Bryum gemmiferum*.

TUESDAY 24 JULY

On the Tuesday we set off for the coast of south-east Lewis, starting at the headland of Rubha na h-Easgainn (NB4119) to the north-east of Marbhig. This area has broken cliffs with rocky outcrops and a diverse bryoflora, including *Blepharostoma trichophylla* and such western specialties as *Lepidozia cupressina* and *Bazzania tricrenata*. The lunch spot was the highest point of the peninsula where we were delighted to repeat the Shetland experience and watch a basking shark, this time outside the mouth of Loch Marabhig.

After lunch we divided the forces in order to record both NB32 and NB42. The area around Cromore (NB42), proved a challenge to find anything bryological, but was an interesting lesson in how intensively this land has been cultivated in the past. Every little basin of peat had been cut over and every patch of flat ground had lazy beds and small cairns where the fields had been cleared of stones. The second party had more success when they explored the ground to the north of Cabharstadh (NB32) where on a north-facing heathy slope below crags Nick found *Sphagnum skyense*, only the second record for v.c. 110. Other records included *Grimmia funalis* and *Cephalozia catenulata*.

WEDNESDAY 25 JULY

We resolutely resisted the temptations of the North Harris Hills with Brendan, and instead headed to the north east of Lewis, until we ran out of road at Traigh Ghearadha and set off to explore NB55, via the coastal path. The weather was damp and grey, the midges active and the ravine, Aspens and waterfall at Steall Abhainn na Cloich were disappointing, yielding surprisingly little in the way of epiphytes with *Ulota phyllantha* dominant and **Ulota crispa* s.s. *Campylopus brevipilus* was found on the adjacent blanket bogs as we headed back to the cars and lunch. In typical fashion the ravine near the car park proved far richer.

For the afternoon we again divided company. Whilst one group headed back to Stornoway and the sliver of unrecorded land in NB52, the others stayed in the rather unprepossessing NB44. This square quickly turned into a lesson in not judging ground by first appearances! The tiny area of dunes had *Entodon concinnus* and *Syntrichia ruralis*. The sandstone conglomerate to the north was surprisingly bare but a small *Salix*-covered gully yielded many records, including the island rarity **Lunularia cruciata*! A brief venture inland started with the usual trek across cut-over peat land, where Mark discovered that the marginal ditch had a very extensive population of **Anthoceros punctatus* and also some **Phaeoceros laevis*. The venture onto Chicken Head (NB52) was most notable for the carpets of gentians and the behaviour of the bonxies and arctic skuas, but *Nowellia curvifolia* was found, being deprived of its more usual logs, creeping among *Campylopus brevipilus* and *Sphagnum tenellum* in coastal mire.

THURSDAY 26 JULY

Thursday saw us setting our sights on a remote part of Lewis, the completely unrecorded square of NB30. This would have involved a long walk in from Eisgein, but we were again very fortunate in being able to benefit from Brendan's local knowledge and contacts as he arranged for a local fisherman, Donald Macleod (or Doleshan as he's known locally – to distinguish him from the 3,000 other Donald Macleods on the island) to give us a lift from Leumrabhagh (Lemreway) across Loch Sealg to the coast east of Rubha Dubh.

We were also fortunate, on a day with an extremely doubtful weather forecast, to have brilliant sunshine and calm seas, otherwise landing on and embarking from the rocky shoreline could have been problematic. Once ashore we divided into two parties, with one group heading for the higher rocky ground and coastal ravines to the east and the second group heading south to explore the lochs, moorland and ravines. The eastern area proved most interesting with abundant *Campylopus shawii*, *Grimmia funalis* and *G. curvata*, whilst the coastal ravine yielded *Aphanolejeunea microscopica*, *Colura calyptrifolia*, *Trichostomum hibernicum*, *Hypnum callichroum* and abundant *Tortella tortuosa*.

The return to Stornoway let us experience the torrential rain endured by the rest of the island whilst we had been basking in the sunshine, and once the storm moved on four of us headed out for a quick evening recording the Point Peninsula (NB53) at Seisiadar where *Radula aquilegia* was found growing in coastal turf.

FRIDAY 27 JULY

The final full day of recording saw us heading west again, first to the north-west coast at Gabhsann bho Thuath (Galson) (NB45). The inland area was once again dominated by a fringe of cut-over peat, with *Cephalozia catenulata* and *C. leucantha*. **Sphagnum flexuosum* was found by Nick in the rushy ground at the edge of the blanket bog, but the lochans spotted on the map proved not to be patterned bog and were more favoured by greater black-backed gulls than bryophytes. So forsaking the bogs for the coast and lunch, we were rewarded by delights, a small but rich area with a complex of fen and hillside flushes with an extensive population of *Haplomitrium hookeri* plus *Sphagnum teres* and *S. warnstorffii*. After this we once again divided up to cover two final hectads, Aird Dhail (NB46) to the north, which yielded **Hygrohypnum*

ochraceum, and Arnol (NB34) to the south where a large population of *Blepharostoma trichophyllum* and *Racomitrium affine* were found on the coastal rock outcrops.

SATURDAY 28 JULY

On the final Saturday there was only time for a brief visit to the grounds of Stornoway Castle before heavy rain and the pressing need to catch the ferry dragged us away. However, even that short exploration of a wooded ravine and some of the mature park trees, both rare habitats in Lewis, yielded 70 species for NB43, including **Eurhynchium pumilum* and **Dicranoweisia cirrata*, and further populations of *Lunularia cruciata**, first recorded 2 days earlier in NB44. **Orthotrichum pulchellum* was found, but as only a single clump was seen, it was left *in situ* to spread and remains for a subsequent bryologist to claim the record. Only the fringes of these extensive wooded grounds have been examined and they would warrant further investigation.

Our small party worked very hard to record 16 under-recorded hectads. We found 20 new or debracketed vice-county records, and some interesting ground in this far flung corner of the Outer Hebrides. Though much of the centre of Lewis is fairly uniform and involves working long distances to find any variation in habitat, the coastal sites yielded some interesting gems with very enjoyable recording, and the weather was kind to us for most of the trip. Our thanks go to Brendan O'Hanrahan for arranging the boat trip and to Doleshan for taking time off from his fishing to ferry us back and forth across the sea loch.

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