



THE DUBLIN NATURALISTS' FIELD CLUB

Club Newsletter

Autumn 2023

Dear Members,

We hope you enjoy this account of the many events that took place this autumn. This year, the club organised a series of events intended to introduce environmentally-conscious Dublin-based students to field botany and to the activities of the DNFC. To this end we held two outdoor events to examine the flora and ecology of the banks of the Grand Canal in the Baggot St. Bridge area. These outings were promoted in particular by two of our student members. The contacts made led to a series of indoor events, introducing future botanists to the history of botanical recording in Ireland and featured original books and engravings. These were held in the School of Botany, for access to which, we are particularly fortunate.

OUTINGS

Rathmines, August 2023.

The influence of watercourses (many now underground) and other natural determining factors on the built environment of Rathmines were highlighted during a walk through the streets of this busy Dublin suburb.

Corballis, Co. Dublin. August 2023.

A number of coastal plants were examined in areas of salt marsh, shingle and outer dunes at Corballis, Co. Dublin. These included the glassworts *Salicornia dolicostrachya* and *S. ramosissima*, sea lavenders *Limonium binervosum* and *L. humile* and *Triglochin maritima*, *Plantago maritima*, *Aster tripolium* and *Limbarda crithmoides* (syn. *Inula crithmoides*). The distribution of species in relation to ecological gradients was considered.



Aster tripolium and *Salicornia ramosissima*, Saltmarsh, *Limbarda crithmoides*.

Photographs S. Hanley

Grand Canal. September 2023.

This outing, the second of two, focussed on a section of the canal west of Baggot Street Bridge. The canal flora is of interest in that it provides an opportunity to examine aquatic and emergent species within the inner city. These species, part of the indigenous flora of wetlands in the Central Plain were originally spread into the Dublin area by the dragging action of canal boats and by the flow eastward of water from the summit level at Robertstown, Co. Kildare, which conveyed their seeds and vegetative propagules. When compared to the studies conducted by DNFC several decades ago, it seemed that the bankside flora and vegetation was largely unchanged, with large stands of tall grasses such as *Glyceria maxima* and *Phragmites australis*, and other robust emergent species including *Iris pseudacorus* and *Sparganium erectum* providing structural support for less sturdy species. Of particular interest was the substantial presence of *Lycopus europaeus*, a species seldom encountered in Dublin, other than in the canals system.

The true aquatics species however had not fared well, and though one cannot judge on the basis of a small number of visits, it appears that many water species, especially in the genus *Potamogeton* had become very scarce. The immediate reasons for this decline were not clear, but the position needs to be monitored to develop more informed perspectives as to the causes. The canal at Baggot St. Bridge was once a spot where the nationally-rare *Groenlandia densa* could be encountered in quantity. Of some considerable concern was the occurrence of *Crassula helmsii*, a well-known invasive species, which forms large mats of vegetation of the bed of the canal. This species is exceedingly common in the Grand Canal to the west of Dublin city and is now occupying the space formerly held by native species.

A more pleasing aspect of the walks was the number of shade-loving and natural grassland species encountered, which continue to maintain an authentic presence on the dry and lime-rich soils on the fringes of the canal. These habitats comprise an enduring genetic reservoir of native species, in contradistinction to the large numbers of introduced wild-flowers now being actively sown in flowerbeds around the city.

Clara Vale. September 2023.

The poor acid soil of the Avonmore River valley supports a number of characteristic woodland species. The ground cover included mosses *Thuidium tamariscinum* and *Polytrichum formosum*, the hard fern *Blechnum spicant*, cow-wheat *Melampyrum pratense* and wood sorrel *Oxalis acetosella*. Holly *Ilex aquifolium*, the bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* and honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum* were components of the shrub layer. The sessile oak *Quercus petraea*, rowan *Sorbus aucuparia*, birch *Betula pubescens* and Norway Spruce *Picea abies* were some of the trees recorded.



Blechnum spicant and *Melampyrum pratense* (Photographs 2 & 3).

Photographs S. Hanley

Knocksink Wood, Enniskerry. October 2023.

Knocksink Wood, designated a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), is situated in the Glencullen River valley. The old oak woodlands, petrifying springs and alluvial forests are some of the diverse habitats in the site. Over forty fungal species were recorded including the blue roundhead *Stropharia caerulea*, the clouded agaric *Clitocybe nebularis*, the sheathed woodtuft *Kuehneromyces mutabilis*, the red-cracking bolete *Xerocomellus chrysenteron*, sulphur tuft *Hypholoma fasciculare* and the stinking dapperling *Lepiota cristata* as well as species of honey fungus, stonecaps, puffballs and earthballs.



Helvella crispa, *Melanoleuca melaleuca*, *Ramaria cf. stricta* and *Trametes versicolor*.

Photographs A. Healy, S. Hanley

Farmleigh. October 2023.

The park and gardens host a wide range of native and exotic trees with mature and younger specimens. The characteristic features of a number of trees were examined, including the seeds of the hornbeam *Carpinus betula*, the cones on western red cedar *Thuja plicata*, the deciduous cones of the dawn redwood *Metasequoia glyptostroboides* and the male cones of the deodar *Cedrus deodara* that produce pollen in November. The contrasting terminal leaflets of the London plane *Platanus x hispanica* (short) and the oriental plane *P. orientalis* (long and

extended) and the white markings on the undersides of 'hiba' *Thujopsis dolabrata* leaves were shown.



Acer griseum bark, layering in a mature *Thuja plicata*, young *Liquidamber styraciflua*.

Photographs S. Hanley.

WORKSHOPS

These workshops were held in the National Botanic Gardens by permission of the Director. Members shared their knowledge of and exhibited material from many plant groups. These included fresh and pressed material from the Brassicaceae (Cruciferae), Apiaceae (Umbelliferae), *Epilobium*, *Rosa* and *Potamogeton* hybrids as well as some late flowering weeds from north Dublin. There were short presentations about two rare species, the forked spleenwort *Asplenium septentrionale* and the Dorset Heath *Erica ciliaris*, an introduction to botanical Latin, an introduction to plant genetics and a review of various publications.

In addition, a number of sessions were devoted to fern identification skills with a particular focus on the *Dryopteris affinis* group. Participants were shown the features that distinguish the *D. affinis* group from the other *Dryopteris* ferns and were informed about the best procedures for recording, collecting and preserving specimens for further examination. This introduction was followed by a two day workshop led by visiting experts from the British Pteridological Society. Members were invited to bring samples of fresh and pressed *Dryopteris* specimens for determination.



Fern workshops, detail of lowest pinnae and rachis scales.

Photographs S. Hanley.

ONLINE PRESENTATION

Joshua Clarke is a conservation officer for Buglife (The Invertebrate Conservation Trust, Northern Ireland). Joshua spoke of his experience of recording Opiliones, an order of arachnids also known as harvestmen. Opiliones appear in the fossil record ~400mya and appear to have changed very little in the interim. Some species scavenge, others feed on small arthropods eg. springtails. They have no venom glands (unlike some spiders) and employ a number of defence mechanisms against predation including bobbing, thanatosis (playing dead), secretion, crypsis (cryptic colours) and leg autonomy for protection. 19 species were recorded here in 2021. Native species include *Rilaena triangularis* and *Opilio parietinus*. An alien species, *Opilio canestrinii* has becoming more widespread.

Thanks to the many experts and club members who contributed to these events.

We look forward to seeing you in 2024.