

## THE PURPLE SPLURGE

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I visited Lundy for the second time, not, as many visitors, with the prime object of bird-watching, but searching for rare plants as the island, being so isolated and unspoilt by modern methods of agriculture, is a haven for our wild flowers as well as birds and animals.

Before I arrived in June 1978 on my first visit I contacted the Biological Records Centre at Monkswood to see if there was anything useful I could do during my week's stay. In reply I was told, yes they would be grateful if I could forward to them information on the status of three plants either rare or non-existent on the mainland for which they had no recent information. These were:-

Lundy Cabbage, Balm-leaved Figwort and the Purple Splurge.

The first plant as many people will know, is endemic to Lundy being found nowhere else in the world. The second used to be found quite frequently along the Devon and Cornwall coast line but has become increasingly rare over recent years and may soon only be found on the off-shore islands such as Lundy and the Scillies. The third, although found originally at several points along the coast on the mainland, now almost certainly extinct there. The most recent record apart from the Channel Islands was from Lundy.

On arriving I was greeted by the sight of the Lundy Cabbage *Rhynchosinapis corightii* in full bloom beside the road coming up from the Landing Beach. It does, I later discovered, grow on the cliffs and scree slopes along a large portion of the east coast preferring the sunnier more exposed outcrops.

The Figwort *Scrophularia scorodonia* prefers the east coast but grows lower down in the more sheltered parts, especially around Quarry Beach and the Landing Beach. Because it prefers these moister spots with a little more topsoil it is fighting a continual battle for survival against the bracken and Rhododendrons.

The spread of the latter appears to be a serious threat especially in the Quarry Beach area. The quarries and spoil heaps have a richer flora than most of the east side, mainly due to the comparatively thin growth of Bracken but if the Rhododendrons are allowed to continue their march north this interesting area will be lost for ever.

The Purple Spurge *Euphorbia peplis* which soon became known to the natives as "Purple splurge" may already have vanished.

The Biological Records Centre has only a vague record that it once occurred in the 1 km square SS1345. As this plant normally favours sandy or gravelly beaches and the island appears to have none other than the Landing Beach area this was rather puzzling. There are in fact very small areas of beach above high water mark on Quarry Beach and just outside this grid square near Needle Rock and Battery Point. In Jenny's Cove and at other points along the west coast there are steep slopes which are quite gravelly and could have furnished a suitable habitat. Nevertheless a search carried out in two years failed to produce this elusive plant.

I would be very interested to hear from anyone who has seen (or thinks they have seen) this plant on the island in the past.