



## Plants and Ferns

Andrew Cleave

### Flowering Plants

#### The New Year Plant Hunt on Lundy:

The year got off to a good start when Assistant Warden Stuart Cossey carried out the Botanical Society of the British Isles (BSBI) New Year Plant Hunt on January 1<sup>st</sup> and recorded 14 species in flower. This event takes place nationwide every year with hundreds of observers recording plants actually in flower (not just leaves or buds), but this is the first time we have had records from Lundy. Hopefully, this can become an annual event. The most obvious flowering plant on Lundy on New Year's Day is always Common Gorse, but Stuart managed to find many far less conspicuous species like Petty Spurge, Early Dog-violet, and Tall Ramping Fumitory. The results are added to a national database and help us to understand how wild and naturalised plants are responding to a changing climate.

Full list for the 2023 New Year Plant Hunt on Lundy (Stuart Cossey)

Daisy	<i>Bellis perennis</i>	flowering early or late	native
Red Valerian	<i>Centranthus ruber</i>	flowering late	neophyte
Ivy-leaved Toadflax	<i>Cymbalaria muralis</i>	flowering late	neophyte
Bell Heather	<i>Erica cinerea</i>	flowering late	native
Petty Spurge	<i>Euphorbia peplus</i>	flowering expected	archaeophyte
Tall Ramping-fumitory	<i>Fumaria bastardii</i>	flowering late	native
Creeping Buttercup	<i>Ranunculus repens</i>	flowering early or late	native
Groundsel	<i>Senecio vulgaris</i>	flowering expected	native
Red Champion	<i>Silene dioica</i>	flowering early	native
Sea Champion	<i>Silene uniflora</i>	flowering late	native
Smooth Sow-thistle	<i>Sonchus oleraceus</i>	flowering late	native
Dandelion	<i>Taraxacum sp</i>	flowering early	native
Gorse	<i>Ulex europaeus</i>	flowering early	native
Early Dog-violet	<i>Viola reichenbechiana</i>	flowering early	native

In line with the national trend, five of these species feature in the “top ten” list of most frequently recorded plants nationwide – Daisy, Dandelion, Petty Spurge, Groundsel, and Gorse, but some of the others, such as Tall Ramping-Fumitory, are far less frequent with only a handful of scattered records elsewhere. Some of these species might be expected to be in flower on this date in a mild winter, but for others, flowering is either late or early.

Notes: *Archaeophyte* - a plant which is not native to a region but was an introduced species in ancient times.  
*Neophyte* – a plant which is not native to a region and was introduced in recent history.

#### Other flowering plant records during 2023

Two species of Milkwort occur on Lundy and the flowers are very similar at first glance, so it is necessary to examine the arrangement of the lower leaves to be sure of the correct identification. **Common Milkwort** *Polygala vulgaris* has alternate leaves but the very similar **Heath Milkwort** *P. serpyllifolia* has opposite lower leaves. The flowers of both species are very much alike, usually an intense blue, but can sometimes be pale blue, and in Common Milkwort they could sometimes be pink or very pale. Heath Milkwort usually has a shorter inflorescence and is also

◀ *Skullcap* *Scutellaria galericulata* near *Tibbets August* (photo: Tracey Eden).



▲ Heath Milkwort *Polygala serpyllifolia* April (Photo: Mandy Dee).

a smaller, more prostrate plant. Records of Heath Milkwort this year have come from the steep slopes near the south end and around the top of Gannet's Coombe, although both species are quite widespread in grassy areas.

Thanks to Tracey Eden for spotting **Skullcap** *Scutellaria galericulata* in a damp gully on the east side beyond Tibbets on August 9th. Skullcap is easily overlooked until the deep blue paired flowers open. It is most common on Lundy in the Gannet's Coombe area and sometimes flowers quite close to the main track, but always in very damp locations and usually under other vegetation. There were many reports of **Sheep's-bit** *Jasione montana* which is another of the blue-flowered species on Lundy. It is very tolerant of drought conditions and often grows on almost bare rock. It is a good source of nectar and attracts many insects including the **Sulphur Beetle** *Cteniopus sulphureus*.

The tops of walls and gaps between cobble stones are good habitats for small, low-growing species that are unable to compete with more aggressive plants. **Lesser Trefoil** *Trifolium dubium* and **Slender Trefoil** *T. micranthum* are both small, creeping annuals which can be found in the village area, the paths around Millcombe House and in frequently mown grassy areas. Both species did well this year with the peak of flowering in mid-summer, but some persisted until mid-October.

**Swine-cress** *Lepidium coronopus* is quite widespread on Lundy on paths, tracks, gateways and well-trodden stony areas. It forms small compact patches and, on closer examination, can be seen

**Plants of wall tops and stony paths on Lundy.**



▲ Ivy-leaved Toadflax *Cymbalaria muralis* on the top of the wall by Stoneycroft, May (photo: John Hedger).



▲ Soft Brome Grass *Bromus hordeaceus* on the top the wall by Barton Field, May (photo: John Hedger).



▲ Wall Pennywort *Umbilicus rupestris* and Ivy-leaved Toadflax *Cymbalaria muralis* on Barton Field Wall (photo: Tim Davis).



▲ Lesser Trefoil *Trifolium dubium* amongst stones, The Village May (photo: Andrew Cleave).

to have dense clusters of small flowers with 2mm-long white petals. However, **Lesser Swine-cress** *L. didymium* is also present and very similar at a glance. A quick way of distinguishing the two species is by scent, as Lesser Swine-cress has a pungent aroma when the leaves are crushed. The flowers are small with minute, or sometimes absent petals. Both species are found in the village area, around the Stone Crusher, and in some gateways. **Sea Storksbill** *Erodium maritimum* is another often overlooked species that grows in similar locations and has small flowers with tiny petals which are shed almost as soon as the flower opens. It also forms distinctive leaf rosettes on bare and stony ground. A later-flowering species which did well this year, especially in the disturbed ground around the Stone Crusher is **Black Nightshade** *Solanum nigrum*, an annual which produces small clusters of black fruits by late summer.

## Grasses & Sedges- the May survey by Steven Sylvester and Natural England

A visit was made to Lundy by a team from Fera, principally Steven Sylvester, and Natural England in May 2023 and recorded a number of grass and sedge species, some of which have not been noted in recent years – presumably because they have been overlooked in previous surveys.

### Under recorded grass species found in the May 2023

Brown Bent	<i>Agrostis vinealis</i>	Gannet's Coombe
Squirrel-tail Fescue	<i>Vulpia bromoides</i>	nr Millcombe Pond
Spreading Meadow-grass	<i>Poa pratensis ssp irrigata</i>	Gannet's Coombe
Crested Dog's-tail	<i>Cynosurus cristatus</i>	NW of Old Hospital

### Other grass species recorded

(Including several more common and frequently seen species on Lundy):

Early Hair-grass	<i>Aira praecox</i>
Silver Hair-grass	<i>Aira caryophyllea</i>
Creeping Bent	<i>Agrostis stolonifera</i>
Common Bent	<i>Agrostis capillaris</i>
Soft Brome	<i>Bromus hordeaceus ssp ferronii</i>
Sea Fern-grass	<i>Catapodium marinum</i>
Purple Moor-grass	<i>Molinia caerulea</i>
Sheep's-fescue	<i>Festuca ovina</i>
Sweet Vernal-grass	<i>Anthoxanthum odoratum</i>
Smooth Meadow-grass	<i>Poa pratensis subs pratensis</i>
Spreading Meadow-grass	<i>Poa pratensis subs irrigata</i>
Perennial Rye-grass	<i>Lolium perenne</i>

### Sedge species recorded

Sand Sedge	<i>Carex arenaria</i>
Common Sedge	<i>Carex nigra</i>
Greater Tussock Sedge	<i>Carex paniculata</i>
Common Yellow Sedge	<i>Carex demissa</i>

### Ferns

Thanks to all those who entered records of ferns in the Logbook. They included **Hay-Scented Buckler Fern** (*Dryopteris aemula*) a small but elegant tripinnate (three times branched) leaved fern clinging to the banks found along the Lower East Side Path north of the Quarries by Sheena Duller. She also recorded **Sea Spleenwort** *Asplenium marinum*. It is a robust fern able to tolerate salt spray, so is often found closer to the sea than other ferns. It is also able to grow in rock crevices and on walls where it does not suffer competition from other larger species. It is quite common on the walls at the Fog Battery and has also colonised the south-facing wall of the Castle. Some quite large specimens can be found in the Earthquake, apparently growing out of bare rock. Another species of *Asplenium*, recorded on Lundy in the past, but not seen in recent years, is **Lanceolate Spleenwort** *Asplenium obovatum ssp billotii*. This is also likely to occur on walls, but in more sheltered locations than Sea Spleenwort as it is a far less robust species. There have been occasional possible sightings of this species recently, so it will be well worth checking likely locations, such as the walls around Millcombe, in case this lost Lundy fern is still present.

*Contributors: Many thanks to everyone who made notes in the LFS Logbook of plants and ferns they spotted this year. Your help is much appreciated.*



▲ Sea Spleenwort *Asplenium marinum* on rocks within the Earthquake (photo: Sheena Duller).



▲ Hay-Scented Buckler Fern *Dryopteris aemula* Lower East Side Path nr. Brazen Ward (photo: Sheena Duller).