

ISLES OF SCILLY 24-31 May 2008

Saturday 24 May

Most of the group met up with leaders Rosemary and Ian on the ferry RMV *Scillonian*. The sailing was later than usual as the ferry was making a double sailing. The weather was good and plenty of gannets, Manx shearwaters and other birds were seen on the way.

Arriving in Hugh Town we left our luggage to be brought by carrier and made our way to Lyonesse Guest House where Melanie and Alan greeted us and showed us to our rooms. The luggage soon arrived. A brief meeting before dinner was held in the lounge overlooking the Harbour. The leaders introduced the holiday and outlined the itinerary for the week and discussed safety issues. After dinner the group went to a 'powerpoint' presentation by local 'birdman' Will Wagstaff. This was illustrated by many superb photographs of the islands and their wildlife and made a very good introduction to Scilly.

Sunday 25 May St Mary's

With the weather undecided today we stayed on St Mary's. Our plan to use the bus was stymied when we heard it had broken down! So a change of plan and we set off to walk to Old Town via the nature reserve at Lower Moors. The Lower Moors are marshy areas with grey willow *Salix cinerea oleifolia* carr over a wet ditch with lady fern *Athyrium filix-femina*, starwort *Callitriche brutia*, hemlock water dropwort *Oenanthe crocata* and other wetland plants. Looking out from a 'blind' over Shooter's Pool we could see bog pondweed *Potamogeton polygonifolius* and lesser spearwort *Ranunculus flammula*. From the bird hides overlooking the Lower moors pool we watched gadwall. Arriving at Old town Bay on the east side of the island we walked along to a small bay at Porth Minick where house holly fern *Cyrtomium falcatum* grows among the rocks and on the beach sea sandwort *Honkenya peploides*, sea kale *Crambe maritima* and sea pea *Lathyrus maritimus* were growing.

At Tolman Point the huge drifts of pale dewplant *Drosanthemum floribundum* and Hottentot fig *Carpobrotus edulis* growing over the rock attracted attention. We also located a few plants of suffocated clover *Trifolium suffocatum* and sea pearlwort *Sagina maritima*. The common white clover *Trifolium repens* and western clover *Trifolium occidentale* were nearby and the differences could be easily determined.

After lunch at Tolman Cafe we walked around the bay to Old Town church and the churchyard with naturalised Cinerarias *Pericallis* hybrid in many colours as well as a mix of native and cultivated plants. Then a walk along around the edge of the coast and up the steep steps on to the headland at Penninnis Point. Here among coastal grassland and heathland with huge granite carns, wind-sculptured into amazing forms and the lighthouse we found more of the plants that were becoming familiar to us. In one patch of heath we found spring squill *Scilla verna*, quite close to a rock formation called Pulpit Rock from its resemblance to an old-fashioned church pulpit. In this area are found several rare lichens; so soon people were on hands and knees looking through lens at the tiny ciliate strap-lichen *Heteroderma ciliata*. On rocks nearby were also spun-sugar like golden hair lichen *Teloschistes flavicans*. Among the rocks we saw wheatears and the rock pipits continually

performing their song flight. On our walk back along King Edward's Road towards town we were lucky to locate a short-toed lark on a ploughed field.

Down Buzza Hill where greater quaking grass *Briza maxima* and rough dogstail grass *Cynosurus echinatus* grow, along the sea front at Porthcressa and then through town . Some people then returned to the guest house and the others continued up the hill and onto the Garrison and to the Elizabethian Star Castle and views across to the more distant islands. We returned to Lyonnesse by taking the short-cut through the 'sally-port' through the Garrison walls.

Monday 26 May

Although the day dawned dull and blowy we decided to go to the island of Bryher. Before the boat had gone far across the Roads towards Bryher and Tresco the rain started. The boatman tried to make the trip less bumpy for his passengers and took a long way round – eventually taking twice as long as the usual twenty minutes trip, ensuring we all got very wet! When we arrived on Bryher we decided to go into the little church where there are very beautiful new windows designed and crafted by a local stained glass artist . We admired the wildlife depicted in the windows as we dripped on the stone floor, but eventually had to leave the shelter and venture forth. It had been predicted the wind and rain might stop later, but instead the storm increased so we then botanising was impossible and we were forced to take refuge first in Hell Bay hotel for coffee and then to Fraggie Rock cafe to lunch! Abandoning the expedition we caught the boat back to St Mary's – the boatman this time speeding back as everyone was too wet to need any consideration.

Soon we were back at Lyonnesse and filling Melanie's kitchen with piles of wet boots and clothes. The warm lounge proved a welcome refuge. Despite the abandoned excursion the day had been a graphic example of life and conditions on these small islands.

Tuesday 27 May

Undeterred by the conditions yesterday we set off to the small inhabited island of St Agnes. The weather had improved and we were soon walking around in warm sunshine. First we visited one of the bulb farms on the island where we were able to see at close hand many of the unusual and beautiful arable weed species associated with growing winter-flowering narcissus. Species including lesser quaking-grass *Briza minor*, small-flowered catchfly *Silene gallica*, small tree-mallow *Lavatera cretica*, musk storksbill *Erodium moschatum* , four-leaved allseed *Polycarpon tetraphyllum* , corn marigold *Chrysanthemum segetum* , field madder *Sherardia arvensis* , hairy buttercup *Ranunculus sardous* , great brome *Anisantha diandra* , as well as the fumitories *Fumaria muralis boraei* and *F. bastardii* . From the farm we made our way along a muddy land still wet from the rain of the previous day to the open heathland of Wingletang Down. Here we were able to see some of the rare heathland plants including lesser adderstongue fern *Ophioglossum azoricum*, and a few dying fronds of the very rare, even smaller least adderstongue *O. lusitanicum* and tiny pea-flowers of orange birdsfoot *Ornithopus pinnatus*. Walking around the coast we saw more fantastic rock shapes, waved heath and small bays as well as distant views of the Western Isles and the isolated tower of the Bishop Rock lighthouse. At the curiously named Beady Pool we sat on the bank and ate our sandwiches and watched the oystercatchers and ringed plovers. Most of the plants had been washed from the bay during the winter but some sea kale *Crambe maritima* was already growing back and in the dune behind was both sea spurge *Euphorbia paralias* and Portland spurge *E.*

portlandica. On the slopes nearby the plaintive calls of ring plovers revealed one sitting on a nest so we avoided disturbing her. On the way back we admired some large sea spleenworts *Asplenium maritima* in rock crevices in one of the huge carns. We then continued on around the coast to St Werna's Bay and St Werna's Well and up the hill again to the Coastguard cottages where we called in at the cafe for tea and cakes. Best cream teas ever!

From here we walked down to another small bay and harbour and then across the chamomile-scented cricket field to return to the quay and our boat back to St Mary's.

Wednesday 28 May – St Martin's & Eastern Isles

Another promising day. So we elected to go to St Martin's but via the Eastern Isles. This is a longer boat trip and we sailed in and out around the beautiful, uninhabited Eastern Isles with their softer contours and green with bracken, coastal grassland and heathy hilltops. As we went round we saw cormorants, shags, guillemot and razorbill, fulmar and oystercatchers. Also we had good views of the female peregrine on a crag and the many seals in the water and on the rocks –great photographic opportunity!

Then we landed at Higher Town on St Martin's. By the landing were many unusual plants. Here we walked over another chamomile cricket field to admire seaside buttercup *Ranunculus baudottii* in the pool. Here we left June who was going back on an earlier boat apparently umpiring a match in the tennis courts! Then up the steep hill to the village and then a long walk along the white concrete road to Lower Town. On the way we stopped many times to look at plants or the amazing views. At Lower Town we had tea on the lawn outside the Hotel –again with beautiful views across Tean Sound. Here some of us heard and briefly glimpsed a bee-eater! Later we heard it had been recorded about twenty minutes later on another island!

Then into the boat and return to St Mary's along the coast. Common terns, guillemots and other birds on the way.

In the evening some people walked up onto the Garrison to watch the women's gig race coming back to the harbour.

Thursday 29 May - Tresco

Due to work on one of the quays we had fewer options over the visit to Tresco today. Most people elected to go into the Abbey Gardens. Others had other plans to see more of the rest of the island. We walked the long way to the gardens – seeing some pheasants and a male golden pheasant --to the Gardens via the edge of great Pool and the plantations. The Gardens as usual were superb and excellent for photography. Unfortunately for the botanists the gardeners had been busy so not so many interesting weeds were found!

Then we returned to the quay along the north of the Great Pool, visiting the two bird hides on the way to see some of the resident gadwall and other waterfowl, and looking at plants as we went. Then it was once more back to St Mary's.

An optional evening trip to look for sea birds was taken up by several of the group. We sailed out to the sanctuary of Annet, then down to Mellegan in the Western Rocks, returning after sunset. We

were lucky to see a number of Manx shearwaters as well as puffins, guillemot, razorbill, fulmar, kittiwake, as well as shag and cormorants.

Friday 30 May

With another fine day forecast it was decided to return to Bryher rather than spend the day on St Mary's (the cessation of the bus service rather changing the original plans). Arriving at the quay on Bryher we walked south and picked up the coastal path to walk around the base of Samson Hill to Rushy Bay. As we passed Veronica Farm several took the opportunity to buy bags of the gorgeous homemade fudge made there. On the way we had also seen a large patch of the maritime form of common broomrape *Orobanche minor maritima* growing under a hedge.

Around the coast we passed a number of tiny fields that were at one time planted with bulbs but some are already reverting to bracken and heath. Along the edge were stands of wood spurge *Euphorbia amygdaloides* growing in the open. This is believed to be one of the relict woodland species found in Scilly.

At Rushy Bay a hunt for the dwarf pansy proved fruitless, but many other miniature plants could be seen. A patch of lesser adderstongue *Ophioglossum azoricum* was also found. On Heathy Hill nearby both birdsfoot species, orange birdsfoot *Ornithopus pinnatus* and common birdsfoot *O. perspersillus* were in flower, as well as the first bell heather *Erica cinerea*. Our route then continued up the coast to the Pool, a true saline lagoon where we fished out some beaked tasselweed *Ruppia maritima* and then visited the small pool which has creeping marshwort *Apium inundatum*, common spikerush *Eleocharis palustris* and bulrush *Typha latifolia* (the latter probably introduced). There was still time to walk up Gweal Hill. Here we found more adderstongue fern (a new site), allseed *Radiola lineoides*, the non-flowering rosettes of autumn lady's tresses *Spiranthes spiralis* etc. The hill has been part of a grazing programme using Shetland ponies. On top of the hill we perched ourselves on vantage points to eat our picnic and enjoy the fantastic views towards the Norrad islands, Scilly Rock, Gweal Island and other islands.

Later, some returned directly to our old friend the Fraggie Rock cafe after patronising the island stores. Ian and the others went up to Hell Bay and Badplace Hill before everyone met for a cup of tea at the cafe. Then back to the quay and return by boat to St Mary's.

Saturday 31 May – St Mary's

The last day. With the carriers collecting bags early we were free to spend the day exploring more of St Mary's. We started at the Bant's carn and Halangy village and exploring the ancient sites and surrounding areas. In a field nearby we found Scilly pygmyweed *Crassula decumbens*, corn spurrey *Spergula arvensis*, small bugloss *Anchusa arvensis* and more plants of arable fields. From there we walked up the hill to the Telegraph – the highest point in Scilly and past a field yellow with corn marigolds *Chrysanthemum segetum*. Then we followed a side road towards Porthloo, stopping on the way for lunch at Juliet's Garden and another wonderful view back towards the harbour. After lunch it was slowly back to town taking in another ancient monument at Harry's Walls. Here the mown grass was full of chamomile *Chamaemelum nobile* and several of the special clovers.

Back in Hugh Town the group collected their hand luggage from Lyonesse and made their way to the quay. Due to the double sailing the quay was very busy with the Scillonian discharging one set of passengers and others queuing to board.

R. Parslow