

Urban Flora Project, Newsletter 18/2

Midsummer Update

The Urban Flora project is progressing according to the field programme: May and June have been very busy months, with field meetings in the major urban locations Stirling and Glasgow as well as some smaller towns such as Melrose, Carnoustie and North Berwick. Many of us have also been doing our own botanical explorations. I have data from Girvan and Stranraer, and several streets near where I live in Edinburgh. Some of these Edinburgh streets have not been treated with herbicide this year, at least so far. In Comiston Drive alone, I found 47 species, some of them unexpected, like *Briza major*, *Claytonia perfoliata* and *Oxalis corniculata*. I think they have escaped from gardens but here they are growing and flowering in the cracks and dust of roadsides and pavements. I like looking in cemeteries, but most are too well-tended to harbor many species. There is a good one in Dalry, and of course Warriston. If you know any good ones, anywhere in Scotland, please let us know.

Cemeteries are one of several urban environments that we need to explore thoroughly. Another is the roadside environment, especially the trunk roads. Edinburgh is bounded by the A720, which is currently looking extremely floriferous. Partly this is due to planting, I'm sure.

Lone recording can be very productive as one can fit the effort into the odd hour or so in the evening – very little planning is involved. Yes, we get strange looks from passers-by as we stare intently at walls and cracks in pavements. A hand lens around the neck seems mysterious. Bird watchers are so numerous that their binoculars do not provoke a similar reaction from the public. Sensitive people may feel self-conscious as lone botanists. In groups, this doesn't occur. There is strength in numbers. And in groups we find more species.

Have we found anything rare this summer? It's early to say, and some specimens are still being examined. The unusual ones for me have been Wall Whitlow Grass *Draba muralis* (found by David Chamberlain in Melrose), Pirri-pirri-bur *Acaena novae-zelandiae* (found by Maria Chamberlain, also in Melrose), Betony *Betonica officinalis* in Morningside and Portland Spurge *Euphorbia portlandica* (a southern species rarely recorded in Scotland) found by the shore in Girvan).

We still need more people to be involved as recorders. It's never too late to join in. There are still some organized visits: the Water of Leith on August 1st and Glasgow on August 5th.