# Belfast Naturalists' Field Club

# Field Reports 2016





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# **Oxford Island**

**Leaders: Education Team, Oxford Island** 







Mallard duck with ducklings

For the first outing of 2016, members met at Oxford Island, on the shore of Lough Neagh, in the 'Discovery Centre', where we were given a talk by the Education Team about the Reserve (including Lough Neagh, History, Habitats, Wildlife species on the Lough and Reserve and Management of the site).

Oxford Island became a peninsula after the water level of the lough was lowered artificially in 1846. Acquired by *Craigavon City Council* in the late 1960s, many thousands of mixed woodland trees have been planted, the Lough shore allowed to develop naturally and the meadows have largely reverted to species rich grassland.

Lough Neagh is the largest freshwater lake in the British Isles. It covers 160 square miles and drains almost half of Northern Ireland. Six major rivers flow into the Lough while only one, the *Lower Bann*, flows out.

Due to its international importance for wildfowl the Lough is designated as a *Ramsar* site, *Special Protection Area* and *Area of Special Scientific Interest*.



The education team at the Lough Neagh Discovery Centre offer a full range of NI Curriculum linked environmental education programmes which cater for students of all ages and abilities, from primary to university level, and cover issues relating to the environment of Lough Neagh and Oxford Island.

After the talk (and coffee) we had a guided walk around the site including Lough Neagh shore, wildlife garden, human sundial, bird hides etc.



# Orlock, County Down, Botany

Leaders Margaret Marshall *Botany* and Alastair McIlwain *Zoology* 

10th May 2016



18 members gathered at the National Trust path to **Orlock Point** on a fine May evening. "Orlock" is reputed to mean "Golden Hollow" and this year the Gorse or Whin Bushes (*Ulex europaeus*) are particularly resplendent. However care is needed to prevent them becoming too invasive.

Norma Perceval-Price saw a light brown Apple Moth and 2x7-spotted Ladybirds (Coccinella 7-punctata). Spring Squill (Scilla verna) is the flower of County Down - in May its blue flowers carpet areas of short coastal grassland and we were not disappointed. The cool spring has delayed many other coastal plants but the pink of Thrift (Armeria maritima) and the white of Sea Campion (Silene uniflora) provided a contrast.



Uniflora because it is distinguished from other Campions by having single flower-heads. Two days later I was walking on a sunny cliff path at Portpatrick, 20miles across the North Channel, and again saw spreads of the Squill but the other coastal plants appeared to be further ahead. We examined 4 different Plantains – the broad-leaved Greater Plantain (*Plantago major*) grows on trodden paths, Ribwort Plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*) in grassland, Sea Plantain (*Plantago maritima*) has linear leaves, while Buckshorn Plantain (*plantago coronopus*) has leaves like antlers.



For some strange reason, an attempt had been made in the past to create a coastal coach road by cutting through rocks and blasting a tunnel where there were warnings not to linger in case of rock falls.

Sea Radish (Raphanus raphanistrum ssp maritimus), the dominant plant in the summer, was coming into flower. Its spherical seed pods distinguish it from other brassicas. In damp places were the leaves of Yellow Flag Iris (Iris pseudacorus), which was used to treat cataracts, and Brookweed (Samolus valerandi) in the primrose family.

Spring squill

As we approached Orlock village, garden escapes became evident - patches of Chilean Iris (*Libertia formosa*) and a long-established Dewplant (*Carpobrotus edulis*). This is very invasive on cliffs in the Scilly Islands and Cornwall but not in our climate. As dusk was approaching , we returned by road after a pleasant spring evening walk.



**Margaret Marshall** 

continued

Thrift



# Orlock, County Down, Zoology

Leader: Alastair McIlwain

10th May 2016



Columba palumbus

Started at 7.00pm, clear mild evening with good visibility, scattered light cloud. Rocky shoreline with lichen covered rocks bordering arable fields with spring crops beginning to show, houses and gardens, stony, shingly beaches with small inlets, expanses of blossoming gorse and scrub consisting of old hawthorn trees, elder and rock faces covered in ancient ivy. Where water drains from the fields and gardens backing on to the area, marshy areas have formed with Flag Iris and reeds.

Reed Bunting Emberiza schoeniclus Herring Gull Larus argentatus Oyster Catcher Haematopus longirostris Pied Wagtail Motacilla alba Whitethroat Sylvia communis

Song thrush Turdus philomelos

Blackbird Turdus merula

Magpie Pica pica

Jackdaws Corvus monedula

House Sparrow Passer domesticus

Lesser Black-backed Gull Larus fuscus

Black Headed Gull Chroicocephalus ridibundus Eider Duck Somateria mollissima

Robin Erithacus rubecula

Mallard Anas platyrhynchos

Arctic Terns (TBC) Sterna paradisaea

Wood Pigeon Columba palumbus

Rock Pipit Anthus petrosus

Pheasant Phasianus colchicus

Wren Troglodytes troglodytes



Anas platyrhynchos



Larus fuscus



Somateria mollissima



Larus argentatus

BNFC Field Trip Reports 2016





Haematopus longirostris





# Belshaw's Quarry

## 17th May 2016

# Leader Ian Enlander - Geology



Belshaw's Quarry



Ian Enlander with BNFC members

Belshaws Quarry is a well-known geological excursion locality in the Lisburn area. It was acquired by the *Department of the Environment* specifically because of its geological interest. It is a designated Nature Reserve and, more recently, an *Area of Special Scientific Interest*. It is a valuable location for both formal and informal 'lessons' in geology.

The limestone quarry was certainly operating in the 1840's, one of a number of such sites in the ownership of **Bennett Megarry**. A visit by the Belfast Naturalist's Field Club to another limestone works in the area within the same ownership is recorded for September 1866. Lime production for the agricultural sector, both in Ireland and for export (especially to western Scotland from where lime-laden ships returned with coal critical for use in lime production) was an important industry still forming part of the routine management of acidic soils today. Quarrying at Belshaws ceased in the 1950's.

The oldest rock on site is a section showing the **Triassic Mercia Mudstone Group**. The rocks were described including their wider importance for their salt beds, mined at **Kilroot** (and elsewhere across Europe) and potential use for innovative engineered solutions for gas and compressed air storage under **Larne Lough** (the target salt units here will probably be the older *Permian halite beds*). Triassic (and post-Triassic) geology is of critical importance to the oil and gas industries across much of north-western Europe as reservoir and capping rocks. A significant unconformity, representing some 150 million years of 'lost time', separates the Triassic series from the overlying **Cretaceous Ulster White Limestone** (chalk) series here represented by the Portrush and Ballymagarry Members. Of particular note was the presence of the 3 main forms of

flint: nodular, tabular and the unusual barrel-shaped (and oddly named) paramoudra's. The formation of the limestone from microscopic coccolith material was discussed together with the origins of the flints noting the apparent strengths and weaknesses of 'infilling' and 'replacement' models. The small exposure of the Clay-with-Flints' prompted a discussion about the changing views on the formation of this series noting that in the 1900's the problems caused by interpreting this deposit as a result solely of in-situ weathering, had already been identified. Indeed, in the 1840's the military engineer and geologist **Portlock** identified the contentious clay component as volcanic muds. The Clay-with-Flints story is now better understood as the interaction between flints, produced by solution weathering of the chalk, and clays derived from volcanic ash deposits.

Capping the series at Belshaws are the familiar basalts, belonging to the **Palaeogene Lower Basalt Formation** which was also discussed. Belshaws hosts a good example of normal faulting, notably affecting the chalk quarry face. Also present, associated with the formation of the basalt series, are a number of intrusive dykes, seen in places to intrude the chalk and overlying basalt rocks.

The varied and enjoyable afternoon underlined the importance of this site and the need for ongoing appropriate maintenance to ensure that all the key geological features can be viewed and accessed.

Further information on the history of the site can be found at – <a href="http://lisburn.com/history/digger/Digger-2012/digger-06-01-2012.html">http://lisburn.com/history/digger/Digger-2012/digger-06-01-2012.html</a>
Documentation of the ASSI designation can be accessed at – <a href="https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/belshaws-quarry-assi">www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/belshaws-quarry-assi</a>

# Ian Enlander





# Whitepark Bay

**Leader: Mike Simms** 

21st May 2016

# Joint with Belfast Geologists' Society

Times change! In July 1870, the Club visited the area, including *Ballintoy*. The Proceedings from that year note -



"Mr. Herdman had kindly directed his men to expose the bank at the most likely spots; a vast mass of material full of fossils, was thus thrown down, and a perpendicular section of some 12 feet or more, made available; this was a very great advantage, as it furnished an opportunity for such an examination, as probably the locality never received before. Those whose zeal led them to make the necessary exertion were highly successful, and heavy bags of good specimens were made during the few hours available for the work."



In 2016 things are much more restrained; the area mentioned above are protected as an ASSI, and we confined ourselves to investigating the pebbles on the beach. There is a huge variety of rock types among these pebbles. Some are local, eroded from the cliffs and shore around the bay. Many others have been brought here by ice from near and far. We were invited to come along to see how many different types we could find, and to see if the geologists can figure out what they are and where they came from.



Our leaders helped distinguish between the bewildering range of white, black, red and other coloured pebbles.

Careful searching found a few distinctive fine-grained granite pebbles - *Ailsa Craig microgranite*, brought here as glacial erratics. Ailsa Craig granite was until recently the sole source of curling stones, but the quarries are now closed and Welsh granite is used.

Some of the grey pebbles are Jurassic, and vigorous knapping eventually revealed a couple of small but perfectly preserved ammonite.





# The Gobbins and Brown's Bay

24th May 2016



The Gobbin's Path



The Gobbin's Bridge



Zeolite intrusions



Kittiwakes (Rissa tridactyla)

The **Gobbins Path** originally opened in 1902, built as a tourist attraction for the Belfast and Northern Counties Railway Company and designed by **Berkeley Deane Wise**. Having fallen into disrepair, it opened again in April 2016, and the Club visited on the 24th May. We had been given an excellent introduction at the Club Luncheon in March, when **George McGrand** and **Robert Stewart**, guides at the Gobbins, spoke to us about the history and rebirth of the path.

This was of course not the Club's first outing to the Gobbins Path, and there are detailed accounts in the Proceedings of the Club - on 24th August 1901, when seventy members were led by **Mr BD Wise**, and on 19th September 1902, when 126 members turned up and the party had to be split in two.

With rather fewer members this time, we also had to split into two groups, as Health and Safety nowadays determine how many are allowed on the path at any one time (12). Wearing our safe footwear, and the safety helmets provided at the centre, we walked down the steep approach path from the top of the cliff, and then proceeded with our very well informed guide through 'Wise's Eye' to the path proper.

The original iron structures have been replaced by stainless steel replicas, though in many places the remains of the original ironwork can be seen along with the new. The groups made their way carefully along the 2km of the path, a couple or twenty metres above the surface of the sea. Attention was divided between examining the rocks of the cliff-face, basalt with in places interesting zeolite inclusions, and avoiding the attentions of nesting seabirds. Right at the end of the path, we glimpsed the hoped-for puffins through binoculars, high above us.

We greatly admired the way Larne Borough Council and the other organisations involved have brought this piece of history back to life, and the knowledge of our guides on all aspects of the history, geology and zoology of the Gobbins. The visitor centre, where we met before the expedition, is excellent - no need to "commandeer a cow" when the milk runs low, as our predecessors did in 1902.

# **Liam McCaughey**



Members take a break in the shade

continued





# The Gobbins and Brown's Bay (contd)

24th May 2016



Members identifying specimens in Brown's Bay

After our exciting morning on the Gobbins Cliff Path, we went to **Brown's Bay** on the northern tip of **Islandmagee** for a gentler stroll. The grass had been mown right down to the beach, so there was no chance for any seaside plants to grow.

As we walked towards the National Trust **Skernaghan Point**, we crossed a small stream where **Hemlock Water Dropwort** (*Oenanthe crocata*) was flourishing. Oenanthe means "wine-fragrant" but the plant is very poisonous.

Spring has been late this year and **Bluebells**, **Common Dog Violets** and **Primroses** were still in flower. In the sunshine the scent of the splendidly yellow **Whin/Gorse** (*Ulex europaeus*) was everywhere. On the rocky coast there were fine displays of pink **Thrift** (*Armeria maritima*) and white **Sea Campion** (*Silene uniflora*). The botanists were soon down on their knees with hand lenses examining a tiny white flower – it turned out to be **Heath Pearlwort** (*Sagina subulata*) which Webb describes as 'occasional in the north and west but unknown elsewhere' in Ireland.

**David Mc Neill**, BSBI Recorder of County Antrim, had bought the BNFC here twice, the second time to see **Grass of Parnassus** (*Parnassia palustris*) flowering, but we were too early for that. In wet places there was **Watercress** (*Rorippa nasturtium-aquaticum*) and **Ivy-leaved Water Crowfoot** (*Ranunculus hederaceus*). *Yellow Irises/Flags* (*Iris pseudacorus*) were coming into flower. Iris was the rainbow goddess, referring to the wonderful iris colours and pseudacorus refers to its use as an ancient treatment for cataract. A pleasant end to a fine BNFC excursion.





Ulex europaeu



Armeria maritima



Iris pseudacorus





# **The Gobbins Archive 1902**

# ANNUAL REPORT AND PROCEEDINGS

OF THE

# BELFAST NATURALISTS' FIELD CLUB

For the Year ending 31st March, 1902.

(THIRTY-NINTH YEAR.)



SERIES II.

VOLUME V.



PART I.

1901-02.

# Belfast :

PRINTED BY R. CARSWELL & SON.

QUEEN STREET AND COLLEGE STREET.

1904.



[Proc. B.N.F.C.,

was explored by the more juvenile members of the party. Another cashel on the opposite side of the hill was next visited, but it was found to be in bad preservation and hardly worth the climb. However, the view from this point was very fine. Descending the hill, Cushendun was again reached, and soon the drive back began. Dinner was served at four o'clock in Cushendall, and all too soon the signal for the homeward journey was sounded. Bidding farewell to Mrs. Millar, and with a parting cheer for the Cushendall members, the drive to Parkmore through Glenariff commenced. The views of the road up the valley were magnificent, and it was with regret that Parkmore was reached. After a quick run to Belfast, the party separated, the mem-

# BENEVENAGH.

bers expressing their delight at the amount of enjoyment

10th August.

This excursion, owing to the inclement weather, attracted only two members, who duly carried out the programme, but no report was supplied.

# THE GOBBINS.

Among the seventy members who joined this excursion on 24th August were to be found botanists, conchologists, geologists, and a large proportion of members who joined as excursionists, without any other hobby than to enjoy an afternoon in the country. All were catered for in their respective pursuits. About one-half of the party started by the 12-50 train for Ballycarry station; arriving there cars were in waiting, and the majority of the party proceeded rapidly to the coast, passing over the main roads for a short distance, and then taking the pleasing by-roads with which the district is ramified, till they reached the high ground overlooking the North Channel. Here they descended from the cars, and proceeded on foot to the shore. In former years

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1901-1902.]

it was somewhat difficult progress, but on this occasion it was easily undertaken by everyone, as convenient styles or footbridges have been erected by the Northern Counties Railway Company at all difficult places. Passing the first headland a fine comprehensive view of the coast was obtained; in the distance the bluff head of the Gobbins, reminding one of Fair Head, or some of the well-known headlands at the Causeway. In the middle foreground large masses of white chalk have fallen into the sea, and give variety to the coast line, paved with a multitude of pebbles, well-rounded chalk predominating; in the immediate foreground a steep wall of black basalt rises, and casting its shadow over the path gives charm to the foreground, and lends perspective to the distance. As soon as we had grasped the features of the landscape we turned to the details near at hand, and found romance and mystery in the Smugglers' Cave. Truth is stranger than fiction, and local history stranger than romance. "Here in this cave Lieutenant Moses Hill, the head of the now great house of Downshire, lay concealed in 1588, after the disastrous affray with M'Donnel, at Altfracken, when the Scot put to flight the soldiers from Carrickfergus, and Sir John Chichester lost his head." A stone wall or screen extends across the mouth of the cave, and commands the narrow entrance with its rifle embrasures. At present much of the entrance is obscured from view, as debris has fallen from the overhanging cliff, and masked the screen on the outside, but on the inside the details of the wall are clearly seen.

Soon the geologists came upon the small exposure of Lias clay, a stiff blue clay, which when saturated with water becomes plastic, and, underlying the Chalk and Basalt, has formed an insecure foundation for the overlying rocks, with the result that small landslips form a feature in the scenery where such a combination of rocks exists. Fossils were found in abundance in the short time at our disposal, even our youngest members picking up such specimens as Cardinia listeri and Ostrea. A little further on there are little cliffs showing sections of the Cretaceous rocks with their various zones



from the Glauconitic Sands with their Brachiopods and fish remains at the base to the compact white Limestone at the top. Near Hillsport the character of the Chloritic sands was well seen in the slipped masses of the undercliff, some abounding in Inoceramus bands, and in some four places yielding spines of an extinct urchin (Cidaris), sponges (Ventriculites, Camerospongia, and Etheridgia), shells such as Rhynchonella and Pecten, and many others of species now extinct.

A short way ahead appeared the hospitable cottage of Mrs. Hill, where tea is to be obtained. Close to this is a wellmarked pathway leading round the foot of the Gobbins cliffs. This path has been carried round the foot of the headland well above high water mark along the ledges of basalt, and where walls of rock used to meet the traveller in former visits he will now find short tunnels cut through the solid rock. Where a gaping chasm yawned there is now a hanging bridge constructed of bearers of rolled iron girders with a footway of solid plank; even the nervous need not fear to pass, for the sides of the path are furnished with a wire railing to stout uprights of iron, which have a sure foundation deep in the rock. Our party was conducted by Mr. B. D. Wise round this path till we reached the first of that great series of caves that are to be found at the foot of the Gobbins cliffs. In the cool shelter of the caves we found the rocky walls covered with the most delightful sap greens—a closer inspection revealed ferns and liverworts of many varieties. Asplenium marinum and Scolopendrium vulgare var. crispum were growing in the greatest perfection on the sides of the cave and also from parts of the roof. Some members proceeded a considerable distance into the cave, but did not succeed in reaching the end. Mr. Wise, the engineer of the Northern Counties Railway, explained the intention of the Company to carry the path further round the cliffs to reach some more of these famous caves,\* and ultimately they hope to provide access to the group of seven caves further along the coast.

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<sup>\*</sup> This has now been carried out almost as far as the first of the "Seven Sisters' Caves.



1901-1902.]

It is, however, the geologist that can best gain an idea of the beauty and grandeur of the place; these headlands are the products of a comparatively recent age, which geologists term broadly the Tertiary Period. A great interval of time elapsed between the formations represented by the Chalk and the basalt found in these headlands. is the record of a time when the whole of the County Antrim was submerged beneath the sea; the remains of the deep sea fauna are still to be found as fossils embedded in the Since these animals lived many changes in the earth have taken place; what was the old sea floor was elevated and again became dry land, bleak and barren in many parts, as the nature of the Chalk is such that its decomposition did not result in forming a fertile soil such as now covers the country. Instead of being rich in the material that plants require for their growth and nourishment, the surface of the ground was covered with flints such as may be seen on the top of the chalk underlying the basalt in the Whitehead quarry. Finely comminuted chalk particles and a thin ochreous bed accumulated along river valleys, but even here the vegetation must have existed for long ages till the life in the adjoining sea had changed—one species after another dying out or being replaced by another form. At last, in the early part of the Tertiary times, great earth disturbances took place all over the County Antrim, and far north to the West of Scotland Volcanoes burst forth in places, and the Faroe Islands. large rents and fissures occurred in the chalk rocks or surface rocks in this wide area; through these fissures and from the volcanoes issued great flows of basalt in a highly heated and fluidal condition. All this matter was of basic composition; that is, it contained a much smaller percentage of silica in its composition than does granite, which geologists term an acid rock. Molten basic rocks retain their fluidity for a longer period than do acid rocks, and the consequence is the basalt flowed as sheets over large districts, overlapping another at its edges. When one sheet had solidified there may have been a period of rest during which the upper sur-



face of the sheet became subject to atmospheric influences, wind, and rain, which decomposed the surface, forming a thin coating of soil. As the basic rocks contain a large proportion of iron, so we find the resulting soils containing also much iron. Sometimes the alumina compounds were washed into the valleys, and from such soils have resulted the substance known as bauxite, from which aluminium is extracted, as in the works at Larne Harbour. But after a short interval another outburst would occur-another lava flow take place, covering up and scorching the thin coating of soil, and leaving a reddish band as the only remnant of the soil and vegetation that had flourished, and marking the limits of one flow from another. Such a course of events can be traced in the fine headlands of the Gobbins, where one flow is distinctly marked from another by these red bands, and also by the difference in character of the respective flows. Some of the beds are massive and black, others are black, but contain cavities filled with white crystalline matter known as zeolites. These can be admirably studied in the Gobbin rocks, and open up a wide field for investigation. Have these zeolites crystallised from highly-heated vapours, or have they resulted from chemical changes that have taken place in the rock after its deposition, or have both methods been employed by Nature? Volcanic action has now ceased as far as our country is concerned, but the same disturbances only shifted further north, changing in character, and are still to be found in operation in Iceland. But what is left to us in Antrim and the various islands of the West of Scotland is only the remains of a vast plateau of basalt that covered the entire district. The channel that separates the Antrim sheets from the Scottish must, therefore, represent a vast period of time during which denudation has been going on steadily but surely; during this period of time the sea and air have weathered away the intermediate rocks, and leave us now the bold cliffs which form the striking scenery of our Antrim coast. Face to face with these precipices of the Gobbins we have some of the most momentous lessons of geology deeply



1901-1902.]

imprinted on our minds, and we surely learn more than ever to appreciate the efficiency of the seemingly insignificant forces that are sculpturing and moulding the landscape, which everyone, be he field naturalist or tripper, can enjoy in proportion as he brings a mind prepared to appreciate the subject. But the interest is not confined to past history. The banks and fields are gay with flowers; in the proper season we have observed the Bladder Campion, Sea Pink, Lady's Fingers, Venus' Comb, and many other wild flowers. Bird life is abundant among the eeries on the cliffs; the Peregrine Falcon and the Herring Gull find a home in the fastnesses of the rocks. Butterflies, too, are in abundance through the fields, one member noting the rare Peacock Butterfly (Vanessa io.)

The members returned to Ballycarry, where the evening train for Belfast was taken.

## CASTLEWELLAN

The last excursion of the Summer Session was held on 7th September. Lord Annesley had kindly granted permission to visit the demesne and gardens attached to his fine country seat at Castlewellan. The party which assembled at the County Down Railway was a small one, as some were deterred by fear of rain, but what was wanting in numbers was made up by the zeal of those who were present. Arriving at Newcastle, we proceeded immediately by cars to Castlewellan. Heavy clouds capped the heights of Slieve Donard, but the summit of Thomas Mountain and many of the other prominent peaks of the Mournes were visible. Passing through the town of Castlewellan, we soon reached the gates of the fine park lands in which the residence of Earl Annesley is situated. A few minutes' pause at the gate allowed us to approach the picturesque entrance lodge, which was covered with a blaze of colour, produced by the scarlet flowers of Tropwolum speciosum. Driving along the





# The Gobbins Cliff Path Archive 1902

ANNUAL REPORT AND PROCEEDINGS

OF THE

# BELFAST NATURALISTS' FIELD CLUB

For the Year ending 31st March, 1903.

(FORTIETH YEAR.) .



SERIES II.

VOLUME V.

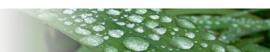


PART II.

1902-03.







88

[Proc. B.N.F.C.,

# GOBBINS CLIFF PATH.

(HALF-DAY EXCURSION.)

The final excursion of the Club took place on Saturday, 27th September, the place selected being the Gobbins Cliff Path, recently opened by the enterprise of the Northern The day being an exceptionally fine, Counties Railway. bright, autumnal one, the members of the Club and their friends turned out to the number of 126, and left by the 12-50 p.m. train for Ballycarry Station, with the Vice-President and Mr. Robert Patterson, Hon. Secretary, acting as guides. Owing to the numbers being so largely in excess of those expected and prepared for, the party had to be divided at Ballycarry, and the cars had to do double duty, starting first with sixty and then returning for the remainder, and even then each car had to carry seven passengers and the driver. The sub-division allowed the first party to start at the near end of the path, and the cars then carried the second portion to near Hill's Cottage, where both rejoined and commenced the Cliff Path proper. On this walk several of the members pointed out and explained the various points of interest, in the geological formation, with its beautiful sections of amygdaloidal basalt, studded on every conceivable portion with zeolites sparkling in the sunlight; the great dykes; the long red layers of iron and ochre punctuating, as it were, the chapters in the history of the earth's formation; the great sea caves; the long line of raised terraces, showing a gradual upward movement of the crust, and the wearing away of portions of the cliff and the consequent formation of islands, bays, heads, and recesses. The botanists of the party soon found the beautiful Sea Spleenwort (Asplenium marinum), and were loud in their praise of the precautionary measures taken for Amongst other things noticed were the winter its safety. homes of the common garden snail (Helix aspersa) hollowed out in the chalk. These came in for a large share of close attention. One member of the Club handed in the following list of birds he had noticed during the afternoon, viz.:—Song





89 1902-1903.]

thrush, blackbird, stonechat, redbreast, wren, pied wagtail, meadow pipit, rock pipit, swallow, greenfinch, house sparrow, linnet, corn bunting, yellow bunting, starling, jackdaw, rook, skylark, cormorant, heron, oyster-catcher, black-headed gull, common gull, and herring gull, making a total of twenty-four species. With reference to the path itself and its construction from an engineering point of view, one continuous chorus of praise was its just tribute, and many expressed desires to return and enjoy more leisurely the stately grandeur of the noble cliffs as seen from the safe structures of Mr. Wise, the engineer of the Railway Company. On the return from the path the goodly company of six score stopped at Hill's Cottage for tea. At this point a deadlock was within measurable distance, but the resourceful efforts of the Hon. Secretary surmounted all difficulties. He foraged round and got in extra provisions, and even when the milk was finished he was not to be beaten, for he "commandeered" a cow and brought it into the camp, and the subsequent operations caused much amusement. After tea cars again brought the members and guests to Ballycarry en route for Belfast, with many expressions of praise and gladness that the final excursion of the Session had been so successful.







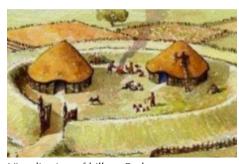
# Laytown

Leader: Declan Doogue 18th July 2016

BNFC members met up with members from the **Dublin and Wexford Naturalists' Field Clubs** at the **Sonairte Ecology Centre** in Laytown.



# **Programme**



Visualisation of hilltop Rath

We will meet at 10.30 at the Sonairte Eco-centre which is situated on the north bank of the River Nanny, with access from the R150 road between Julianstown and Laytown, Co. Meath. The day will begin with an examination of moths collected in traps that were set in the area the previous evening. Then (11.30) we will climb up to the hilltop Rath for a virtual tour of settlement history and archaeology in the region, led by local archaeologist, Kieran Campbell.

Following our historical sojourn, at 12.30 we will take a break for lunch; and participants will also have a chance to explore Sonairte's walled organic garden, nature trail, bee museum and eco-shop. There is a small café on site, but it may be busy on the day, so it would be best to bring a packed lunch.

After lunch (13.30) we will visit the area of salt marsh on a river meander just south of the nature trail at Sonairte, led by Declan Doogue; and then (14.30) we will travel the short distance out to Laytown to explore the deposition areas at the mouth of the River Nanny and to examine the vegetation colonising stabilised areas of sand and other aspects of the Laytown-Mornington coastal ecology.

Then at 16.30 we will return to the Sonairte Eco-centre for a short roundtable discussion at which all participants can give us their views on what they would like to see the FIFC organise in the future. We will round off the day by repairing around 17.45 to the nearby Lime Kiln Gastropub in Julianstown for an evening meal, and by 19.00 we should all be on our way back home.

continued





# Laytown (contd)

Leader: Declan Doogue 18th July 2016

In the afternoon we enjoyed the expertise and enthusiasm of the botanist **Declan Doogue**. In the courtyard he explained how the dominant **Mediterranean Red Valerian** (*Centranthus ruber*) could prevent the growth of our native winter annuals. Another wall-growing alien plant **Ivyleafed Toadflax** (*Cymbalaria muralis*) could survive being sprayed with weed-killer when native plants did not. The dark yellow **Mediterranean Wallfower** (*Erysimum cheiri*) has been growing on old Irish walls since Norman times. Declan showed us how to identify **Broad-leaved Willowherb** (*Epilobium montanum*)- there are 8 species of Willowherb in Ireland and all hybridise. The rarer **Keeled-fruited Cornsalad** (*Valerianella dentata*) can be distinguished from the **Common Cornsalad** (*V.locustsa*) by its fruit.



Walled Garden

We walked through the organic walled garden where we admired a fine yellow **Tree Lupin** (*Lupinus arboreus*) and along the nature trail to the salt marsh on the banks of the tidal **River Nanny**.

Here the dominant plant was **Sea Club Rush** (*Bolboschoenus/Scirpus maritimus*) along with **Sea Arrow–grass** (*Triglochin maritima*). The dominant colour beside the beach was the yellow of **Charlock** 

(Sinapis arvensis) and of **Sea Radish** (Raphanus raphanistrum ssp.maritimus) which was full of the invasive Brassica-feeding **Diamond-backed Moths**. Declan showed us how tough rootstocks of **Marram Grass** (Ammophila arenaria), **Sand Couch** (Elytrigia/Elymus juncea) and **Sand Sedge** (Carex arenaria) enable dunes to form. The invasive bluish-green **Lyme Grass** (Leymus arenarius) however is having a detrimental effect by allowing shore-growing plants to be washed away.

It has been a late spring - some say our climate is now "a long spring and a long autumn" and **Ladys' Bedstraw** (*Galium verum*) was just coming into flower. Another Bedstraw found was **Hedge Bedstraw** (*Galium mollugo*) which Webb describes as "widespread but very rare". I had once been shown it in Co.Tyrone. Being less than a hundred miles further south can make a noticeable difference to the plants one finds. There was a large clump of **Goatsbeard** (*Tragopogon pratensis*) with its spherical clocks; there were no flowers open – hence its popular name 'Jack-go-to-bed-at-noon'.

Declan was thanked for an afternoon, very interesting and informative for us all.

# **Margaret Marshall**



# **Murlough Nature Reserve**

Leader: Pamela Thomlinson and Stephen Craig

28h May 2016



Members met at *Murlough House* on the *Murlough Nature Reserve* at 9.30am for the opening of moth traps. We grouped around the table to identify the contents of the traps set up the previous evening, and highlights were kept to show those members arriving late.

Mid-morning, we set off for a walk through the reserve, looking at botany as well as butterflies. While some took their botany seriously, perhaps the most memorable event was a distant sighting of a cuckoo!



Joan McCaughey gets up close



Pale Tussock (Calliteara pudibunda)



Caroline Pannell



Latticed Heath (Chiasmia clathrata)



Pebble Prominent (Notodonta ziczac)



Cuckoo





# **Sligo Field Trip**

31st May to 3rd June 2016

Our long field trip in early summer 2016 was to County Sligo. Robert Lloyd Praeger in his book "The Way That I Went" states

"It (Sligo) is the centre of a district of high interest and beauty and whether one's tastes are archaeological biological or aesthetic, there is much to be seen and done"

Jim and I agree with Praeger that Sligo is indeed one of the most beautiful counties in Ireland but often by-passed. There is a plethora of interests for many field trips, nevertheless we made the most of our few days in Sligo's diverse scenery and habitats.

Thirty-seven BNFC members participated and we also welcomed *Dorothy* and *Terry Lyle* from *Dublin Field Club*. Members from *Sligo Field Club* joined us on some of the outings and we had the benefit of their local knowledge.



Cavan Burren Park

Our first stop on May 31st was at Cavan Burren Park which is part of the Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark and a designated UNESCO site. It is an example of a "relict" landscape where we saw the evolution of a landscape from its formation in a tropical sea to the last Ice Age.

After visiting the excellent Visitors Centre we went walking among glacial erratics, viewed the karst

features and amazing megalithic tombs dating from the Neolithic Period.

On then to our next stop in *Glencar* where *Michael Bell* from the Sligo Field Club had set up moth traps the previous evening. We then walked to Glencar Waterfall associated with Ireland's romantic poet W B Yeats. After a meal in our hotel in Sligo Town those with energy left went on a guided walk in the town organised by the Tourist Office. See report on History of Sligo Town.



On June 1<sup>st</sup> we were pleased to welcome *Leo Leydon*, President of Sligo Field Club, who accompanied us. Our first stop was *Creevykeel Neolithic Court Cairn*.

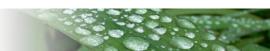
This huge Cairn encloses an oval court and a burial chamber with two compartments. Four cremations were discovered and other artefacts.

We then continued on to

Mullaghmore where we had very interesting walk in the sand dunes led by Margaret Marshall.

continued





31st May to 3rd June 2016

After lunch Mullaghmore Head was our next stop.

This is an example of a fossilised delta, details of its formation can be found in Jim's Geology report. Next on to more recent history, namely the *Spanish Armada*.



Serpent Rocks



Above, coral - Lithostrotion and Crinoid (right)



At Streedagh Strand in 1558 the great storm threw up three ships on to the shelving sand and pounded them to bits. We heard some interesting details, especially the travels in Ireland of the survivor Captain De Cuellar who even visited the Girona wreck site in Co Antrim. We then wandered across the extensive area of machair with its associated plants. The fossil collectors among us had to resist picking up samples from the Carboniferous era which were strewn on the storm beach.

However the real fossil "feast" was yet to come at Ballyconnel where the so called Serpent Rocks are absolutely amazing. The rock here belongs to the *Glencar Limestone* Formation - about 339 million years old. The fossils are corals, bryozoa, brachiopods, forminifera but it is the prolific crinoids which are so outstanding. Crinoid is from the Greek krinoeides meaning "like a lily". Although plant-like, these were marine animals anchored on the sea bed with a long segmented stem supporting a plant-like head at sea level. Now they lie horizontal for all the world like "serpents"

Our day finished with a visit to the *Promontory Fort of Knocklane*, well

defended on the seaward side by cliffs and landward by man-made ditches. Here we heard the legend of how the phantom coach and gold clad horse of *Letitia Gore-Booth of Lissadell* still haunt the place. However good a story it may be, we were told that at certain high tides the sea makes a roaring noise at it rushes into a cave below the headland!

In the evening *Sam Moore* from the Sligo Field Club gave us a talk on the Pre-History of the County which has some of the best Neolithic monuments in Ireland. This whetted our appetite for another great day.

continued



31st May to 3rd June 2016



Knocknarea Glen





June 2<sup>nd</sup> indeed proved to be that great day with geology and archaeology. Our first stop was a hidden gem, namely *Knocknarea Glen* which really is hidden unless you know where to find it. It is quite a scramble to access the main glen but well worth the effort. The sides are sheer limestone festooned with tufa and ferns. Some of our group felt that they were in a different world. The jury is still out on its formation but it could have been caused by a "pull apart" rift on the side of Knocknarea Mountain.

Our Geology Secretary Jim also pointed out that it could have happened at the end of the Ice Age. The great glaciers had scooped the valley sides almost perpendicular. When the ice melted the sides having lost the support of the ice, broke away and huge slices slid forward slowly. An example of this is the so called *Swiss Valley in Glencar* which we did not fit into our programme this time but is well worth a visit.

The afternoon saw us arrive at *Carrowmore Megalithic Cemetery* for a guided tour. Although only 64 monuments remain due to the

removal of stone for building purposes our guide assured us that originally there were about 100, making it one of the oldest and largest Neolithic complexes in Ireland. We saw stone circles, dolmens and cairns. The information from the guide and from the Visitors Centre gave us much to think about.

The main areas of Passage Tombs in Ireland are the *Boyne Valley*, *Loughcrew in Co. Meath, Carrowkeel* and *Carrowmore* in Co. Sligo. The small passage tombs we saw reminded us of a lesser version of *Newgrange, Knowth* and *Dowth* so we were left with the question did the cultural influence which led to the construction of these travel east from here to its culmination in the Boyne Valley, that is from the simple to the complex? However new thinking and carbon dating would possibly indicate that the influence moved from east to west with a deterioration in building technique or from some change in the attitude of the Neolithic people regarding monuments. It was all fascinating stuff. We noticed that the building stones used at Carrowmore were gneiss and quartzite as we were now in the rocks which make up the *Ox Mountains*.

continued





31st May to 3rd June 2016

We then travelled much farther back in time than the Neolithic, in fact to the oldest rocks in Ireland found in the Ox Mountains. We stopped at approximately where the *Highland Boundary Fault* transverses the County. At a cutting in the road there was an exposure of *Serpentinite*, the green mineral present in *Connemara marble*. This south shore of *Lough Gill* consists of the most ancient rocks in Ireland while the north shore is of *Carboniferous Limestone*. We went on a walk in *Slish Wood* with its rare plants and view over lovely Lough Gill and "Lake Isle of Innisfree". The geology and botany reports give details of this area.

In the evening we had our usual conversazione with opportunity to display our "finds", photographs etc and talk about our interests.



**June 3<sup>rd</sup>** was to be somewhat different as we delved into something rather more recent, namely social history with visits to Ireland's last working coal mine and a restored workhouse, both very unusual experiences. On the shore of *Lough Allen* in Co Roscommon is *Arigna*, a former working coal mine now opened for visits. Ireland's carboniferous coal deposits were mainly eroded long ago leaving only small seams at *Carlow*, *Coalisland* and *Arigna*. On arrival we were provided with hard hats. There was some trepidation regarding claustrophobia but there was a souvenir shop and coffee shop as an alternative to going under ground.



Our guide was a former miner who gave us a most interesting talk on the history of mining at Arigna and then we headed into the mine along an adit. It was well illuminated and there were appropriate background sounds. The mine had provided work in an otherwise poor farming area especially during the Irish Famine. The coal was in big demand during the 18th century when Dublin was growing. In 1955 a Power station was opened but closed in 1980 when imported coal was more economical. The Arigna mine closed operations in 1990. We were quite horrified at the working conditions in the mine. The seams were only a few feet thick and the miners had to lie on their backs often in water, using short shovels to move the coal along to where it was loaded into "tubs" and hauled along by ropes. We all enjoyed a cup of coffee on emerging into the daylight and were thankful for present day "Health and Safety".



31st May to 3rd June 2016



The final stop on our trip was yet another revelation. This was to an original Workhouse in the process of being restored. Many of these institutions in our towns have been knocked down or renovated into hospitals so it was of interest to see just what life was like for the unfortunate inmates of Bawnboy Workhouse. We had a tour of this extensive building for which the Preservation Committee have plans for new ways in which it can continue to serve the local community e.g. as a Field Study Centre.

# **Pat Rutherford Excursion Secretary**



continued



# Sligo Field Trip - Botany

31st May to 3rd June 2016

Sligo has a great diversity of habitats-coastal dunes, beaches, ancient woodlands, lakes, limestone, mudstone, sandstone and gneiss so there is a great variety of plants.

On our first evening during the walk round Sligo town, we were taken to the delightful gold medal winning *Yeats Secret Garden*, now moved behind *The Model*. It is a reconstruction of *Innisfree* complete with "9 bean rows and a hive for the honey bee", wild and garden flowers and a Strawberry Tree (*Arbutus unedo*).

On 1st June in lovely sunshine *Michael Bell* and *Don Cotton, BSBI Recorder for Co. Sligo,* led us along the machair at *Mullaghmore*. Although this is a Special Area of Conservation, it is being over-grazed, but we did find the rare Early Forgetmenot (*Myosotis ramosissima*), Sea Mouse-ear (*Cerastium diffusum*) and the yellow Wild Pansy (*Viola tricolor ssp. curtisii*) on a sandy area. Don was pleased to find a large patch of Adderstongues ferns (*Ophioglossum vulgatum*) in a dune slack.

While the geologists were examining Mullaghmore Head, we found a damp area colourful with Marsh Marigolds (*Caltha palustris*), Water Avens (*Geum rivale*) and Ragged Robin (*Lychnis flos-cuculi*) so called as it flowers when we should be hearing the cuckoo.

Streedagh Strand, another SAC, demonstrated the importance of and the good results possible with conservation measures. The large patches of Birdsfoot Trefoil (Lotus corniculatus) and Kidney Vetch (Anthyllis vulneraria), its foodplant, were alive with Small Blue Butterflies. A large hybrid broad-leafed Marsh Orchid (Dactylorhiza incarnata sp.) was the only orchid seen, it being a late spring.

Thursday brought us to *Knocknarea Glen*, a narrow limestone gorge shaded by deciduous trees, noted for mosses, liverworts and ferns. Hartstongue (*Asplenium scolopendrium*) was growing luxuriantly along with Soft Shield Fern (*Polystichum setiferum*). Sweet Wodruff (Galium odoratum), Sanicle (Sanicula europaea) and Quaking Grass (*Briza media*) were in flower. During our afternoon archaeological tour of *Carrowmore Megalithic Cemetery*, it was good to see that the area was being developed as a wild flower meadow. Oxeye Daisies (*Leucanthemum vulgare*), Red Clovers (*Trifolium pratense*), Yellow Rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*) and many native grasses were swaying in the gentle breeze.

Our final botanical walk in Sligo was to the Natural Heritage Area along the shores of *Lough Gill at Slish Wood*, Yeats' Sleuth Wood. Lake water was lapping and the sun shining through the ancient Sessile Oak trees (*Quercus petraea*), Aspen (*Populus tremula*) and flowering Whitebeam (Sorbus aria). Guelder Rose (*Viburnum opulus*) was in flower – its 5 showy outer petals are infertile but the inner petals will give way to shiny red berries in the autumn. Bitter Vetchling (*Lathyrus linifolius*) was plentiful along the path along with Hay-scented Buckler Fern (*Dryopteris aemula*) which is rare except in the West.



Adderstongue



Lough Gill

continued





# **Sligo Field Trip - Botany (contd)**

31st May to 3rd June 2016



As in the 2000 Excursion we failed to reach the Strawberry Tree (*Arbutus unedo*) here at its most northerly site in the world. The gneiss produces acidic soils so Ling Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtilus*) and Great Wood-rush (*Luzula sylvatica*) were common.

Our thanks are due to Patricia and Jim Rutherford who put a great deal of effort and expertise into arranging our Field Trip to Sligo.

# **Margaret Marshall**

Thrift

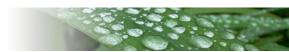


Mullaghmore machair



Small Blue





# **Copeland Bird Observatory**

Leaders; Margaret Marshall *Botany* and Mary Parr *Zoology* 

25th June 2016



Lighthouse Island foreground with Mew Island in the background - (the one with the Lighthouse!)

The three Copeland Islands, Mew, Lighthouse and Copeland are situated just north of Donaghadee in the Irish Sea. Our destination was Lighthouse Island which has no lighthouse because it was resited on Mew. Over a hundred years ago it had a population of about one hundred and it was well cultivated with many lazy beds for potatoes. The morning was grey but clear when the first boatload of our members left Donaghadee harbour.

The tide was out as we passed through a narrow channel beside the biggest island and we had good views of the grey seals on rocks and in the kelp. More and more seabirds appeared on our approach to Lighthouse island.

On landing the botanists got busy with lenses and botany books. Masses of **Sea Campion** (*Silene uniflora*) were in flower as were lovely pink mats of **Sea Milkwort** (*Glaux maritima*). The Sea Campion was the only white campion seen on the island.

We gradually made our way up to the observatory building on a heavily rabbit grazed path between stunted **Elder** (*Sambucus nigra*) and **Sycamore** (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) trees with this year's **Bracken** (*Pteridium aquilinum*) still uncurling. The shade provided by these plants encourages the widespread growth of **Bluebells** (*Hyancinthoides non-scriptus*) but many other plants are unable to compete thus reducing the variety. Elder berries, however, provide a useful source of early autum food for birds.

The vegetation was decorated as if for Christmas, by thousands of **Seven spot Ladybirds** (*Coccinella septempunctata*). In contrast many hundreds of shells of the **Common Garden Snail** (*Helix aspersa*) were found. We surmised that they may have been parasitised.

Near the observatory, **Russian Comfrey** (*Symphytum x uplandicum*) proved very attractive to the **White tailed Bee** (*Bombuslucorum*) and the **Carder Bee** (*Bombus pascuorum*). The Comfrey was able to grow as the invasive **Himalayan Balsam** (*Impatiens glandulifera*) had been eradicated by the observatory volunteers. An old name for Comfrey was Knit-bone and it is also a useful fertiliser.

A plant new to many was **Brookweed** (Samolus valerandi) growing prolifically in damp areas. Another member of the Primrose family common on the island was **Scarlet Pimpernel** (Annagallis arvensis), the Poor man's Weatherglass, as it opened its petals for us as the sun came out. Widespread **Marsh Pennywort** (Hydrocotyle vulgaris) showed that many areas are normally very damp. Its English name comes from the shape of its leaves and the scientific name means 'water-cup'.

Warnings were issued about the poisonous **Hemlock** (*Conium maculatum*) an umbellifer with purple spots on the stem and famously used to execute Socrates. **Red Campion** (*Silene diocea*) was widespread throughout the island compared to its distribution on the mainland and strangely there appeared to be no **Thrift** (*Armeria maritima*). **Daisies** (*Bellis perennis*) were also absent and a single **Dandelion** (*Taraxacum*) was found. This may have been due to the rabbits.

continued





# **Copeland Bird Observatory (contd)**

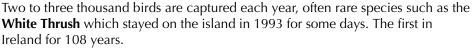
# Leaders; Margaret Marshall *Botany* and Mary Parr *Zoology*

25th June 2016

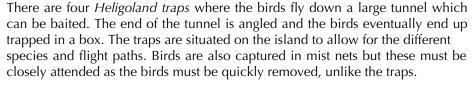
Some queries had been raised with the botanists before the fieldtrip. One was about the presence of food plants for moths which had been found on the island. Another was about Mayweeds; **Sea Mayweed** (*Tripleurospermum maritimum*) appears to be the only Mayweed.

A list of all the plants we managed to find during our four hours on the island was sent to the Bird Observatory at their request and is included with the BNFC report.

We were welcomed by **Chris Acheson** who showed us around and explained the work of the volunteers. The observatory was built from the ruins of the lighthouse keeper's house and is owned by the **British Trust for Ornithology.** It was opened in 1954 and is manned at weekends from March to October, weather and volunteers permitting.



Initially it is the spring migrants going North which are caught and ringed and then in May/June it is the seabirds coming to nest. In July the migrants start to return, the **Willow Warbler** often being the first to appear.



We were delighted to see **Puffins** (*Fratercula arctica*), along with **Razorbills** (*Alca torda*) and **Common Guillemots** (*Uria aalge*), swimming near the bird hide. They have become interested in nesting after some persuasion with a sound system emitting puffin calls for a few years. Apart from a rogue **Otter** in the past, there are no puffin predators so the island is ideal for their needs. The puffins just happened to be near the *Loo with a view*. The half door of this small room provided an excellent view of Mew island and plenty of fresh air.

The observatory has many other success stories including two hundred and fifty two pairs of nesting **Eider duck** (Somateria mollissima). Nest boxes have been built for the **Black Guillemots** (Cepphus gryll) and placed on cliff edges. The birds appeared to be very comfortable in these strange nests which resembled green shoe boxes. We were fortunate to see one which had a successful fishing trip and was holding what may have been a **Butterfish** in its beak. Among other birds which visit the island there are **Storm Petrels** (Hydrobates pelagicus) and **Manx Shearwaters** (Puffinus puffinus). These birds only come ashore at night to avoid predators, mainly gulls.

The rabbit burrows provide excellent nests for the Shearwaters which have not only been ringed but tracked. Unusually even the chicks have been tracked and on leaving their nests they immediately make an amazing flight to South America. Once paired, the Manx Shearwaters always return to the same burrow and so they can be caught several times throughout the years. Mortality is greatest in the first year but if they survive they can be captured again up to twenty five years later. Recapture is more likely if one has lost its mate and is searching for a new one.



Fratercula arctica



Eider Duck's nest





# **Copeland Bird Observatory (contd)**

# Leaders; Margaret Marshall *Botany* and Mary Parr *Zoology*

25th June 2016



Lifting the lid on a Shearwaters nest

We were treated to a close encounter with a nesting Manx Shearwater. It is possible to remove the top of the burrow when the nest is vacant and replace it by a concrete slab with the appropriate ring number. This gives easy access to the nesting chamber. Chris removed a Shearwater from its nest and we could see a white egg in the burrow and admire the bird's plumage which is black above and white below.

We were also able to appreciate its long narrow wings which are so suitable for its 'shearing' flight.

The island has an interesting network of paths to follow for exploration and discovery of the many plants, birds and various invertebrates. The seats outside the observatory are perfectly placed to catch the afternoon sun, which added to our visit by appearing around midday. They also provided us with a lovely place to enjoy our picnic lunch. Had the weather been less kind, a big kitchen and a lounge were available in the building.

Shortly after lunch we had to leave as the wind was increasing but we had a beautiful sunny journey back to Donaghadee, again surrounded by seabirds. Some birds were perhaps disappointed that we weren't a fishing boat.

# **Margaret Marshall and Mary Parr**



Shearwater (Puffinus puffinus)



# **Belfast Harbour Estate**

25th June 2016

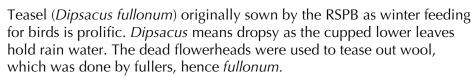
The brown field sites on the Harbour Estate are composed of the original marine deposits and granite and basalt stone brought in to raise the ground level. This provides a variety of habitats for plants.



Immediately opposite the RSPB Window on Wildlife centre (WOW) is an open area which in the past year has become overgrown with birch, alder and buddleia scrub, but still has a variety of flowering plants.

Yellow-wort (*Blackstonia perfoliata*) is easily recognised as the stems grow through the greyish –green leaves – hence *perfoliata*, but the yellow flowers only open in sunshine. It normally grows on dunes and calcareous soils but is very abundant here. Webb still states it does not occur in NE Ireland. Its relative Common Centaury (*Centaurium erythraea*)

was also common. Another lime-loving plant Perforate St.John's Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) was abundant.



We then walked towards Hide 2 where a large open area, bare in 2015, was a sea of yellow. Narrow-leaved Ragwort (*Senecio inaequidens*), a South African plant, was first identified off the Cregagh road in 2015 and is now spreading rapidly. The yellow snapdragon-like Common Toadflax (*Linaria vulgaris*) may be common in the south of England but was new to many of us. I have seen it on slip roads on to the M1 and M2 so maybe the seeds are carried to Northern Ireland on lorries. We were pleased to see Bee Orchids (*Ophrys apifera*) still flowering on the waste ground.

The RSPB - planted area at Hide 2 had become overgrown but Weld (*Reseda luteola*) had survived – it cures bruises and was used as a yellow dye. The RSPB has now started replanting the area at the entrance to WOW. Graham Day identified a hybrid between Hogweed (*Heracleum sphondylium*) and Giant Hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) along the lane. The latter was brought from Asia to adorn estates but can cause skin damage especially in sunlight.



Bee orchid



Teasel

continued





# **Belfast Harbour Estate (contd)**

25th June 2016



Blackstonia



Narrow leafed ragwort



Black tailed godwits

Fleabane (*Pulicaria dysenterica*) was coming into flower in a damp ditch – its scented leaves were dried to deter fleas.

BNFC members had enjoyed an afternoon covering geology, insects, birds, butterflies and flowers so we had all increased our knowledge.

# **Margaret Marshall**







# Get to know your grasses - Minnowburn

2<sup>nd</sup> August 2016

The forecast was awful and until about 5.00pm the day was awful. However, the rain ceased and though the sun did not appear it was a pleasant evening and Plan B, a selection of specimens taken to the *Ramada Hotel*, did not have to be implemented!

Many people have a horror of grass identification but with a few simple pointers about 10 common grasses can be identified.

The first challenge was to look at the obvious differences between a grass, a sedge and a rush.

Sedges have edges

Rushes are round

Grasses have knees

That bend to the ground.

An alternative version is:-

Grasses are hollow

Right down to the ground (Anon)

There is a third version not for polite company.

Essential diagnostic terms like *lemma*, *awn*, *glume* and *ligule* were demonstrated. Then using *Sinkers* excellent lateral key, obtainable from the *Field Studies Council*, the first two grasses were successfully run down, Annual Meadow-grass (*Poa annua*) and False Brome (*Brachypodium sylvaticum*).

Next we found Bottle Sedge (*Carex rostrata*) and Remote Sedge (*Carex remota*), both with triangular stems, Soft Rush (*Juncus effusus*) round but filled with pith, showed the truth of the rhyme. Great Wood-rush (*Luzula sylvatica*) represented another non-gaudy flowered group but was differentiated from rushes by being very hairy.

Several common grasses are instantly recognizable:

Cock's-foot (*Dactylis glomerata*) is rough grass which is branched in three like a cock's foot and Crested dog's-tail (*Cynosurus cristatus*) with the bare strip down one side.

Yorkshire fog (*Holcus lanatus*) is grey/green and downy, the long narrow head of Timothy (*Phleum pratense*) can look like Foxtail (*Alopecurus pratensis*) but Timothy is later-flowering and the awn is on the glume while in Foxtail the awn is attached to the back of the lemma.

False oat-grass (*Arrhenatherum elatius*) and False brome (*Brachypodium sylvaticum*) can look similar but the awn in False Oat is attached at the base of the lemma and often bent while the awns on False Brome are terminal and look like a tuft.

Common couch (*Elytriga repens, formerly Agropyron repens*) and Perennial ryegrass (*Lolium perenne*) have similar looking heads but in Common Couch the spikelet faces the stem and in Ryegrass the spikelet is sideways to the stem.

continued



Marion Allen explains the finer details of grass identification



Poa annua



Poa annua spikelet

BNFC Field Trip Reports 2016



# Get to know your grasses - Minnowburn

2<sup>nd</sup> August 2016



Crested Dogtail

The feathery heads of Bent (Agrostis sp), Meadow-grasses (Poa sp) and Fescues (Festuca sp) are superficially similar.

The Poa spikelet has a silky look, no awn and a spikelet 2-6mm but Festuca has an awn, long narrow leaves and a spikelet 10mm+.

Note Festuca pratensis does not have an awn. Both Festuca and Poa have several florets to a spikelet which stick out beyond the glumes while Agrostis has one or two florets that are shorter than the glumes and no awn.

Rough meadow-grass (Poa trivialis) has a very rough stem and a long triangular ligule whereas Smooth Meadow-grass (Poa pratensis) has a smooth stem and a short ligule. Annual Meadow-grass (Poa annua) is a pale green, leaves often with a pleated appearance and is the most common grass of disturbed/bare ground.

The very large grass leaves belonged to Reed Canary-grass (Phalaris arundinacea). Without the flower it can be distinguished from the similar

looking Common Reed (Phragmites australis) by looking at the ligule, in Phalaris the ligule is long and torn while in Phragmites the ligule is a line of hairs.

This was not intended to be a definitive guide but to help give people the confidence to recognise some of the common grasses and notice if something looked a bit different.

MDB Allen



Yorkshire Fog





# **Presidential visit to Downpatrick**

**Leader: Mike King** 

6th August 2016



Mike King at Inch Abbey



Maureen takes the waters at Struell Wells

The Presidential outing was a trip back to the Early Christian period in Downpatrick and surrounding area with *Mike King,* curator of Down museum our guide for the day.

The excursion started with tea/coffee and a scone in the beautiful new tearoom before visiting the new gallery where the *Downpatrick High Cross* and related artefacts are displayed.

The Downpatrick High Cross was reconstructed and erected outside the Cathedral by BNFC member *Francis Joseph Bigger* in 1897 so after the tour of the new gallery we visited the replica of the High Cross outside the Cathedral and the adjoining St Patrick's grave.

There is some dispute about the authenticity of the grave but it is generally accepted that it is in the vicinity. In 1900 Francis Joseph Bigger and members of the BNFC placed a granite slab on the grave site partly to protect it from the pilgrims who were removing handfuls of soil from it. There was also be an opportunity to view fragments of Crosses inside the Cathedral. These date from when the Cathedral Hill was an important monastic site.

After lunch in the museum, we set off for visits to Early Christian sites starting with *Struell Wells* where we learnt about the religious rituals associated with the site.

The next visit was to *Saul Church (below)* which is believed to have been built on the site of the first church founded by St Patrick. We learnt about the long history of the site and Mike pointed out the remains of a wall of the mediaeval building which had occupied the site. In the adjoining graveyard we examined the remains of two small stone built 'cells' which date from when there was a monastic complex on the site.



continued





# Presidential visit to Downpatrick (contd)

6th August 2016

Although one is now used as a burial vault the interior of the other one can be viewed and is thought to have been used for confession or private devotion.

Our last stop was *Inch Abbey* which is situated in a beautiful setting on the banks of the *Quoile River*. It was established as a Cistercian house by *John de Courcy* and his wife *Affreca* and was colonised by monks from *Furness Abbey in Lancashire* in 1180. It was destroyed during the reformation in 1542 and was never rebuilt. However even in its ruinous state it remains the earliest example of Gothic architecture in Ireland.

When we arrived on the site there was a group of *Game of Thrones* enactors which roused a lot of interest even in those people who had never seen the television programme. This event was a bizarre finale to an interesting and informative day in *Lecale*.



One of the Stone built cells at Saul Church





St Patrick's gravestone



Inch Abbey



BNFC Members at the Replica Cross outside Downpatrick Cathedral





# The Whyte Estate and Newry Canal

Leader: Graham Day 27th July 2016

Twenty one members assembled at the entrance to the **Whyte Estate** for a botanical and historical walk along the trails which pass through estate woodland and meadows.



There are 2 large ringforts - **Coolnacran** which aptly means 'the meadow of the wooded place' and **Johnston's Fort**, a counterscarp raised rath with a substantial ditch. Troops were stationed on the estate in World War 2 and there are the remains of concrete foundations.

There is a large rookery in the wood and habitats for badgers, foxes, hares, hedgehogs and smaller creatures. The woodland is mostly broadleaf - **Beech**, **Sycamore**, **Ash**, and veteran **Oaks** up to 350 years old but there are also **Douglas**, **Silver** and **Grand Firs** and **Monterey Cypresses**.



Speckled Wood (Pararge aegeria)

Local community groups have been working to clear the invasive **Cherry Laurel** to encourage the natural regeneration of the woodland and its native plants. In spring there are **Bluebells** (*Hyacinthoides non-scriptus*), **Wood Anemones** (*Anemone nemorosa*) and the garden-escape **Three-cornered Garlic** (*Allium triquetrum*).

Graham Day, the BSBI recorder for County Down, showed us how to distinguish various ferns - Common Polypody (*Polypodium vulgare*), Male Fern (*Dryopteris filix-mas*), Golden-scaled Male Fern (*Dryopteriss affinis*), Soft Shield Fern (*Dryopteris setiferum*), Lady Fern (*Athyrium filix-femina*) and Broad Buckler Fern (*Dryopteris dilatata*).



Ergot

A native hedgerow was planted along the trail in 2008 to encourage wildlife; the shiny red berries of **Guelder Rose** (*Viburnum opulus*) were conspicuous. In wet areas were large patches of **Greater Birdsfoot Trefoil** (*Lotus pedunculatus*) and **Brooklime** (*Veronica beccabunga*). The fungus **Ergot** was identified on grasses, doubtless due to the wet summer. This could spread to cereal crops and was notorious for causing hallucinations and severe pain in the Middle Ages. The return walk along the Ride was through linear woodland - photographs were taken of gnarled tree trunks.

Some members then adjourned to the delights of the Art and coffee at the FE Mc Wlliam Gallery, others continued to Scarva for coffee beside the colourful gardens and a botanical walk along the canal. Graham showed us Ivy-leaved Water Crowfoot (Ranunculus hederaceus), Floating Sweet-grass (Glyceria fluitans), Water-pepper (Persicaria hydropiper), Greater Duckweed (Lemna polyrhiza) and Common Duckweed (Lemna minor).

Graham and Julia recorded a complete list of all the plants seen at both sites and were thanked for leading a most interesting excursion.



Viburnum opulus

**Margaret Marshall** 





# The Building Stones of Belfast

Leader: Ian Forsythe 20th August 2016

A fine sunny evening was the setting for the Building Stones tour of the *Cathedral Quarter* led by *lan Forsythe*. Thirteen members attended, meeting outside the *Central Library* in Royal Avenue. The fine Scottish, Dumfries Sandstone building of the Central Library opened in 1888 the year Belfast was granted City Status and this was, I suppose, an air of confidence in its new status.

Our journey took us across the Cathedral Quarter, around *Donegall Street* to *Waring Street* and the *Custom House Square* and *Albert Clock* areas. Most of the buildings were Sandstone, mostly *Scrabo Triassic* and *Scottish Sandstones*. Others were largely *limestone* and some even *granite*.

Moving on to *Donegall Street, St Patrick's Catholic Church* was still undergoing a restoration programme to combat the effects of weathering and pollution to the facade, including its sandstone stone. Again mostly Scrabo Triassic sandstone as well as Dumfries sandstones, and *Carboniferous sandstones* from *Durham* and *Armagh*. We had a chance to see the church interior including the triptych - *The Madonna of the Lake* (1917) by the painter Sir John Lavery, a local who was baptised there in 1856.

Then across *York Street* to the MAC (a new cultural theatre and art centre) in *St Anne's Square* (2012) supposedly constructed from *Portland Limestone*, but the associated newly constructed Basalt panels in the building were in fact splitting off the edges due to obviously poor construction. This was very much in evidence judging from the protective netting above the main entrance to protect the public while repairs were undertaken.

A short stop made at the nearby Church of Ireland *St Anne's Cathedral* where it was noted that *Portland Limestone* was the main stone but also included were *Doulting Limestone* from *Somerset* plus some sandstone and granite.

Attention was drawn to the *Northern Whig Pub* in *Bridge Street/Waring Street* corner. Here the Granite was not Mourne, but of a rare occurrence in Belfast of *Leinster Granite*.

We finished off in the area of the Albert Clock marvelling en route at the fantastic *Merchant Hotel*, formerly the HQ of the Ulster Bank, composed of *Giffnock Scottish Sandstone*.



Belfast Library



The Madonna of the Lake - Sir John Lavery

continued





# The Building Stones of Belfast (contd)

20th August 2016

The Albert Clock is a mixture of *Scrabo Triassic* and *Carboniferous Sandstone*. Here we were able to observe the stones that were restored in 2000, having been replaced previously between 1924 and 1950 due to pollution.



Across the way we had a look at the Custom House Building, mostly Carboniferous Sandstone from Giffnock, but also Newry Granite at the steps with good exposures of xenolith crystals.

So much to see in this historic part of Belfast - we ran out of time having covered most of the main locations in the Cathedral Quarter.



Outside the Custom House Building

The MAC





# **Belfast City Cemetery**

**Leader: Tom Hartley** 

20th August 2016

A dozen members met on a dull afternoon, to be conducted around the cemetery by *Tom Hartley*, whose book *Written in Stone - the History of Belfast City Cemetery (2006)* tells the stories of the men and women who lie at rest in Belfast's first municipal burial ground, which officially opened on 1 August 1869. It contains information about the architectural diversity of the various plots and tombs, personal details of those buried in the graveyard and suggestions for walking routes through the cemetery.



The cemetery provides an important insight into the history of Belfast.

It is a recognised historical site and shows many fine examples of Victorian, Edwardian and Gothic revival architecture.

We saw some of the splendid memorials to the most important industrialists and thinkers of Belfast, and in particular a number of men and women who have played a part in the history of the Club.

Of special interest at the moment was the monument to Samuel Stewart, co-author of the *Flora of the North-east of Ireland*. The bronze plaque on this has been

stolen, and the Club is planning to replace the plaque with a replica made using a 3D scan of the original mould.



The Corry Family Monument



Samuel Stewart Monument

Not far away is the *Corry* family monument, recording the death of Stewart's co-author T.H. Corry, who sadly drowned in Lough Gill in a boating accident.

Other graves noted included that of the well-known photographer *R.J.Welch*.



The grave of R.J.Welch

BNFC Field Trip Reports 2016





# **Downhill and Benvenagh**

Leader: Peter Millar 27<sup>th</sup> August 2016

#### **DOWNHILL**

In Antrim there are three Basalt formations - Lower, Middle and Upper. These are now officially "Lower Basalt Formation", "Causeway Tholeiite Member" and "Upper Basalt Formation". However in the Downhill/ Binevenagh area the Lower Basalt Formation is absent and the Upper Basalt Formation rests directly on the Chalk.



Mussenden Temple from Magilligan Strand

The *Ulster White Limestone (Chalk)* outcrops in the lower part of the cliffs to the west of Downhill. It is overlain by the usual *Clay-with-Flints* horizon and then a sequence of mostly thin basalt lava flows.

From the beach there's a good view of the *Mussenden Temple*, built of *Ballycastle Sandstone* by the *Earl Bishop of Derry* in 1783. A considerable amount of recent work has been done reinforcing the rather rubbly cliff below the Temple.

Walking up the Bishop's road, almost immediately we could see *vesicle cylinders* (just beside the road sign). These were caused by volatile-rich streams of magma

moving up through a lava flow, possible originating as steam evolved as the lava flowed over damp ground.

Uphill round the bend a dyke was seen and this has good ladder jointing, produced by cracking at right angles to the vertical cooling surfaces at the contacts of the dyke.



Bishop's Road, showing a pocket of weathered basalt blocks and dust on top of a basalt flow. Overlying flow has pipe amygdales caused by steam bubbles rising from damp ground.

#### **BISHOP'S GATE AREA**

Driving up the A2 in the direction of Coleraine, about 1 km and just over a crest in the road, we came to a lay-by and picnic site on the right and entered *Downhill Forest* on the SW of the road.

Going through the entrance gate and turning right at the orienteering post, we came to a dam which impounds a very long narrow lake. This was another of the Earl Bishop's projects – a fish pond. Returning along the side of the lake and doubling back left to the entrance – a walk which gives good views of an impressively deep and steep-sided glacial meltwater channel from the last ice age.

continued





## **Downhill and Benvenagh (contd)**

27th August 2016

#### **GORTMORE VIEWPOINT**



Statue of Mannannán Mac Lir at Gortmore Viewpoint

Drive back down to Downhill and then fork left up the Bishop's Road. After about 4 km we came to the *Gortmore Viewpoint*, overlooked by a striking stature of Celtic sea god *Manannán Mac Lir*.

The original statue had been stolen some time before said to be by people who were of the opinion that it was an affront to local religious traditions. Whether true or not it now occupies a grand position overlooking Magilligan. From here you have an excellent view of the *Magilligan* foreland.

It is thought that the Magilligan foreland started to form as recently

as 5000 years ago during the high sea-level episode. The nucleus was a line of boulders at *Bellarena* called the "Giant's Walk".

The shore-line progressed further and further to the north, leaving a series of curving ridges. This seems to have been a rapid process (geologically) as there was no time for dunes to form on the ridges. The ridges were fed by material brought from the east by long-shore drift. There are peaty hollows between the ridges. The ridges can be seen very clearly from Gortmore. With the fall of sea-level the supply of material was cut off and the foreland is no longer actively developing. The Lough Foyle (west) side of the foreland was eroded rapidly around 3000 bp, truncating the ridges. Both the north and west shores of the foreland are currently eroding.

There's also a good view of Binevenagh from here. There are superb rotational landslips below the cliffs. The usual view is that these landslips, which occur all the way round the Antrim plateau, are post-glacial. The idea is that the ice over-steepened the basalt cliff faces and then when the ice melted the now unsupported cliff faces collapsed.

#### **BALLYKELLY SOUTH BASE**

We headed to our final and probably the most interesting stop of the day – the *Ballykelly South Base*. Difficult to find as one had to negotiate an area of local housing to access it in a cul de sac. There is a grassy recreation area here, in which is a most unusual structure.

It has a circular base of assorted rock types with a sandstone coping, and is topped by ornamental railings. This is the *Ordnance Survey South Base tower*. There are similar structures at *Minearny* and Magilligan. A fourth at Magilligan north beach has been lost to the sea.

continued





# **Downhill and Benvenagh (contd)**

27th August 2016



Picture of South Base Tower taken from http://roevalley.com/ newsbrowser/historical/historypics/ min.jpg)

A crucial part of the Ordnance Survey six-inch mapping project was the Principal Triangulation, started in 1827. This survey was directed by Joseph Ellison Portlock (1794-1864).

The purpose of this was to fix a framework of reference points usually on mountain tops - whose position was accurately known. The procedure was initially to measure the distance between two points very accurately. This is the "base". The length of the Lough Foyle base is 8 miles. The location of another point could then be worked out by observing its direction from the two ends of the base with a theodolite and "leapfrogging" across country in a similar fashion. A network of accurate triangles could thus be built up covering the whole island.

W P Millar





### **Crumlin Road Gaol**

#### **Leader: Gaol Guides**

#### 6th September 2016

We met at the front entrance to the jail on the Crumlin Road for the official guided tour by gaol guides. The gaol is situated directly across the Crumlin Road from the courthouse, and connected by an underground tunnel, which was our first visit.



The gaol, designed by *Charles Lanyon*, and dating to 1843-5, is built within a five-sided basalt wall; the four wings are up to four storeys in height and fan off from the central area which was known as The Circle – seen here as the guide spoke to us.

As well as common criminals, quite a number of well-known political figures from our near and distant past have spent time in Crumlin Road!

Some of the cells hold reconstructions of prison life from the past, but the most disturbing area was the gallows room – the last hanging, for murder, was in 1961.





The Circle



The Tunnel



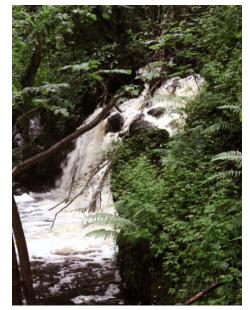






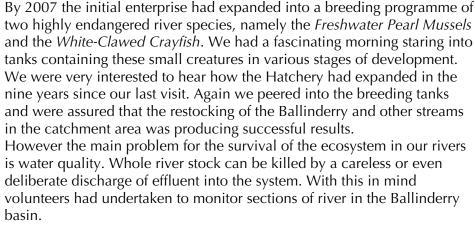
# Ballinderry River Hatchery and Tullyhogue Fort 17th September 2016

**Leader: Mark Horton and Claire Foley** 



On the morning of September 17<sup>th</sup> 2016 a good turnout of BNFC members had their second visit to the Hatchery of *The Ballinderry Rivers Trust* near *Cookstown*. There is a comprehensive report on our first visit of 2007 which explains in detail how this enterprise began in 1984 with the aim to increase the stocks of *Dollaghan* and Brown Trout in the Ballinderry River.

The Hatchery is situated on the *Gortin*, a tributary of the Ballinderry. This small river tumbles through a gorge with a fall oxygenating the water which is fed into the tanks.





We heard about these problems and the recent involvement of the local schools, while seated in the newly opened "RiverSchool" at the Hatchery, where incidentally we were treated to a welcome cup of tea. Groups of schoolchildren come here to be made aware of the dangers and reasons for pollution. It was gratifying to hear that between 18 and 25 local schools were taking part in this worthwhile programme.

The practical part is when trout eggs are delivered to the classrooms, placed in fish tanks and looked after by the pupils; for example they remove any dead stock and change the water. Finally the great day arrives when Frank or Mark from the Hatchery take the children out to release the small fry into their natural habitat in the rivers. Along with this the schools often help in litter picks.



Altogether again we had a most rewarding visit, especially hearing how our young people are being involved.

**Pat Rutherford** 

continued



# Ballinderry River Hatchery and Tullyhogue Fort (contd) 17th September 2016

**Leader: Mark Horton and Claire Foley** 

BNFC visit in 2003

### **Tullyhogue Fort**

After lunch the party moved to *Tullaghogue For*t south of *Cookstown*.

This remarkable tree-crowned earthwork sits high on a hilltop with extensive views. It was not so much a fort as the power centre and inauguration place of the northern *O'Neills* and their antecedents since at least the 11<sup>th</sup> century and was controlled by their allies the *O'Hagans*.

The earthwork was built to impress with a high outer bank enclosing a capacious ditch, inner bank and circular interior. Entering from north we speculated about a possible gate feature represented by two small mounds and although the interior is flat and featureless now it would have contained timber buildings.

The famous *Bartlett* image of this site (see below) prominently shows the inauguration chair which was not in the site but downhill to east. It was composed of stone slabs set around a boulder and was last used to inaugurate Hugh O'Neill in 1595. It was alas destroyed in 1602 by *Lord Mountjoy* on the rebound from the *Battle of Kinsale*.

Some of us braved a very soggy hillside to inspect two potential locations for this former chair. We were told that the O'Hagans' traditional burial

ground is at *Donaghrisk* – nearby to south and that many of the O'Neills are buried at *Donaghmore* graveyard to southwest. Hugh O'Neill is buried in Rome.



### **Claire Foley**







# Fungus Foray, Minnowburn

**Leader: Alistair McCracken** 

1st October 2016

On a fine October morning members gathered at Minnowburn with baskets and identification books. Even before we had left the car park, Earthstars were spotted –the unusual Collared Earthstar (*Geastrum triplex*) with 3 layers underneath the star and the Common Earthstar (*Geastrum vulgatum*) with its beautiful star-like form.



What we see as fungi are only the reproductive parts which develop to form and distribute spores; they have no chlorophyll and cannot photosynthesise. They draw their sustenance from dead or living plants with which they have a symbiotic relationship, helping plants to absorb minerals. Without fungi there would be no decay. Alistair showed us the bootlace-like mycelia of Honey Fungus (*Armillariella mellea*) which can kill trees. We saw variously-coloured *Russulae* whose caps are convex when young. The Sickener (*Russula emetica*) has a red cap as do many poisonous fungi. Ink Caps are so named as the gills dissolve into a black inky liquid. The Lawyer's Wig or Shaggy Ink Cap (*Coprinus comatus*) is edible as is the Common Ink Cap (*Coprinus atramentarius*) as long as it is not eaten along with alcohol, when it can produce unpleasant symptoms.

*Xylaria* are fungi that grow on wood and hasten decay. We saw one rotting branch with 6 different species of fungi including Candle-snuff Fungus (*Xylaria hypoxylon*). Bracket Fungi are polyphores producing their spores in pores and growing on dying tree trunks.

Alistair demonstrated how the Artist's Palette Fungus (*Ganoderma applantum*) could be used as a drawing medium. We saw many of the edible Common Puff-balls (*Lycoperdon perlatum*), the scientific name refers to the similarities of the spores bursting out to a wolf breaking wind!

continued





# Fungus Foray, Minnowburn (contd)

1st October 2016

Alistair is an expert on plant diseases – he reassured us that Ash die-back disease (*Chalara fraxinea* ) caused by the fungus *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus* has so far not spread too much in Northern Ireland but was spreading in the South and would become a problem here. We examined Rust on Blackberry leaves - rusts are specific to different plants. Willow Rust spores can only reproduce after contact with Larch trees. After a picnic lunch and refreshments from the Minnowburn Pizza and Coffee van, some of us went on to Barnett Demesne to look for Wax Caps (*Hygrocybe*) and Magic Mushrooms (*Psilocybin*) for which this area was known. None were found on this occasion, Magic mushrooms can produce serious psychedelic effects, but I found Growkits advertised on Google.

Alistair was thanked for yet again leading the Belfast Naturalists' Field Club on an informative and fascinating Fungus Foray, the traditional final field excursion of the BNFC year.

#### **Margaret Marshall**



Earthstar

