

Vice-County 104: 2006 Review

A native plant found in the vice-county for the first time is perhaps the best record likely to be made by a botanist in the usual run of events, though recent events not far away - *Tuberaria guttata* (Spotted Rock-rose) on Coll and *Carex salina* (Saltmarsh Sedge) in Loch Duich - show that plants new to Scotland or even to the British Isles can still be found.

In the first VC record category in 2006, *Carex acutiformis* (Lesser Pond-sedge) was found as a large stand along a burn in northern Skye. A number of hybrids were also recorded for the first time in the vice-county, notably several *Rumex* (dock) hybrids. One of these, *R. x dufftii* (*R. sanguineus* (Wood Dock) x *obtusifolius* (Broad-leaved Dock)), has a superficial resemblance to *R. conglomeratus* (Clustered Dock). At least on Raasay, and perhaps elsewhere, old records for *R. conglomeratus* may be this hybrid – the only recorded Raasay site for *R. conglomeratus* now has this hybrid but not *R. conglomeratus*. A number of aliens were also recorded for the first time in the vice-county. One of these was a crucifer from the top of the shore near Armadale which turns out to be a *Peltaria*, almost certainly *Peltaria angustifolia*, a denizen of the Middle East and not a normal item of British horticulture. This appears to be a first record for the British Isles.

Next down the list are plants new to an island, and in this category *Ranunculus sceleratus* (Celery-leaved Buttercup) was recorded for the first time on Skye. John Chester reported *Ligusticum scoticum* (Scots Lovage) from Castle Island, the first Eigg record. On Raasay, a number of newbies appeared after roadworks including *Fumaria muralis* (Wall Fumitory), *Fumaria officinalis* (Common Fumitory), *Papaver dubium* (Long-headed Poppy) and *Sisymbrium officinale* (Hedge Mustard). It transpired that soil had been brought from Alness in Easter Ross and this was the source of these plants, along with *Chrysanthemum segetum* (Corn Marigold) which had not been seen on Raasay for many a long year and *Spergularia rubra* (Sand Spurrey) which was previously confined to the car parking area near Balameanach for the Dun Caan walk.

A one-day visit to Pabay in mid-August led to a respectable plant list, the first such list for 70 years. A further visit a little earlier in the season would probably prove useful. A good population of *Bolboschoenus maritimus* (Sea Club-rush) was a minor surprise as the known Skye populations are around southern and western coasts. Other nice records included *Osmunda regalis* (Royal Fern), *Rumex sanguineus* (Wood Dock) and a large area of *Zostera marina* (Eelgrass) in the "harbour".

A great many new 10 km square records were made, including aliens and hybrids. Notable native plants amongst these include *Dactylorhiza traunsteinerioides* (Pugsley's Marsh-orchid) – previously *D. lapponica* (Lapland Marsh-orchid), *D. incarnata* subsp. *coccinea* (an unusual subspecies of Early Marsh-orchid) and, thanks largely to James Merryweather's efforts, the gametophyte of *Trichomanes speciosum* (Killarney Fern). *Vicia hirsuta* (Hairy Tare) was spotted in disturbed ground beside the main road near Edinbane along with *Papaver dubium* (Long-headed Poppy). Given the Raasay experience with imported soil, one is tempted to wonder how often *Papaver dubium* records on Skye (which are rare) are the result of soil import.

An old report of *Cephalanthera longifolia* (Narrow-leaved Helleborine) at Geary was confirmed and a new site was found near Storr Lochs. This nationally rare plant is also known from Sleat where it was spotted in two locations in 2006; one remains to be re-found. The new sites on coastal cliffs, similar to known sites on Mull, lead one to imagine that there are further sites awaiting discovery.

A call by SNH and BSBI for records of *Platanthera bifolia* (Lesser Butterfly-orchid) led to several new contacts and records for both this species and *Platanthera chlorantha* (Greater Butterfly-orchid).

The distribution of *Epilobium hirsutum* (Great Willowherb) turns out to be greater than previously recorded with new sites during the past couple of years in the Uig, Glendrynoch and Kyleakin areas, thanks to Morag Henriksen, H. MacAulay, Carl Farmer and myself.

In the aliens sphere, *Impatiens glandulifera* (Indian Balsam) and *Persicaria campanulata* (Lesser Knotweed) were recorded from a number of localities. In one of these *I. glandulifera* is present over a large area and is at least partly living up to its reputation as an invasive species.

Three species, *Erinus alpinus* (Fairy Foxglove), *Euphorbia dulcis* (Sweet Spurge) and *Gaultheria shallon* (Shallon) were shown in the *New Atlas* as occurring on Skye – one 10 km square for each. The Biological Records Centre records on which these were based were very vague – anonymous and no localisation within the 10km square. These were all re-found during 2006 and localised records made.

Various other aliens were noted amongst which *Sanguisorba canadensis* (White Burnet) at Kyleakin and Bernisdale is a striking plant. On Raasay, an area used for garden rubbish turned up some thriving plants of *Brunnera microphylla* (Great Forget-me-not), *Geranium endressii* (French Crane's-bill), *Oenothera glazioviana* (Large-flowered Evening-primrose) and a garden violet described by the referee as "either *Viola x wittrockiana tricolor*-like cultivar, reverted further towards *V. tricolor*, or plain *V. tricolor*". It is not the same as standard *V. tricolor* on Skye or Raasay.

Sadly, from my point of view, Carl Farmer who has made a major contribution to recording on Skye in recent years has moved elsewhere, but he is enjoying his new location and I wish him the very best. 2006 saw a major push on computerising paper records by Carl, with about half completed thanks to a grant from SNH. The second half is currently underway under a grant from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, again with Carl as the contractor.

2006 saw the formal retirement of Mrs C. W. Murray from the post of Vice-county Recorder for VC 104 after forty years in the job and my taking over as sole Recorder. She achieved a remarkable coverage of Skye, especially the mountains and lochs and in 2005 published the third edition of *The Botanist in Skye and Adjacent Islands* with John Birks.

With such a large area to cover, spread over Skye, Raasay, the Small Isles and numerous associated smaller islands, and with much high ground that is a long way from roads, my efforts are now mostly directed away from Raasay and towards Skye. Raasay has been well covered over the past twenty-plus years and A Flora of Raasay and Rona is now in preparation.

Stephen Bungard
January 2007

Circulation:

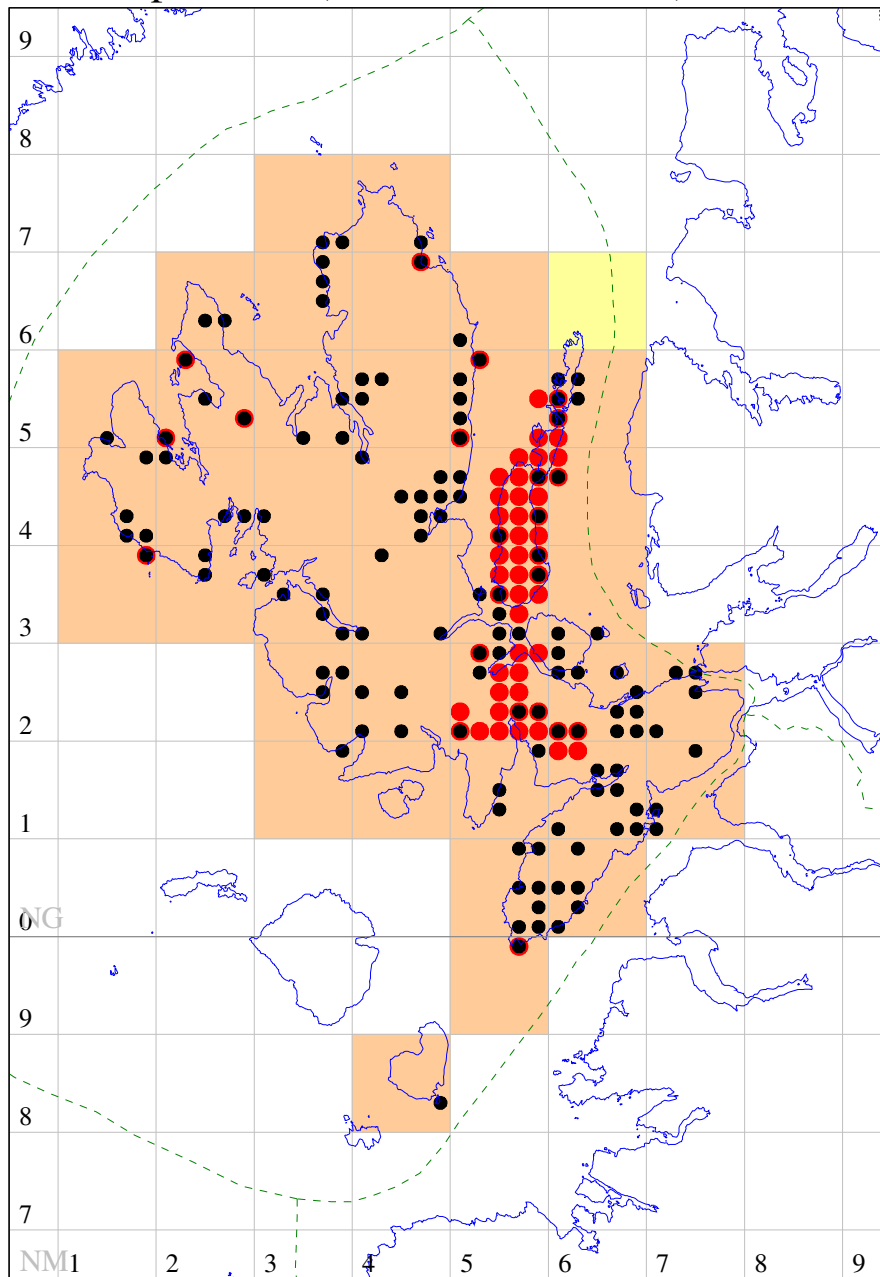
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Succisa pratensis (Devil's-bit Scabious)



Distribution map using currently computerised data. (Rum about to be added.)

Circles are tetrads, red pre-2000, black 2000-2006

Squares are 10 km squares, yellow pre-2000, pink/brown 2000-2006

Also sent to James Merryweather, Paddy Braithwaite, Roger Cottis, John Chester, Bill & Deirdre
Peppe, Mike Wilcox, Neil Barrett.