

## RECORDING DANDELIONS IN CARMARTHENSHIRE, 2009 – 2014

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In recent years, during April and the early part of May we have got into the habit of collecting a few dandelion specimens each time we're out botanizing in Carmarthenshire. Prof. John Richards (retired head of the Botany Department at Newcastle University) has had a life-long interest in dandelions and is the UK's authority on their identification: 235 micro species are described in the latest account (Dudman & Richards, 1997).

The 'collection season' is limited to when plants are in late bud and early flower and when they are grown well (but not too well, eg in very nutrient-rich conditions). This is because characters are very 'plastic' and plants may be impossible to name if too young, stressed, trampled, grazed, shaded or allowed to grow into their summer form as leaf-shape invariably increases in complexity as the weeks advance! Also, for specimens to be identifiable, they must be collected critically, very carefully pressed and dried and preferably accompanied by photographs illustrating flower and petiole colour and involucre bract characters. But encouraged by John's enthusiasm for receiving more material for identification following the 156 specimens we had sent him from the 2009, 2010 and 2011 seasons, we're ashamed to say that we had accumulated a further two hundred specimens during the following three springs (2012-14) and we were embarrassed to dispatch such a large parcel to him last November. We were amazed that he said he would determine this latest consignment during the following few weeks and return them by Christmas!

The 235 taxa described in the BSBI Handbook are grouped into five sections. A few species characteristically grow in habitats such as wet, acid pastures (eg *Taraxacum nordstedtii* Dahlst.) or dunes and limestone grassland (eg *T. oxoniense* Dahlst.) and may have distinct distributions attributable to the various phytogeographic regions (such as Lusitanian, Boreal, Continental, etc) but the most numerous seem to be included in section *Ruderalia* which contains many robust plants, often non-native in Britain.

John was true to his word and the parcel was returned well before Christmas. Of the 200 specimens, 45



Some of the dandelions determined by Prof. John Richards showing different leaf shapes. Some of the Whitmill School specimens are shown: *Taraxacum quadrangulum* is top row second from the right, *T. ancistrolobum* is to its left and *T. laeticolor* to its right.

Photos: Richard Pryce

were indeterminate or only identifiable to section level but fourteen were first county records, thirteen second county records and an additional 57 first 10km square records (this compares with four first county records and 38 first 10km square records from the 2009-11 collections).

However, the highlight and the material which John was most excited about was *Taraxacum quadrangulum* Railonsala, a distinctive species of section *Ruderalia*. I (RDP) had collected plants from the edge of the tarmac playground and by the building of the disused primary school at Whitemill, near Carmarthen (SN462215) on 17<sup>th</sup> April 2012 while doing a survey for Carmarthenshire County Council. John noted that “the lozenge or diamond-shaped end lobe on the outer (older) leaves is diagnostic and distinctive. Its closest British relatives are *T. croceiflorum* Dahlst., which is more heterophyllous and has red-purple striped ligules with red ends, and *T. lacerifolium* G.E. Haglund which lacks the distinctive lozenge-shaped end-lobe and is generally less robust.” In his covering letter he said that he would not normally have known what this distinctive material was, but it so happened that he had been trawling through a set of Dutch photographs that afternoon and it immediately rang a bell. It is one of the species Railonsala named after the Second



*Taraxacum quadrangulum* Railonsala at Whitemill School

Photos: Richard Pryce



World War in Finland, most of which proved to be eastern European adventives thought to have been imported with horse feed by the Germans. It is probably adventive in the Netherlands too, but may be native in the Czech republic. He anticipates that it will probably not last long in Britain but it would be interesting to keep an eye out for it. It is perhaps noteworthy that the Whitemill plants were found close to the A40, a principal route for importing straw from England to sell at Carmarthen livestock mart. The Whitemill School site also yielded another new county record, *T. ochrochlorum* G.E. Haglund, together with *T. sinuatum* Dahlst. (the 3<sup>rd</sup> county record), *T. laeticolor* Dahlst. and *T. ancistrolobum* Dahlst.!

Although the Carmarthenshire *Taraxacum* flora is becoming relatively well recorded: 125 species currently

expertly determined out of the described 235 (not including *T. quadrangulum* and six, at present, referred to only by working names), John's enthusiasm continues to motivate us to collect from as many parts of the county as time permits during the short season! We are very grateful to him for his encouragement and for his very prompt service as BSBI referee for material to be identified!

#### REFERENCES

Dudman, A.A. & Richards, A.J. (1997) *Dandelions of Great Britain and Ireland: BSBI Handbook No.9*. Botanical Society of the British isles, London.

Ollgaard, H. (2003) New species of *Taraxacum*, sect. *Ruderalia*, found in Central and Northern Europe. *Preslia, Praha*, **75**: 137-164. <http://www.preslia.cz/P032COLg.pdf>

Railonsala, Artturi. (1957) *Taraxaca nova*. I. *Arch. Soc. Zool. Bot. Fenn. "Vanamo"*, **11**: 163.

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