

Ireland - The Burren

Naturetrek Tour Report

31 May - 3 June 2008

Tour report compiled by Philip Thompson



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Day 1

Thursday 31st May

Those of us who were met by the minibus at the airport enjoyed a pleasant stop en-route to our hotel at a local village. We made a visit to the adjoining ruined abbey where we were entertained by the nesting Sand Martins in the stonework as well as several interesting plants, including Stream Water-crowfoot (*Ranunculus penicillatus*) in the nearby stream.

During our transfer to the hotel we all became aware of the abundance of Ragged Robin (*Lychnis flos-cuculi*) and Yellow Flag (*Iris pseudocorus*) in the damp meadows in this part of Ireland; they were a delight to see.

After the whole group had gathered at the hotel and been assigned their respective rooms we set out mid-afternoon for our first excursion to Capanawalla. Our main objective here was to see the abundant Greater Butterwort (*Pinguicula grandiflora*) in one of its few sites in the Burren and it made a fine show of colour in the grassy bank where it grows. We had enjoyed a pleasant walk up to the site and had seen many of the special plants for which the Burren is famous on the way up and growing alongside the butterwort. The most notable plants, which were to become a feature of the trip, were Bloody Cranesbill (*Geranium sanguinum*) and Burnet or Burren Rose (*Rosa spinosissima* ex *Rosa pimpinellifolia*). The highlights were Spring Gentian (*Gentiana verna*) and Catsfoot (*Antenaria dioica*).

We then returned to our comfortable hotel for the first of our splendid meals.

Day 2

Friday 1st June

For our first full day in the field we made our initial stop at Poll Salach, a large area of limestone pavement that runs down to the sea and ends in some vertiginous cliffs.

We then spent an engrossing time exploring the scailps (deep crevices) and grassy lawns for botanical treasures. Spring Sandwort (*Minuartia verna*) was promptly found alongside Sea Milkwort (*Glaux maritima*), *Plantago maritima*, *Armeria maritima* and *Samolus valerandi* in the grassy areas, while at the cliff edge Rock Sea Lavender sp (*Limonium recurvum* ssp *psuedotranswallianum*) and Rock Sea Spurrey (*Spergularia rupicola*) were also noted.

We next moved on to Black Head, a hill over 300m high, set back from the coast with an iron-age hill-fort set at the top. During this transfer numerous Black Guillemots were noticed close inshore. A few of the group opted to spend our time here on the lower slopes while the majority set off up the hill with reaching a variety of altitudes, a few making it all the way to the hill-fort on the summit! The lower slopes yielded *Saxifraga rosea*, *Helianthemum canum*, *Dryas octopetala* and *Thalictrum minus*, while those that reached the top were rewarded with *Empetrium nigrum*. Not to be overlooked were the views from the top across Galway Bay and towards the Aran Isles with a stunning blue Atlantic Ocean to admire in the glorious sunshine.

Lunch was then taken at Monk's Bar in Ballyvaughan which proved entertaining when we all came to pay; the bar used three different tills to take our money, which caused some confusion when it came to clarifying that everything was paid for. Still, we all enjoyed a pleasant meal before setting off once more, this time to The Rine, which is a low-lying sandy promontory not far from Black Head. Our aim was to see the local *Limonium humile* and *Cerastium arvense*, which we did alongside *Honkenya peploides*.

Our final stop of the day was to take a short walk along the Green Lane near Formoyle as much to admire the views as to see plants. One member of the group however had a very lucky sighting of a Pine Marten running across the track while ahead of the main group. We also added *Geum rivale* to the trip list.

Day 3

Saturday 2nd June

We started the day with a short visit to Kilfenora Cathedral and the Burren Centre; most interest was shown in the Cathedral for its plants as well as its history. I'm sure if we had had inclement weather the choice might have been reversed!

Next we drove the short distance to Mullachmor and the nearby turlough (a unique type of disappearing, or seasonal, lake found mainly in limestone areas of Ireland) of Loch Gealain. Within metres of setting off we had noted the abundant *Potentilla fruticosa*, *Dactylorhiza incarnata* ssp. *cruenta* and *D. traunsteineri* in the surrounding area. Moving on towards the turlough edge we picked out some examples of *Viola percisifolia* growing alongside *Viola canina* and possible hybrid offspring. Beyond the lake, which hosted Common Sandpiper, Dabchick and noisy Common Gulls, we crossed a stone wall and arrived at an area of higher ground with limestone pavement. Here we were lucky to find an example of *Neotinia maculata* that had, unfortunately, just gone over. Further on we found some examples of *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* ssp. *okellyi*, the localised form of Common Spotted Orchid.

Then after having our lunch in the bar at Caron we set out for the Cliffs of Moher. This is a very popular area for tourists to visit; the cliffs are an impressive sight despite the crowds and well worth visiting. We were lucky with the weather once more, enjoying perfect visibility and views of the bright blue ocean below. Huge numbers of breeding birds were present on the cliffs, including Guillemot, Razorbill and Puffin to complete the set of UK auks for the trip. Also present were abundant Kittiwakes and Fulmars, plus a few of the group managed to see a pair of passing Chough.

On our return to the hotel we stopped briefly at a roadside verge to admire some splendidly robust examples of *Dactyloctenium aegyptium*, another Irish speciality. For those that missed the Choughs at Moher another bird then flew past for all to see.

Day 4

Sunday 3 June

The final morning before our return to normality was spent on the dunes at Fanore. We started our walk on the seaward side of the dunes and soon found several new plants for the trip: *Calystegia soldanella*, *Cakile maritime*, *Rhaphanus raphanistrum* ssp. *maritimus*, *Eryngium maritimum* and *Euphorbia paralias*. We found some examples of Sea Spleenwort (*Asplenium marinum*) on an area of large rocks close to the shoreline; it was on the leeward side of the boulders.

Crossing into the dunes themselves we found some *Euphorbia portlandica*, *Blackstonia perfoliata* and *Euphrasia salisburgensis* var. *hibernica*. The plant that eluded our joint search efforts was the Sand Pansy *Viola tricolor* ssp. *curtsii*, but I can think of worse things to occupy my time than a fruitless search among the dunes in such a wonderful peaceful environment on a Tuesday morning.

And so ended our relaxing stay in the Burren where the scenery and quiet winding lanes all added to the enjoyment of the plants on offer in this special place. We even saw Father Ted's house as an extra bonus!

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Plant Species List

CLASS - GYMNOSPERMS

CUPRESSACEAE

Juniperus communis

Cypress Family

Juniper

CLASS - ANGIOSPERMS

ORDER - DICOTYLEDONS

SALICACEAE

Populus tremula

Willow Family

Aspen

BETULACEAE

Alnus glutinosa

Birch Family

Alder

CORYLACEAE

Corylus avellana

Hazel Family

Hazel

URTICACEAE

Parietaria judaica

Nettle Family

Pellitory of the Wall

CHENOPODIACEAE

Atriplex portulacoides

Beta vulgaris ssp.maritima

Goosefoot Family

Sea Purslane

Sea Beet

CARYOPHALLACEAE

Silene vulgaris ssp.maritima

Minuartia verna

Arenaria serpyllifolia

Honkenya peploides

Lycbhis flos-cuculi

Cerastium arvense

Spergularia media

Spergularia rupicola

Pink Family

Sea Campion

Spring Sandwort

Thyme-leaved Sandwort

Sea Sandwort

Ragged Robin

Field Mouse-ear

Greater Sea-spurrey

Rock Sea-spurrey

RANUNCULACEAE

Thalictrum minus

Aquilegia vulgaris

Caltha palustre

Ranunculus pencilatus

Ranunculus flammula

Ranunculus bulbosa

Ranunculus acris

Ranunculus sceleratus

Buttercup Family

Lesser Meadow-rue

Columbine

Marsh Marigold

Stream Water-crowfoot

Lesser Spearwort

Bulbous Buttercup

Meadow Buttercup

Celery-leaved Buttercup

CRUCIFERAE

Cardamine pratensis

Arabis hirsuta

Hesperis matronalis

Cochlearia officinalis

Erophila verna

Cakile maritima

Sisymbrium officinale

Raphanus raphanistrum ssp. maritimus

Mustard Family

Cuckoo Flower

Hairy Rock Cress

Dame's Violet

Scurvy Grass

Whitlow Grass

Sea Rocket

Hedge Mustard

Sea Radish

CRASSULACEAE

Umbilicus rupestris
Sedum acre

Stonecrop Family

Navelwort
Biting Stonecrop

SAXIFRAGACEAE

Saxifraga rosea
Saxifraga tridactylites

Saxifrage Family

Irish Saxifrage
Rue-leaved Saxifrage

ROSACEAE

Dryas octopetala
Geum rivale
Potentilla erecta
Potentilla fruticosa
Sanguisorba minor
Rosa spinosissima
Sorbus aucuparia
Alchemilla sp.

Rose Family

Mountain Avens
Water Avens
Tormentil
Shrubby Cinquefoil
Salad Burnet
Burnet Rose
Whitebeam
a Lady's Mantle

LEGUMINOSAE

Trifolium dubium
Anthyllis vulneraria
Hippocrepis comosa
Lotus corniculatus
Vicia sepium
Vicia cracca
Lathyrus montanus
Lathyrus pratensis

Pea Family

Lesser Trefoil
Kidney Vetch
Horse-shoe Vetch
Bird's-foot Trefoil
Bush Vetch
Tufted Vetch
Bitter Vetch
Meadow Vetchling

GERANIACEAE

Geranium sanguinum
Geranium molle
Geranium lucidum
Geranium columbinum

Geranium Family

Bloody Cranesbill
Soft Cranesbill
Shining Cranesbill
Dove's Foot Cranesbill

LINACEAE

Linum catharticum

Flax Family

Fairy Flax

EUPHORBIACEAE

Euphorbia paralias
Euphorbia portlandica

Spurge family

Sea Spurge
Portland Spurge

POLYGALACEAE

Polygala vulgaris

Milkwort Family

Common Milkwort

AQUIFOLIACEAE

Ilex aquifolia

Holly Family

Holly

CELASTRACEAE

Euonymus europaeus

Spindle-Tree family

Spindle

RHAMNACEAE

Rhamnus catharticus
Rhamnus alnus

Buckthorn Family

Buckthorn
Alder buckthorn

HYPERICACEAE

Hypericum androsaemum

St John's Wort Family

Tutsan

<i>Hypericum pulchrum</i>	Slender St John's Wort
<i>Hypericum tetrapterum</i>	Square-stalked St John's Wort
VIOLACEAE	Violet Family
<i>Viola riviniana</i>	Common Dog Violet
<i>Viola canina</i>	Heath Dog Violet
<i>Viola persicifolia</i>	Fen Violet
<i>Viola × ritschliana</i> (<i>V. canina</i> × <i>V. persicifolia</i>)	
CISTACEAE	Rockrose Family
<i>Helianthemum canum</i>	Hoary Rockrose
ARALIACEAE	Ivy Family
<i>Hedera helix</i>	Ivy
APIACEAE	Umbellifer Family
<i>Sanicula europaea</i>	Sanicle
<i>Conopodium majus</i>	Pignut
<i>Cherithium maritimum</i>	Samphire
<i>Smyrniolum olusatrum</i>	Alexanders
<i>Angelica sylvestris</i>	Wild Angelica
ERICACEAE	Heath Family
<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>	Heather
EMPETRACEAE	Crowberry Family
<i>Empetrium nigrum</i>	Crowberry
PRIMULACEAE	Primrose Family
<i>Primula vulgaris</i>	Primrose
<i>Primula veris</i>	Cowslip
<i>Primula × polyantha</i> (<i>P. vulgaris</i> × <i>P. veris</i>)	False oxlip
<i>Glaux maritima</i>	Sea Milkwort
<i>Samolus valerandi</i>	Brookweed
PLUMBAGINACEAE	Sea Lavender Family
<i>Limonium humile</i>	Lax-flowered Sea Lavender
<i>Limonium recurvum</i> ssp. <i>pseudotranswallianum</i>	Rock Sea Lavender
<i>Armeria maritima</i>	Thrift
GENTIANACEAE	Gentian Family
<i>Gentiana verna</i>	Spring Gentian
<i>Blackstonia perfoliata</i>	Yellow-wort
RUBIACEAE	Madder Family
<i>Rubia peregrina</i>	Wild madder
<i>Galium sternerii</i>	Limestone Bedstraw
<i>Galium boreale</i>	Northern Bedstraw
<i>Galium odoratum</i>	Sweet Woodruff
<i>Galium palustre</i>	Marsh Bedstraw
CONVOLVULACEAE	Convolvulus Family
<i>Calystegia sepium</i>	Bindweed
<i>Calystegia soldanella</i>	Sea Bindweed
BORAGINACEAE	Borage Family
<i>Myosotis arvensis</i>	Common Forget-me-not

LABIATAE

Thymus praecox
Prunella vulgaris
Teucrium scorodonia

Mint Family

Wild Thyme
 Self Heal
 Wood Sage

SCROPHLARIACEAE

Pedicularis sylvatica
Rhinanthus minor
Veronica chamaedrys
Veronica arvensis
Euphrasia salisburgensis ssp. hibernica
Digitalis purpurea

Figwort Family

Lousewort
 Yellow Rattle
 Germander Speedwell
 Wall Speedwell
 Irish Eyebright
 Foxglove

LENTIBULARIACEAE

Pinguicula grandiflora

Butterwort Family

Greater Butterwort

PLANTAGINACEAE

Plantago coronopus
Plantago maritima

Plantain Family

Buck's-horn Plantain
 Sea Plantain

CAPRIFOLIACEAE

Viburnum opulus
Symphoricarpos albus
Lonicera periclymenum

Honeysuckle Family

Guelder Rose
 Snowberry
 Honeysuckle

VALERIANACEAE

Valeriana officinalis
Valerianella locusta

Valerian Family

Valerian
 Common Cornsalad

CAMPANULACEAE

Jasione Montana
Campanula percisifolia

Bellflower Family

Sheep's Bit
 Peach-leaved Bellflower

COMPOSITAE

Antennaria dioica
Leucanthemum vulgare
Cirsium dissectum
Hypochoeris radicata
Mycelis muralis
Pilosella officinarum
Hieracium anglicum
Solidago virgaurea
Eupatorium cannabinum
Crepis versicaria

Daisy Family

Catsfoot
 Ox-eye Daisy
 Meadow Thistle
 Common Cat's ear
 Wall Lettuce
 Mouse-ear Hawkweed
 Irish Hawkweed
 Goldenrod
 Hemp-agrimony
 Beaked Hawk's-beard

ORDER - MONOCOTYLEDONS**IRIDACEAE**

Iris pseudocorus

Iris Family

Yellow Flag

ARACEAE

Arum maculatum

Arum Family

Lords-and-Ladies

ORCHIDACEAE

Listera ovata
Epipactus helleborine
Orchis mascula

Orchid Family

Twayblade
 Broad-leaved Helleborine
 Early Purple Orchid

<i>Dactylorhiza fuchsii</i>	Common Spotted Orchid
<i>Dactylorhiza fuchsii</i> ssp. <i>okellyi</i>	O'Kelly's Orchid
<i>Dactylorhiza maculata</i>	Heath Spotted Orchid
<i>Dactylorhiza incarnata</i> ssp. <i>cruenta</i>	Early Marsh Orchid
<i>Dactylorhiza majalis</i> ssp. <i>occidentalis</i>	Irish Marsh Orchid
<i>Dactylorhiza traunsteineri</i>	Narrow-leaved Marsh Orchid
<i>Gymnadenia conopsea</i>	Fragrant Orchid
<i>Neotinea maculata</i>	Dense-flowered Orchid
<i>Platanthera biflora</i>	Lesser Butterfly Orchid

PTERIDOPHYTA - FERNS

<i>Adiantum capillus-veneris</i>	Maidenhair Fern
<i>Phyllitis scolopendrium</i>	Harts-tongue Fern
<i>Asplenium marinum</i>	Sea Spleenwort
<i>Asplenium trichomanes</i>	Maidenhair Spleenwort
<i>Asplenium ruta-muraria</i>	Wall-rue
<i>Ceterach officinarum</i>	Rusty-back Fern
<i>Polystichum setiferum</i>	Soft Shield Fern
<i>Polypodium vulgare</i>	Polypody
<i>Dropteris felix-mas</i>	Male Fern
<i>Dropteris affinis</i>	Scaly Male Fern