

The Lindisfarne Helleborine

On the afternoon of 10th July, Andrew Craggs of Natural England led members of Berwick Wildlife Group on a walk on Holy Island to see the Lindisfarne Helleborine. This flower is unique to Holy Island, and has only recently been separated from the Dune Helleborine (*Epipactis dunensis*) as a distinct species. Paying tribute to Lindisfarne's history, this recently recognised species is called *Epipactis sancta*. Incidentally, another separate species has been recognised further south and it is known as the Tyne Helleborine.

On the way, Andrew talked about the history of the Island's vegetation and pointed out an enclosure of the type that was used to protect plants from grazing by rabbits at a time when the rabbit population was high. Now certain areas are grazed by cattle to prevent the strong grasses choking out the wild flowers. The rich carpet of flowers shows that this strategy is working well. He explained that he had removed 120 seedlings of Scots Pine in order to prevent the damp areas being dried out. Pirri-pirri Bur, which probably arrived with washings from wool from New Zealand, is an extremely aggressive newcomer. There is a danger that it will adversely affect the native plants and it has already spread to the mainland. The burrs catch onto fabric and animals and for this reason the group wore wellingtons which have a smooth surface, and checked their clothes were burr-free before they left. Open fires and barbeques are not allowed on the island because of the risk of fire spreading and destroying the vegetation.

The species the group saw included Lindisfarne Helleborine, Marsh Helleborine, Sea Centaury, Round-leaved Wintergreen, Marsh Thistle, Bog Pimpernel, Fairy Flax, Common Spotted Orchid (along with some hybrids), Sea Aster, Creeping Willow and Black Bog rush. There were Small White and Green-veined White Butterflies and Dark Green Fritillaries. It was a most interesting and rewarding walk and the group is very grateful to Andrew for his excellent commentary.

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