

**EuCAN visit to Milicz Ponds, western Poland July 31<sup>st</sup> – August 18<sup>th</sup> 2009, with special reference to the vascular plants that were recorded there.**

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This was my first visit to Eastern Europe and I was interested to see the landscape and wildlife (especially the plants) of Poland, a country that I would not have considered visiting as a holiday destination. This trip to Milicz in the Baryczy valley in western Poland was to a lowland wetland area not dissimilar to the Somerset Levels where I live in the UK. This was a 'working holiday' with a wonderful opportunity to add to my knowledge of the European flora, to partake in practical conservation work with other like-minded people and to see some of the cultural life of Poland. Our conservation tasks were to clear encroaching scrub from grasslands and mires to benefit the birds and other wildlife in this internationally important wetland. Our Polish host was Roman Guziak, an immensely knowledgeable ecologist working



Roman Guziak at Staw Połnocny

for Ecological Association ETNA who organized our work and took us sightseeing at the weekends. We met other Polish professionals, volunteers and their families. Roman gave us a few formal Polish language lessons and from this and working and socializing with our Polish friends and colleagues, we learnt some words of the 'difficult' language. Recording the vascular plants of the area was not without its difficulties, as we had no means of accurately identifying *all* the species that we encountered. Nigel and Kathy had brought numerous books to help with this task, including keys and floras from Britain and Hungary, but we did not have a comprehensive Flora of Poland. There are 2468 species in Poland, many of which are present in Britain, but I found it tantalizing that there were some species that we were not able to accurately determine. Most of the areas that we visited were wetlands associated with the Milicz Fish ponds; open freshwater lakes, fringing vegetation and associated paths, tracks and roadsides, but we also visited lowland grassland, mires, broadleaved woodland and arable habitats.

### **Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> August Ruda Milicka**

Our first visit to the Milicz Ponds was the hide at Staw Słupicki where we saw several interesting plants.



*Melampyrum nemorosum* is a handsome plant with yellow flowers and bright purple bracts and was growing in profusion on the roadside in shade.



Small Balsam (*Impatiens parviflora*) was growing in similar shady positions and frequently recorded in other places that we visited.

### **Stawy Gadzinow**

To reach the little islands on which we cleared scrub to benefit nesting terns, Roman punted us through the reeds in a flat-bottomed metal boat. This gave an excellent opportunity to examine the aquatic and fringing vegetation of the lake. Here, Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*), Greater Reed-mace (*Typha latifolia*), Branched Bur-reed (*Sparganium erectum*), Sweet-flag (*Acorus calamus*) and Purple-loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) were abundant.



A strange floating Duckweed-like plant was later identified from photos by as *Ricciocarpus natans*, an aquatic liverwort, which has long ribbon-shaped scales which hang down in the water.



As we returned to the islands later in the week, to burn the brash, we came across a small bush of bright red cherry-plums overhanging the water where beavers had gnawed at the base of Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) trees.

**Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> August**  
**Staw Połnocny**

Before we started work on clearing willow and tall vegetation from the edge of Stary Staw, we stopped to look at abandoned fields. These were an interesting mixture of grassland and ruderal species, indicating that they were probably cultivated in recent years before being abandoned in 1990's



There was little evidence of grazing animals in the Milicz Ponds area and most fields that had not been cut for hay were tall-herb dominated, often with large stands of Canadian Goldenrod (*Solidago canadensis*), a very invasive non-native plant. Species here included Blue Fleabane (*Erigeron acer*), Tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*), Field Wormwood (*Artemisia campestris*), Cornflower (*Centaurea cyanus*), Spreading Bellflower (*Campanula patula*), Maiden Pink (*Dianthus deltoides*), Sheep's-bit (*Jasione montana*), Cypress Spurge (*Euphorbia cyparissias*), Hare's-foot Clover (*Trifolium arvense*), *Rumex thyrsiflorus*, Hoary Cinquefoil (*Potentilla argentea*), Field Pansy (*Viola arvensis*). The wet grasslands that we were working on had a more damp-loving flora. Here Marsh Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle vulgaris*), Marsh Bedstraw (*Galium palustre*), Tufted Hair-grass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*), Common Sedge (*Carex nigra*) and Marsh Willowherb (*Epilobium palustre*) were frequent.

#### **Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> August Staw Połnocny**

More species were recorded in the adjacent mire where we walked after our scrub-clearance work. This was tall-herb mire, dense and ungrazed with an abundance of Marsh Stitchwort (*Stellaria palustris*).



This is a Nationally Scarce species in Britain undergoing a decline in distribution and it was a treat to see thousands of plants straggling through the tall vegetation. Other species here included Marsh Speedwell (*Veronica scutellata*), Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*), Fen Bedstraw (*Galium uliginosum*), Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*), Water Horsetail (*Equisetum fluviatile*) and Jointed Rush (*Juncus articulatus*).

### **Friday 7<sup>th</sup> August** **Staw Połnocny**

Near our working place parking place for the mini-bus, an area of mire that had escaped mowing at the edge of dense scrub revealed many tall plants of Milk-parsley (*Peucedanum palustre*) with their distinctive hairless tri-pinnate leaves. A similar umbellifer recorded in adjacent damp grasslands and mires today was Cambridge Milk-parsley (*Selinum carvifolia*).

### **Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> August** **Stawy Krośnickie**

Passing houses built with ironstone, a dark brown material forming the lowest courses of the walls, we walked along waymarked paths through damp Oak and Hornbeam woodland towards lakes with viewing platforms. Small Balsam (*Impatiens parviflora*) was abundant along the tracks and Touch-me-not Balsam (*Impatiens noli-tangere*) was recorded

occasionally too. I could not resist squeezing the ripe fruits of both of these species to make them burst open explosively. Nettle-leaved Bellflower (*Campanula trachelium*) was present and Large-flowered Hemp-nettle (*Galeopsis speciosa*)



was flowering profusely. A large umbellifer later identified from this area was *Chaerophyllum aromaticum*. The fruits are distinctive as only a few of the florets develop into large elongated fruits, giving the fruiting head a very scruffy appearance with numerous fruitless rays. Other umbellifers included Rough Chervil (*Chaerophyllum temulum*), Hedge Parsley (*Torilis japonica*), Cow-parsley (*Anthriscus sylvestris*) and Burnet Saxifrage (*Pimpinella saxifraga*). On bare soil beneath trees, a few plants of the delicate, white-flowered May Lily (*Maiathemum bifolium*) were recorded. In open, less shaded areas near the water's edge, the verges were colourful with Brown Knapweed (*Centaurea jacea*), Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) and Common St John's-wort (*Hypericum perforatum*). On the way back to the minibus several plants of Narrow-lipped Helleborine (*Epipactis leptochila*) were by the track. The flowers of this orchid are pale green with pink/purple throats, making them very hard to spot in the dappled shade.

### **Duke of Radziwiłł's Hunting Lodge at Antonin**

This is a beautiful eight-sided wooden building where Chopin stayed in 1829. Whilst walking across the lawns, I noticed Smooth Rupturewort (*Herniaria glabra*) in the bare patches in the grass.



### **Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> August River Barycz**

Canoeing on the river was a wonderful experience on this unspoiled stretch of water through the Milicz countryside giving us the opportunity to quietly observe the wildlife as we paddled downstream. Banded Demoiselles fluttered darkly just above the water whilst White-tailed Eagles soared silently far above. The river banks were fringed by tall-herb vegetation including Hemp Agrimony (*Eupatorium cannabinum*), Canadian Goldenrod (*Solidago canadensis*) and Reed Canary-grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*). Aquatic species noticed in the open water were Frogbit (*Hydrocharis morsus-ranae*), Arrowhead (*Sagittaria sagittifolia*), Rigid Hornwort (*Ceratophyllum demersum*) and Shining Pondweed (*Potamogeton lucens*). A jostling mass of Water-soldier (*Stratiotes aloides*) crowded around our canoes as we struggled to haul them out of the water to continue our journey below the weir.

### **Monday 10<sup>th</sup> August**

#### **Staw Połnocny**

The only thing that I wrote in my notes for this day was 'dead mole' – we saw one squashed in the road on the way to the scrub clearance site!

### **Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> August**

#### **Stawy Grabownice**

It was here that we saw the only grazed fields and tethered cows. We walked along a narrow path towards the tall wooden hide which looks across the largest lake in the Barycz valley. The woody species here were Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*), Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), Guelder-rose (*Viburnum opulus*), Pear (*Pyrus sp.*), Aspen (*Populus tremula*). In a shady area near the hide, Three-veined Sandwort (*Moehringia trinerva*) and Narrow Buckler-fern (*Dryopteris carthusiana*) were recorded. Returning to the hostel we stopped at a derelict wooden windmill. The adjacent arable field was studded with blue Cornflowers (*Centaurea cyanus*). This cultivated field was very weedy and it was unclear what the crop was, as the most abundant species was Bristle-grass (*Setaria sp.*). The other arable weeds recorded here were Corn Spurrey (*Spergularia arvensis*) and Perennial Sow-thistle (*Sonchus arvensis*).

### **Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> August**

#### **Grabownice mire**

Today we started work at a new site, cutting scrub from an ungrazed and neglected mire. This is a large undulating area with high water levels, cut by drainage channels. It was species-

rich with a mixture of ruderal, grassland, mire and aquatic vegetation.



A large, tussocky grass with narrow leaves was abundant across this site. It was thought to be a *Calamagrostis* sp., but positive identification was not possible due to the lack of inflorescences. The presence of frequent Nettles (*Urtica dioica*) and Creeping Thistle (*Cirsium arvense*) indicated former cultivation or disturbance. Many species were recorded from this mire including Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*), Fen Bedstraw (*Galium uliginosum*), Square-stalked St John's-wort (*Hypericum tetrapetum*), Marsh Woundwort (*Stachys palustris*), Greater Bird's-foot Trefoil (*Lotus pedunculatus*), Greater Spearwort (*Ranunculus lingua*), Ragged-Robin (*Lychnis flos-cuculi*), Water-violet (*Hottonia palustre*), Mat-grass (*Nardus stricta*), Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), Greater Water-dock (*Rumex hydrolapathum*), *Geranium palustre* and *Inula britannica*.

### **Grabownice woodland**

We walked through this broadleaved woodland on the way to the mire. This had a good ground flora with many associated species. A few worth mentioning are; Yellow Pimpernel (*Lysimachia nemorum*), Wall Lettuce (*Mycelis muralis*), *Festuca gigantea*, Wavy Hair-grass (*Deschampsia flexuosa*) and Creeping Soft-grass (*Holcus mollis*).

**Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> August**

**Grabownice arable fields**

I took time out from scrub clearance to explore the cultivated fields nearby, to see which wild species were associated with the arable crops. Arable weeds are rare in Britain due to intensive agriculture and improved seed cleaning, so it was with great interest that I noticed very weedy crops of cereals & maize. Herbicide use was not in evidence here, but if it is used, it is not intensive, as amongst the crop of rye on the dry, sandy soil was a rich association of mostly annual species including the bright blue flowers of Cornflower (*Centaurea cyanus*) scattered thinly through the rye stalks. Corncockle (*Agrostemma githago*) was also present, not flowering but as open fruit capsules from which the seeds had already been shaken.



These two species are extremely rare in Britain, occurring in only a handful of sites. In Silesia, Corncockle is listed as 'Vulnerable' in *Endangered Vascular Plants of Lower Silesia*. The entry in this local Red Data Book (translated from Polish) states that it is a relatively abundant archeophyte (ancient introduction) found mainly in fields of rye. Due to the poisonous nature of its seeds, it is ruthlessly targeted for elimination, but not always successfully, as in one of these fields where it was abundant. Cornflower was even more abundant beneath the tall maize crop where it was found with Common Stork's-bill (*Erodium cicutarium*), Black Nightshade (*Solanum nigrum*), Small-flowered Crane's-bill (*Geranium*

*pusillum*), *Digitaria* sp., Cockspur-grass (*Echinochloa crusgali*), Field Pansy (*Viola arvensis*) and many other species too numerous to mention.

Full species lists for all the locations that we worked in are available on the EuCAN website. On this trip I learnt a great deal about the flora of Silesia and it was very interesting to me to see new species, especially those which do not occur in Britain. I always enjoy seeing those plants which are rare or scarce in my own country which have a different association or abundance in another. EuCAN have enabled me to increase my overall knowledge of European flora and it has been a very valuable and rich experience.

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