

SHORT NOTES

Plantains in Lanarkshire (VC 77)

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INTRODUCTION

The following is an account, in alphabetical order, of the botanical names, of the occurrence of the members of the plantain Family (*Plantago* spp.) in Lanarkshire.

Plantago arenaria (branched plantain)

An introduced species, very scattered in south and central Britain, less common than formerly. It was recorded as a seed alien from the Ryding and Maryburgh coups by Grierson in 1922.

Plantago coronopus (buck's horn plantain)

A coastal plant, with scattered inland records, mainly in England. In Lanarkshire two plants seen in 2002 about 50 yards apart on the near side verge of the M8 in Drumoyne, Glasgow [close to lesser sea-spurrey (*Spergularia marina*)] were considered to be this taxon; at least as sure as one can be by a front seat passenger, when caught in a traffic jam and travelling at 5-10 mph! (NS 5464). A definite record was made in 2011 (J. R. Hawell) when a cluster of nineteen specimens were noted on damp bare ground by a gravel pit, south of Drumclog (NS 639379) (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Buck's horn plantain from near Drumclog.
Plantago lanceolata (ribwort plantain)

Abundant throughout Britain. The first Lanarkshire record was that of Ure from Stonelaw in 1793. Ribwort plantain grows on lawns, pastures and other grassy waste places. It is also a frequent colonist of lower bing slopes. There are modern

records for all but one full (0.5 SW) and four partial quadrants (*i.e.*, 113 out of a possible 118). Despite its name, the leaves are not always lance-shaped. Some have been seen that are intermediate between it and the greater plantain (at one time called greater broad-leaved plantain).

Flowering spikes have ranged from 9 to 79 cm. The following variants have been noted.

A specimen with persistent prominent stamens was noted growing in short turf in the Glasgow Necropolis in 2004 (NS 6065) and a clump in rough ground in the King George V Dock complex in 2009 (NS 5366) (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Ribwort plantain flower heads with prominent stamens from King George V Dock.

'Carmen Miranda' (Cragg-Barber, 2005), the form with leaves growing from the top of the spike was seen in 2006 near Newlandscroft (NS 599519) and on waste ground in Rutherglen in 2009 (NS 6062). It was so called from the likeness to the headgear worn by the actress of that name! (Fig. 3a & b).



Fig. 3a. Drawing of the actress Carmen Miranda with her distinctive headgear.

A specimen with a triple flower head was collected from the road side at Canderside Toll in 2001 (NS 7748) (Fig. 4)

A pubescent form was noted on the Marlage bing, south-east of Larkhall (NS 7948) in 2006. It was very hairy all over, apart from the flower head.



Fig. 3b. Ribwort plantain specimen with leaves growing from the top of the spike, the 'Carmen Miranda' form, from Newlandscroft.



Fig. 4. Ribwort plantain with triple flower head from Canderside Toll. Specimen photographed against the sky for greater clarity.

***Plantago major* (greater plantain)**

This species is one of the most common plants in the wild in Britain. It was first recorded in Lanarkshire in 1813 by Hopkirk who did not give it a locality. The plant being so common, he probably

thought that unnecessary. There are modern records for 110 of the 118 quadrants; all full quadrants and all but eight partial ones, of which most have only a small part in the vice-county.

This is a trample tolerant plant commonly found on paths and track sides, but also on waste ground, lawns and other grassy places.

The smallest specimen noted had a total leaf length of 3.8 cm. Near Bothwell Castle (NS 689594) a solid clump approximately 1 m long and 0.5 m broad was seen in 2011. The average leaf stalk was 23 cm, the blade being 15 cm long and 5 cm broad (*i.e.*, a total length of 38 cm). The average flower stalk was 32 cm and the flower spike 27 cm, giving a total length of 59 cm. Definitely *P. major*! *Plantago intermedia* has never been recorded in Lanarkshire.

***Plantago major* 'rosularis' (rose plantain)**

This variant was described and illustrated in Gerard's Herbal of 1633. He referred to it as 'spiked rose plantain' and commented that, "*It bears a very double flower upon a short stem like a rose, of greenish colour tending to yellowness. The seed groweth upon a spikie tuft above the highest part of the plant*". A single rose plantain was seen in 1998 in the middle of an overgrown track at Wester Kitchside (NS 608568) (Fig. 5)



Fig. 5. Rose plantain variant of greater plantain from West Kitchside.

***Plantago maritima* (sea plantain)**

Common around the coast, inland sites being mostly on mountains. In recent years it has been described as rare by salt-treated roads. In 1793 Ure reported it from the wayside, near Whitemoss (now in the middle of modern East Kilbride). Patrick (1832) gave a record from 'Gour's Braehead Avondale'. In *Notes on the Botany of Avondale* (R. Turner, 1880) there is the statement, "*Owing to the entirely inland nature of the county, there is a total absence of marine plants, and such as are peculiar to coasts and seaboards. In Avondale, however, near Drumclog, a flowering plant is to be found- the Sea Plantain*

(Plantago maritima)- which usually prefers a coast habitat...but it is not uncommon in upland districts by mountain streams...and this Avondale station affords a good instance of its occurrence in such situations". In 1859 J. H. Balfour found it on rock on banks of the River Cart somewhere between Cathcart and Busby (which may have been VC 77, depending on which bank). The burns near Drumclog have been searched recently without success.

In 2009 a large and a moderate dump was noted at the south-east side of the A73 north of Robertson (JRH; NS 948288) and in 2011 single plants were seen on the eastern verge of the A70, south-east of Tarbrax (JRH; NT 039546) and on the north side of the same road east of Glenbuck Loch (NS 763233) (Fig. 6)



Fig. 6. Sea plantain from the side of the A73 near Robertson.

***Plantago media* (hoary plantain)**

Native in neutral to basic grassland and locally common in Britain north to central Scotland. The occurrence of the plant in Lanarkshire was noted by Hopkirk in 1813 without a specific locality. Hennedy (1865) listed Dennistoun but considered that it was found only as an introduction with grass seed, not retaining its place so as to become permanent in pastures. Patton collected it in the Bothwell Castle area in 1913 (GL).

We recorded it in 1993 from alkaline grassland by a steel foundry at New Stevenston (NS 761598) and it was seen in what was described as a herb-rich paddock/recreation area at Greenhills, East Kilbride (JRH; NS 5870) in 2002.

Despite being a rather drab genus, occurrences, physical variations and variants of *Plantago* spp. are of interest.

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