

## Selected plant records from Burlish Meadows, Stourport-on-Seven 2021/2022

Brett Westwood

Burlish Meadows, off the Kingsway, Stourport-on-Seven, is one of the richest small sites in the county for its flora and is producing a steady stream of notable records. Many of these are of horticultural escapees, alien species which arrived years ago with importations of garden soil and industrial waste. Until 2019 the land was privately owned and used as a landfill site and contained a number of large mounds and bunds of soil and rubble, the origin of which is uncertain. Since 2019 the site has been included within a larger area managed by Wyre Forest District Council which comprises a “re-wilded” golf course and the heathland at Burlish Top. The sandy nature of the soil has encouraged colonisation and establishment of characteristic acid grassland species such as Hares-foot Clover *Trifolium arvense*, Knotted Clover *Trifolium striatum*, Bur Chervil *Anthriscus caucalis* and Common Cudweed *Filago germanica*. Unexpectedly these can be found rubbing roots with imported plants of more neutral soils such as Grass Vetchling *Lathyrus nissolia* which is absent from the local sandstone.

The botanical tally for this small site is likely to run to well over 250 taxa, a total which will fluctuate as the bunds become colonised by grass and shrubs and the saplings that have been planted. Many species such as Lavender *Lavandula officinalis* and Hollyhock *Alcea rosea* will very likely be out-competed. An example of this is the delicate Montpellier Broom *Genista monspessulana* (01), a new county record when it was found in May 2021, but showing no trace a year later.



01. Montpellier Broom *Genista monspessulana* Burlish Meadows. Brett Westwood.

A few of the more obvious or notable plants from Burlish Meadows are listed below.

### Upright Spurge/Tintern Spurge *Euphorbia stricta*

In the UK, this is an annual plant, probably native, whose main population is based in the limestone woods of the Wye Valley in Gloucestershire and Monmouthshire where it springs up in newly coppiced areas. It is also widely grown in cottage gardens for its reddish stems and lime-green foliage and occasionally turns up as a ruderal plant on waste ground or places where garden soil has been imported. About forty plants were seen in summer 2022 on the bunds nearest the Kidderminster road.



02. Balkan Spurge *Euphorbia oblongata* Burlish Meadows. Brett Westwood.

### Balkan Spurge *Euphorbia oblongata*.

This perennial spurge is scattered around the site and easily identified in May and June by its yellow, almost Day-Glo bracts and cyathia (the cupped structures surrounding the flowers). There were several clumps along the perimeter and on the mounds. This species is increasing in the UK and is a good sign of imported garden soil. In June 2022 I also found clumps along the Dick Brook at Shrawley and many years ago it sprang up on newly-seeded verges at Six Ways near Junction 6 of the M5 at Worcester, but was eliminated by mowing.



03. Mediterranean Spurge *Euphorbia characias* Burlish Meadows. Brett Westwood.

### Mediterranean Spurge *Euphorbia characias*.

A dramatic perennial whose clumps of towering stems dominate a few mounds near the Kidderminster road. Their robustness allows them to withstand most competition though permanent shading is a potential future threat.



04. Annual Beard-grass *Polypogon monspeliensis* panicle Burlish Meadows. Brett Westwood.

**Annual Beard-grass *Polypogon monspeliensis*.**

Tens of thousands of plants of this damp-loving grass were found along tracks and in flooded depressions around the site in 2021. Numbers in 2022 were much lower because of reduced rainfall and many plants were diminutive and harder to find. This is a species of winter-wet areas and was formerly scarce in Worcestershire, but is probably increasing on ruderal sites.



05. *Scrophularia scorodonia* Burlish Meadows. Brett Westwood.

**Balm-leaved Figwort *Scrophularia scorodonia*.**

In May 2022 I was surprised to find three large and well-established plants on the southern bunds, their size suggesting that they had been there for three years or more. This distinctive figwort with its rugose (wrinkled) leaves is an established introduction in south-west England where I am familiar with it in the hedgerows of the coastal South Hams in Devon and on the Isles of Scilly. It scattered in southern sites including South Wales, but is generally coastal as it is far less tolerant of frosts than our native figworts. Prior to the Burlish records there is only one confirmed record from Worcestershire, by John Day in 1999 of several plants on a trading estate at Blackpole north of Worcester. This is an unlikely garden plant, so raises questions about the origin of the soil dumped at Burlish Meadows. All three plants were stressed by drought conditions in July and August 2022, so it remains to be seen if they will survive into 2023.



06. Large Speedwell *Veronica teucrium* Burlish Meadows. Brett Westwood.

**Large Speedwell *Veronica teucrium***

This perennial speedwell looks rather like a tall upright form of Germander Speedwell *Veronica chamaedrys* and is native to temperate Continental Europe. Several clumps were found in a small area during May 2022 and the identification verified by county recorder, John Day. The species was noted just twice during recording for the Flora of Worcestershire, at Broadway and Church Honeybourne and is only an occasional garden escape nationally.



07. Nettle-leaved Mullein *Verbascum chaixii* Burlish Meadows. Tom Ward.

**Nettle-leaved Mullein *Verbascum chaixii***

A single plant of this white-flowered mullein was found on a field trip on 16 July 2022 attended by members of the north

Worcestershire botanists and Worcestershire Recorders. Its small flowers and numerous stems puzzled several of us and so, in the absence of a BSBI (Botanical Society of the British Isles) *Verbascum* referee, Tom Ward circulated pictures to Mick Crawley, plant professor at Imperial College London, who has a good knowledge of *Verbascum* in the UK. He replied that the rounded not cordate leaf-bases and flower-stalks *all* shorter than the calyx meant that this was *Verbascum chaixii* and not the potentially confusing *Verbascum nigrum var. album*. John Day, county recorder for Worcestershire, confirmed that this is the first record for VC37.

### 2023 and beyond.

There will doubtless be new plants to find on the site in the coming years as well as a number of perplexing mysteries to solve - those Michaelmas daisies *Symphiotrichum spp.* still fill me with trepidation. What Burlish Meadows demonstrates is that for the modern botanist, brownfield sites can be every bit as rich as classic ancient habitats.

### Acknowledgements

I am grateful, as ever, to John Day for his confirmation of records and status of plants in VC37. Thanks to Tom Ward for use of his *Verbascum chaixii* photographs and for research into *Verbascum*. Thanks also to Mick Crawley for his expertise and help with the *V. chaixii* identification.

### References

Clement, E.J. & Foster, M.C. 1994. *Alien Plants of the British Isles*. Botanical Society of the British Isles, London.  
Maskew, R. 2014. *The Flora of Worcestershire*. Published by Roger Maskew, Worcestershire.  
Stace, C. 2019. *New Flora of the British Isles*, Fourth Edition, C&M Floristics, UK.

### Images

01 Montpellier Broom *Genista monspessulana* Burlish Meadows.  
Brett Westwood.  
02 Balkan Spurge *Euphorbia oblongata* Burlish Meadows. Brett Westwood.  
03 Mediterranean Spurge *Euphorbia characias* Burlish Meadows.  
Brett Westwood.  
04 Annual Beard-grass *Polypogon monspeliensis* Burlish Meadows.  
Brett Westwood.  
05 Balm-leaved Figwort *Scrophularia scorodonia* Burlish Meadows  
Brett Westwood.  
06 Large Speedwell *Veronica teucrium* Burlish Meadows.  
Brett Westwood.  
07 Nettle-leaved Mullein *Verbascum chaixii* Burlish Meadows.  
Tom Ward.