



A Month by Month Look at Millie Bank - March 2021

In terms of weather, March is probably the most fickle of all months, with successive days often being poles apart. The 16th was probably the warmest day of the year so far, particularly in a sheltered spot like Millie Bank, and a good time to see what was going on.

The first picture is not intended to showcase Millie Bank flora, but what it does show is a return to grazing in the shape of about half a dozen sheep supplied by Nicola Reed from The Dale. Although we are nearing the end of the traditional conservation grazing period, the intention is to keep the sheep on for at least a month - and possibly longer - in order to give the sward a bit of a trim before the Summer flora emerges. If all goes well, sheep will be back on in October for several months.

Flowering plants are still not in profusion, but there are leaves everywhere. This picture shows the familiar sight of **Wild Garlic** (aka Ramsons) leaves (and the photographer's finger!). We have no proof, but we feel that garlic is on the increase, and at the expense of the bluebell. In the past, we seemed to see discrete patches of garlic and bluebell, but, increasingly it seems, the garlic is spreading into bluebell territory, possibly because it is enjoying the current wetter weather.

Dog's Mercury has a splendid name, but is often overlooked in the midst of Spring greenery. As can be seen from the picture, it is a very attractive plant, and a good indicator species of past or present ancient woodland. It is also a tenacious plant. We found some in a dark corner of the garden a few years ago, and are still trying to stop it spreading!





One of the first splashes of colour, particularly in damp, open areas, is provided by **Lesser Celandine**, but it is not welcomed by all as it is poisonous to livestock. It is not native to North America, but has managed to arrive there where it can grow so densely that it shades out native Spring flowers. It is plant we have introduced into the garden, but are beginning to regret having done so.



Another plant which likes to grow in damp places is **Golden Saxifrage**. Like dog's mercury, it is often overlooked, but is worth a closer look. If you happen to see a rather funny-looking version, it could be the less common alternate-leaved golden saxifrage, although probably not on Millie Bank, as it is a bit of a lime-lover.



A more benign flower is the delightful **Primrose**. We must have seen hundreds of thousands of them over the years, but you can guarantee we will both go "Aw!" when we see the first of the year. Another suspicion is that cowslips are now flowering earlier, thus increasing the likelihood of false oxlips - the hybrid of primrose and cowslip.



Moss of the Month is this dense patch growing at the base of the large ash tree above the small plantation. It is a member of the Brachythecium family, (probably rutabulum) and is common on wood and stones. Feel free to take a closer look at it.