



A Month by Month Look at Millie Bank - August 2021



Angelica umbel

There are still lots of plants to see on Millie Bank, one of the most impressive being **Angelica**. From a distance, it looks like hogweed (and grows in similar places), but its stem is usually a dark purple, and its flowers often have a pinkish hue. Like most umbellifers, it is very popular with insects. (The umbel is the cluster of tiny flowers at the top of the stem, giving a lace-like effect from a distance.)

Also not far from the beck are at least two species of mint: **Spearmint** has pointed flowers and leaves, and is the traditional 'garden mint', whereas **Water Mint** has more rounded ones, and as the name implies, likes wet places. Both have that distinctive minty smell when a leaf is crushed. Like a lot of other pesky flowers, mints like to hybridise, so don't lose the will to



Spearmint



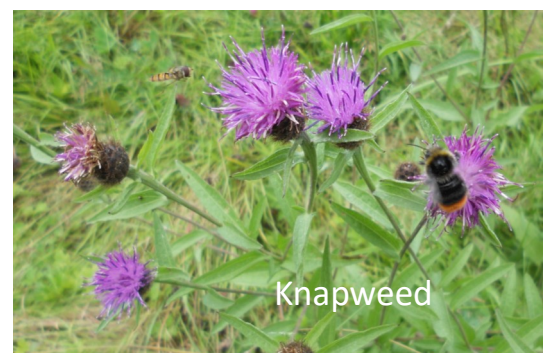
Water mint



Tormentil

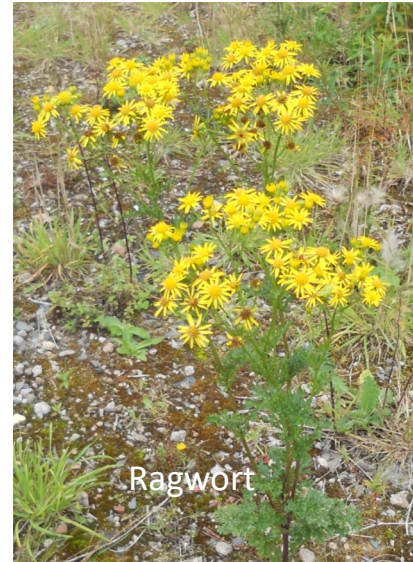
One small yellow flower a bit like a buttercup, but with only four petals to its flower, is **Tormentil**. You will find it at ground-level on neutral to acidic soil, on lowland and upland grass/heath-land. Like many wild flowers, it was used medicinally, and toothpaste was made from it, apparently.

At this time of the year, clumps of **Knapweed** are common on unimproved/undisturbed ground. Their handsome purple flower is extremely popular with bees and hover-flies, and it is a very important plant for all insects given its relatively late flowering period. Allegedly, a young woman would put an unopened flower-head in her blouse, and, when it opened, it was a sign that the man of her dreams was nearby. (Lois has had one in her blouse for weeks, but it doesn't seem to have



Knapweed

Last month, there was a picture of marsh ragwort, but here is the real thing: **Common Ragwort**. It is a very important plant for a wide range of insects, including the cinnabar moth. The moth's attractive caterpillars gorge themselves on this very poisonous plant, and do so because they are able to store the poison they ingest in an internal sac. Of course, anything eating the caterpillars would not be so protected, but their obvious black and orange-striped body sends a clear message to predators to back off! Despite the above, ragwort has to be discouraged from grazed land, as it can prove fatal to stock if ingested in relatively small quantities. On Millie Bank, we let the flowers flower, but then pull the plants up, to stop them seeding. One big can release around 35,000 seeds! If embarking on pulling ragwort, just make sure you are not putting paid to St John's -wort, as the two plants do look a bit similar, and are often



Grass....hopper of The Month is this little chap. (Not our image, we are afraid, the original moved too fast!) If you are prepared to stick your head into the sward of somewhere 'unimproved' like Millie Bank, you will find loads of insects like this jumping up in front of you. You would be lucky to find any in nearly all of the other fields you walk or drive past every day.

Nigel and Lois Harbron

PS: One really nice plant on Millie Bank we have failed to draw to your attention this year is **Betony**.

There is quite a lot, but we didn't feature it last month as we thought it would keep until this month, but today's pics did not do it justice, as we were a bit too late. Here is a picture of it from a few years

