A Viola Quartet

In the nineteenth of a series of articles on Raasay’s flora, botanist STEPHEN BUNGARD takes a look at violets and pansies.

The Viola genus covers both violets and pansies and we have two of each native to Raasay. The violets are both very common; the pansies are each known from single locations.

Both Viola riviniana (Common Dog-violet) and Viola palustris (Marsh Violet) can be found across Raasay, the latter preferring wetter habitats but also e.g. under bracken. The two can be told apart by leaf shape when the plants are not flowering.

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Viola arvensis (Field Pansy) was recorded from Fladday in the 1930s as V. arvatica. It was not seen again until 2004 when several plants emerged from soil taken from East Suisnish to West Suisnish for garden use. Extensive searching at the site from which the soil was taken and at the site at Holoman where most of the soil ended up revealed no further plants. Apparently the area from which the soil was taken was once used for feed storage and this may have been the source of long-dormant seed. Plants have appeared again at West Suisnish in most years since, including 2017.

Viola tricolor subsp. tricolor (Wild Pansy or Heartsease) was recorded in fields at Oskaig as V. lepida and V. lloydii in the 1930s. It was found again in a field at Oskaig in 2004 during a SWT walk I was leading - but it would be good to find it again.

Both these pansies are arable weeds and the loss of arable farming has led to their decline on Skye, Raasay and across the British Isles.

Plants found in Inverarish in 2006 and Clachan in 2012 were determined as either V. x wittrockiana (Garden Pansy) tricolor-like cultivars, reverted further towards V. tricolor, or plain V. tricolor. They were unlike native V. tricolor on Raasay and Skye and clearly of garden origin.

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