Raasay in the 1990s

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Since 1992 I have been mapping vascular plants on Raasay and the associated tidal islands of Eilean Fladday and Eilean Tigh in 98 recording units based on 1 km squares. Recording has been enlivened by trying to find old records. Many sixty year old records remain good today.

Coastal Communities

*Ligusticum scoticum* (Scots Lovage) is only on the west coast of Raasay and on Eilean Tigh. *Sedum rosea* (Roseroot) is present on coastal and upland rocks, growing luxuriantly in shaded coastal dykes and *Tripletviperpermum maritimum* (Sea Mayweed) occurs in small numbers around the coast. *Anagallis minima* (Chaffweed) was found on Raasay for the first time in 1993. *Carex otrubae* (False Fox-sedge) is present in a small area near Leac, explaining an unlikely 1930's record for *C. vulpina* (True Fox-sedge).

At the high tide mark on Eilean Tigh there is *Atriplex praecox* (Early Orache). *Atriplex prostrata* (Spear-leaved Orache) is common but *Atriplex glabraeiscula* (Babington's Orache) has only been found so far at one location.

The best salt-marsh is at Oskag, but there is a second area near Manish Point and several smaller areas harbouring some of the same plants. Species present include *Aster tripolium* (Sea Aster), *Puccinellia maritima* (Common Saltmarsh-grass), *Carex extensa* (Long-bracted Sedge) *Juncus gerardi* (Saltmarsh Rush) and *Glaux maritima* (Sea-milkwort).

Two of the three localities for *Osmunda regalis* (Royal Fern) are on coastal cliffs and slopes along the east coast between Screapadal and Eyrre hold the only sites for *Torilis japonica* (Upright Hedge-parsley) and *Agrimonia procerac* (Fragrant Agrimony). *Daucus carota* (Wild Carrot) is to be found here too, but it may also be seen around Balachuirn in the west.

Freshwater Communities

Two lochs including one on Fladday contain *Nuphar lutea* (Yellow Water-lily). As well as *Potamogeton polygonifolius* (Bog Pondweed) and *P. natans* (Broad-leaved Pondweed), *P. perfoliata* (Perfoliate Pondweed) and *P. filiformis* (Slender-leaved Pondweed) are present. Old records of other species have not been refound.

*Sporgamum natans* (Least Bur-reed) is found in large numbers in two lochs and in smaller numbers elsewhere. In the northern end of Loch Storab and in a few lochs there is *Deschampsia setacea* (Bog Hair-grass).

There is a fine clump of *Cladium mariscus* (Great Fen-sedge) near the road about 1 mile south west of Brochel and in nearby pools there are *Utricularia

intermedia* (Intermediate Bladderwort) and *U. minor* (Lesser Bladderwort). The larger *U. australis* (Bladderwort - presumably this rather than *U. vulgaris* as in acid water - but not seen in flower) is widespread.

Bogs

The acid bogs contain *Drosera rotundifolia* (Round-leaved Sundew) and *D. anglica* (Great Sundew) plus the occasional hybrid (*D. x obovata*). *Pinguicula vulgaris* (Common Bladderwort) is widespread but *P. lusitanica* (Pale Bladderwort) is more local, though still common enough. *Rhynchospora alba* (White Beak-sedge) stands out with its brilliant white flowers in summer and *Schoenus nigricans* (Black Bog-rush) is common.

*Carex limosa* (Bog-sedge) and *Carex pauciflora* (Few-flowered Sedge) are uncommon as is *Hammarbya paludosus* (Bog Orchid) except in one site in the north of the island. Fl.ashes containing *Dactylorhiza incarnata* ssp. *incarnata* and ssp. *pulchella* (Early Marsh-orchid) are reasonably frequent and *Eriophorum latifolium* (Broad-leaved Cottongrass) is occasional.

Moor And Rocks

Large tracts of moorland in the centre of the island are not very exciting botanically. However, an initially uninspiring landscape turns out to harbour a large colony of *Dactylorhiza fumata* (Lapland Marsh-orchid) first found in 1994 and since studied by Richard Bateman of RBG Edinburgh. *Pedicularis sylvatica* (Lousewort) is everywhere with ssp. *hibernica* making up about 25% of the population.

*Listera cordata* (Lesser Twayblade) is to be found under heather and both *Pyrola minor* (Common Wintergreen) and *P. media* (Intermediate Wintergreen) are present, the latter being new to Raasay in 1996. *Orthilia serrata* (Serrate Wintergreen) is the commonest wintergreen.

Where rocks protrude from the moor there may be *Dryopteris aemula* (Hay-scented Buckler-fern) particularly on the northern side, *Anthyllis vulneraria* (Kidney Veteh) and in several places in the east, *Doronicum filiformis* (Thyme Broomrape). Particularly in the north of Raasay, *Juniperus communis* ssp. *sana* (Juniper) forms large mats on the Lewisian gneiss. In a few places, *Ceratocephalum clavatum* (Climbing Caryola) scrambles amongst boulders.

On Jurassic limestone in the east of the island there are *Polystichum lonchitis* (Holly Fern), *Dryas octopetala* (Mountain Avens), *Arabis hirsuta* (Hairy Rock-rush), *Draba adina* (Hoary Whitlowgrass) and *Epipactis atrorubens* (Dark-red Helleborine). *Listera ovata* (Common Twayblade), *Gymnadenia conopsea* ssp. *borealis* (Fragrant Orchid) and *Coeloglossum viride* (Frog Orchid) are found on basic rocks, but the last two are found more widely.
Although the highest point on Raasay is only 444m, the highest points and the limestone escarpment in the east are home to a number of montane species, some of which descend to sea level. Alchemilla alpina (Alpine Lady’s-mantle), Silene acaulis (Moss Campion) and Saxifraga aizoides (Yellow Saxifrage) are fairly widespread, whilst Thalictrum alpinum (Alpine Meadow-rue), Dipsacusstrum alpinum (Alpine-clubmoss), Persicaria vivipara (Alpine Bistort) and Salix herbacea (Dwarf Willow) are more restricted.

Hymenophyllum tunbrigense (Tonbridge Filmy-fern) is known in only two sites, one of which may still hold the record for the most northerly site for this species worldwide. Botrychium lunaria (Moonwort) can be found in quantity on treacherous loose scree on the western side of Dun Caan and Meall Daimh and in smaller numbers elsewhere. Boulder scree near Dun Caan contains a large population of Cryptogramma crispa (Parsley Fern).

Allium vineale (Wild Onion) was new to VC 104, found on cliffs in 1991.

Woodland And Grassy Slopes
The natural woodland is generally open in aspect and there is an interesting field layer growing under the trees. Galium odoratum (Woodruff), Conopodium majus (Pignut), Sanicula europaea (Sanicle), Carex pallescens (Pale Sedge) and C sylvatica (Wood-sedge) are among the many woodland plants to be found. On the cliffs near Leac and Hallaig there are a few specimens of Sorbus rupicola (Rock Whitebeam).

Grassy slopes are home to various orchids including Pseudorchis albida (Small-white Orchid), and to Gentianella campestris (Field Gentian), Alchemilla glabra (Smooth Lady’s-mantle) and A filicaulis ssp. vestita. Carex laevigata (Smooth-stalked Sedge) is found on a number of rough grassy slopes as well as in woodland. A bank near the sea on Eilean Tigh has an Ophioglossum which could well be O. azoricum (Small Adder’s-tongue) described by Alison Paul as “probably O. azoricum, awaiting further study”. More work for 1997!

Man-Made Environments
Recent conifer felling has allowed colonisation by Chamerion angustifolium (Rosebay), otherwise confined on Raasay to rock ledges, and Senecio sylvaticus (Heath Groundsel) - a new Raasay record.

In Inverarish, a few plants have escaped from gardens towards the burn, such as Crocosmia x crocosmiiflora (Montbretia), Saxifraga x urbium (Londonpride) and Persicaria campanulata (Lesser Knotweed). The area around Raasay House has been planted with various trees and shrubs and a few plants have established locally such as Tellima grandiflora (Fringe-cups) and Symphytum tuberosum (Tuberosous Comfrey).

Passing places on the road become colonised by a number of common plants, however, they also harbour some more interesting species such as Epilobium brunnescens (New Zealand Willowherb), Sagina subulata (Heath Pearlwort), Myosotis discolor (Changing Forget-me-not) and Acaena inermis (Spineless Acaena) which is common from the pier to West Suisnish and at the inland end of the old railway.

Concluding Remarks
It is possible in this article to mention only some of the species to be found on Raasay and additions are still being made. There are quite a few plants found on Skye which have never been found on Raasay including Saxifraga oppositifolia (Purple Saxifrage), Rosa pimpinellifolia (Burnet Rose), Trollius europaeus (Globeflower), Galium verum (Lady’s Bedstraw) and Subularia aquatica (Awillt). Quite a few old records have not been re-found ranging from Phalaris arundinacea (Reed Canary-grass) to Tofieldia pusilla (Scottish Asphodel). Despite plenty more to do in the mapping project and these old records to keep searching for, I have started to turn to hybrids recently. Rosa x dumalis (new to Raasay; det. G. G. Graham) was added in 1995, and Salix x sericans (new to Raasay; det. D. Meikle) and Dactylorhiza x formosa and X Dactylorhiza varia (both old records re-found; det. R. Bateman) in 1996. Further hybrid willows will be sent for determination in 1997.

I am always keen to hear from botanists visiting Raasay and never say no to help, particularly with critical species.