

Spiranthes romanzoffiana

Irish Lady's-tresses

The momentous discovery of Irish Lady's-tresses, extinct in England and previously not recorded in Wales, at Borth Bog (Cors Fochno), part of Dyfi National Nature Reserve, in July 2019 speaks to the importance of protecting the natural environment so that it can thrive and continue to surprise and inspire us all.

Distinguishing features

Much taller and more robust than its close relative Autumn Lady's-tresses, which occurs in the Ynyslas sand dunes within Dyfi NNR and other coastal locations in Wales, *Spiranthes romanzoffiana* grows up to 35cm in height. The 3 to 5 narrow basal leaves are grass-like, making the plant difficult to spot when not in flower. Smaller, narrower leaves sheathe the upper stem. The inflorescence carries up to 40 green-tinged white tubular flowers arranged in 3 (occasionally 2) twisted rows along the stem. The blunt-tipped triangular sepals and the narrower petals together form a hood over the cream-coloured lip, which is 'waisted' towards a somewhat heart-shaped tip.

Distribution

Classified as Nationally Scarce in the UK, Irish Lady's-tresses is currently recorded in Wales only from a small area at Borth Bog. Future searches may reveal its presence in other parts of the nature reserve, but the unpredictability of its flowering - gaps of up to six years can occur - could make this difficult.

Spiranthes romanzoffiana also occurs in Scotland and Ireland but is rare in both countries. In North America it is widespread and locally abundant. Since it is not found on mainland Europe, there is much conjecture as to how and when this species crossed the Atlantic.

Habitat and flowering time

Close grazing and poaching appear to stimulate the growth of Irish Lady's-tresses, which favours low-nutrient open grassland with a high water table. The flowers usually appear in the second half of July.



Irish Lady's-tresses at Borth Bog
Picture courtesy of Annette Williamson



Minera Quarry – North Wales Wildlife Trust Nature Reserve

Maes-y-Ffynnon Rd, Gwynfryn, Minera, Wrexham LL11 3DE

This is the best publicly-accessible site for Frog Orchids *Dactylorhiza viridis* in Wales; but, at the time of printing this book, negotiations between the former owner and North Wales Wildlife Trust (NWWT) were ongoing (now completed). This addendum is an ideal opportunity to add Minera Quarry to the ‘must visit’ list for wild orchids in Wales.

Orchids include:

Anacamptis pyramidalis – Pyramidal Orchid; *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* – Common Spotted-orchid; *Dactylorhiza purpurella* – Northern Marsh-orchid; *Dactylorhiza viridis* – Frog Orchid; *Gymnadenia conopsea* – Chalk Fragrant-orchid; *Ophrys apifera* – Bee Orchid; *Orchis mascula* – Early Purple-orchid; *Epipactis helleborine* – Broad-leaved Helleborine; *Spiranthes spiralis* – Autumn Lady’s-tresses; and some *Dactylorhiza* hybrids.



Directions

Postcode: LL11 3DE

OS Grid Ref: SJ258519

Minera Quarry is only 1.5 miles from the centre of Minera. Head west through the village; Maes-Y-Ffynnon Road, a left turn off Church Road, leads directly to the nature reserve, which has its own parking.

Access and facilities

There are good tracks throughout the reserve, but some are steep and gravelly. There is disabled parking (accessed by a RADAR key) leading to a wheelchair- and pushchair-accessible path. There are no public toilets at this reserve.

Walks



Before NWWT took it over, the site was already well known for its Frog Orchids despite having no official public access. This former quarry has steep paths and drop-offs, but there are large and easy-going open areas where orchids are numerous and increasing due to good management by the Wildlife Trust. From mid June, Common Spotted-orchids and Fragrant-orchids carpet the ground, and in 2019 the scarce intergeneric hybrid (picture left courtesy of Elaine Hagget) between these species was discovered.

