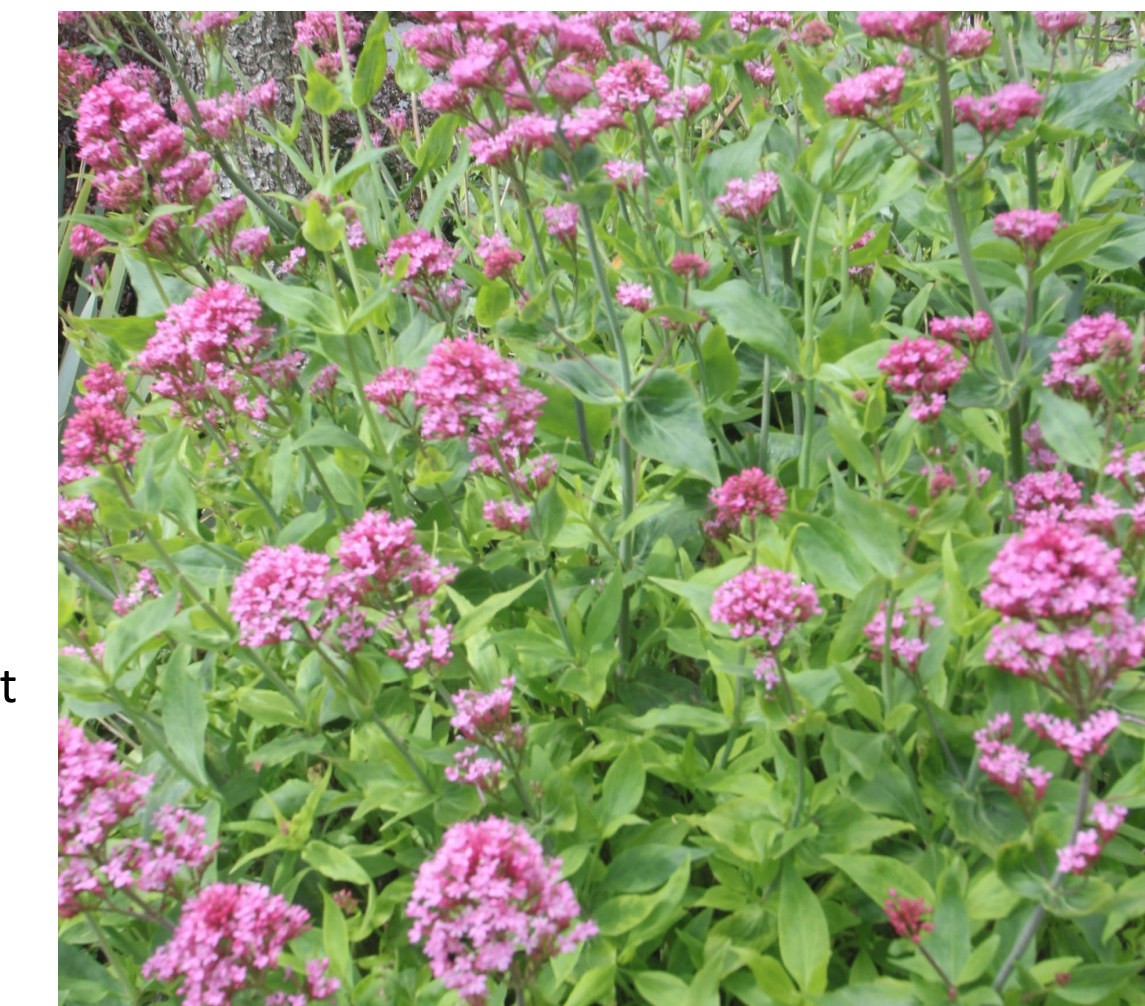
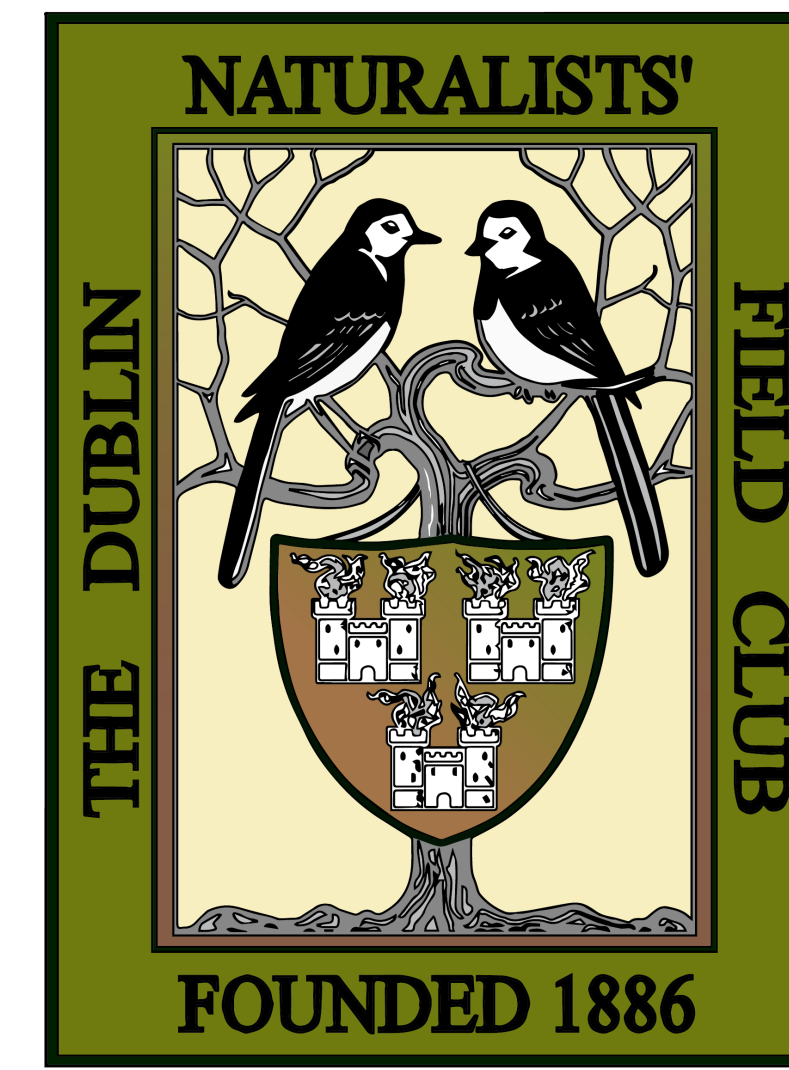




Conserving The Natural Flora of Old Walls and Bridges

Dublin Naturalists' Field Club www.dnfc.net



Cleaning old walls Erasing history

The clothing of historically significant vegetation which has survived for centuries on our old walls is now being erased. This removal of evidence has implications for cultural anthropologists and plant ecologists. Sometimes these works are necessary to stabilise stonework, but too often they are executed in the interests of neatness.

Recent invaders

Many plants of garden origin have spread by seed onto old walls. Larger species overwhelm and shade out more delicate native species. These, and other species, alter the microclimate of the wall. The main culprit is Red Valerian, *Centranthus ruber* but many other species are now beginning to occupy these rare and significant refugia for our native species. Once established it is very difficult to extirpate.

What can be done?

Most towns have old walls, graveyards, castles, church ruins. People are proud of the historical and heritage significance of these structures. Try to bring to the attention of colleagues and the local authorities, the importance of protecting the surviving natural flora and vegetation of these old walls. Once certain significant species are eliminated from a district, there are by now very few seed sources from which the damaged areas can be naturally replenished. For further perspectives, please make contact with the Dublin Naturalists' Field Club.

Nationally rare Hawkweeds (*Hieracium*)

A number of rare Hawkweeds from rocky river valleys find their last sanctuary on old walls in upland areas. Here they are relatively safe from sheep grazing. These Hawkweed species are also threatened by the growth of ivy and encroaching roadside vegetation. More recently some colonies of these rare species have been destroyed by environmental projects.

Natural colonisers, fragile survivors

Much of lowland Ireland is covered by deep soils. There is very little suitable habitat for indigenous plant species typical of rocky ground. Old walls were usually fashioned from the locally-available outcropping bedrock. Some species from these rock outcrops survive on old walls, long after the surrounding ground has lost its natural flora.



Old-established escapes

Fairy Foxglove, *Erinus alpinus*, has been occupying many of the warmest spots on old walls and is very persistent. In Kildare, this species was first encountered, escaped, near Carton, Maynooth, where it was discovered in 1864, as part of the RHS British Botanical Collection project. It still occurs here and on other walls nearby.



Herbicide survivors

Ivy-leaved Toadflax, *Cymbalaria muralis*, originally from Italy and Yugoslavia, has spread onto old walls. After flowering, it inserts its fruits and seeds into cracks. Herbicides kill plants, but many seeds escape. Where old walls are dominated by this species, it often indicates that the surviving natural flora has been lost.

