SEFTON COAST FORUM, February 2006

Afternoon parallel session - PLANTS

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Summary

The Vascular Plant Inventory for the Sefton Coast (2005) gives a complete list of all the flowering plants, conifers and ferns reliably identified in the Sefton Coast Partnership area and in the sand-dune system since the 19th century. A summary of some of the results is shown in Table 1. The full Inventory can be viewed on the Sefton Coast Partnership Web-site: www.seftoncoast.org.uk/natcons.html

Table 1. Summary of data from the Inventory

	Coastal zone	Sand-dune system
Total no. of plants	1177	1055
Introduced plants	435	348
% introduced	37.0	33.0
Probably or certainly extinct	39	37
Nationally notable	57	55
Regionally notable	120	114

The total number of plants recorded (1177) represents 56% of all the vascular plants in the vice-county of South Lancashire (old Lancashire between the Mersey and the Ribble). Similarly, the total of "notable" plants (177) equals 37% of all such plants in Northwest England (Cumbria, Lancashire, Merseyside, Greater Manchester and Cheshire). This demonstrates the extraordinary richness of the Sefton Coast for plants.

The number of alien plants on the coast (435) is steadily increasing year by year but, fortunately, only a few of these introductions are ecologically damaging.

Only 39 species have become extinct since the 19th century, a remarkably low figure, and as many as ten thought to be lost have been rediscovered in the last six years.

The main habitats occupied by Sefton Coast plants are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The main habitats of vascular plants on the Sefton Coast.

Habitat	No. of occurrences	%
Disturbed ground	463	33.1
Slacks, scrapes & ditches	263	18.7
Fixed-dunes	204	14.5
Dune-scrub	133	9.5
Dune-grassland	115	8.2
Woodland	108	7.7
Salt-marsh	47	3.3
Dune-heath	40	2.8
Mobile & embryo dunes	16	1.1
Strand-line	16	1.1

Notice that by far the greatest number and proportion of occurrences is associated with bare ground, followed by freshwater wetland, including especially dune-slacks, and then fixed dunes.

This presentation will discuss the results of the Inventory, in particular trying to address the reasons for such high plant diversity here, the implications of, and origins of, increasing numbers of alien plants and how the use of these data can assist conservation on the coast.