

Bog-rosemary

Andromeda polifolia

Andraiméid

April – June, September – October

Frequent



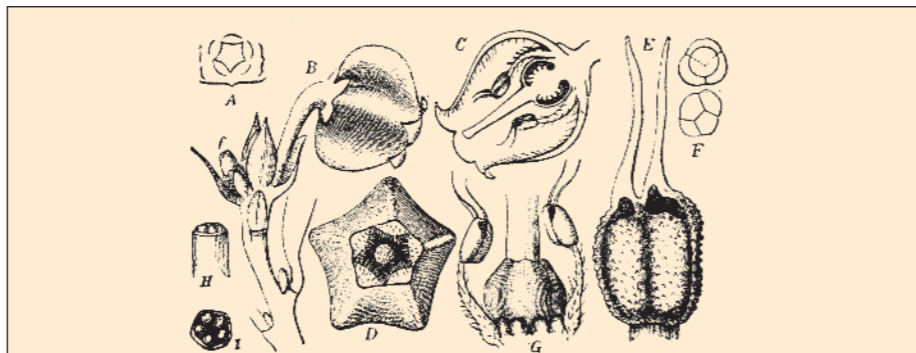
Jackie O'Connell

Bog rosemary merits a unique place in this book because it is the flower selected to represent Offaly on its county crest: chosen for this distinction because it is so specially characteristic of the midland bogs, being found only rarely in other parts of Ireland. It often grows by bog pools or among sphagnum moss, and on areas that have been recently burnt.

The leaves are dark green above, pale blue-green beneath, with strongly inrolled margins and a pronounced midrib running down the middle of the underside. Each plant has five or more delicate pendent flowers, each a beautiful pendulous bell: five pink sepals and a pink urn-like corolla tube, with tiny curled-back teeth to them, white in colour but streaked with rose-pink or pale pink, with swan's-neck grace; the peduncles are longer than the flowers and similar in colour. Inside the bell five short stamens stand in a ring around the pistil, which is

a white pillar stuck on top of a five-chambered ovary, the base of which is encircled by a black collar of ten swellings, the nectaries. The inside of the bell is somewhat hairy, which prevents pollen from falling out, and helps retain the

nectar more securely. The stigma is receptive when the flower opens; it stands just at its entrance, projecting beyond the anthers, looking rather like a little five-lobed jellyfish with blunt arms. The lower part of the style is hairy. The anthers are



The structure of the flower of bog rosemary (after E. Warming).

(A) Diagram of a flower with its bract and bracteoles. (B) The end of a flowering branch; below are two foliage leaves with small leaf buds in their axils; above these a third foliage leaf has been removed to show the further developed leaf bud in its axil. Above this again are two bracts respectively subtending a flower bud (f) and a fully developed flower; between these are closely apposed bracteoles (x3). (C) Longitudinal section through a mature flower. (D) A flower seen from above (x4). (E) An anther (x20). (F) Pollen. (G) Ovary with nectary and two stamens (x8). (H) Tip of style. (I) Stigma, from above.

half way down, brown on top of hairy white filaments that have a swollen base and narrow to a point. At the tip of each anther is a long, outward-directed spine or latch that looks like an insect's antenna.

Any pollen the visitor is carrying when it arrives is bound to be rubbed off at the entrance; then, as it reaches round the stamens to get at the nectar it cannot avoid striking one or other of the latches, which will then tip pollen all over it.

The fruit is a somewhat globular five-valved capsule, from which the seeds are shaken out when ripe.

The great Swedish botanist Linnaeus encountered bog-rosemary in the bogs of Lapland. He named it after Andromeda, who in Greek mythology was the beautiful girl chained to a rock to be devoured by a sea monster in order to appease the anger of Neptune, but was rescued by Perseus (Linnaeus was the man who devised our modern system of Latin nomenclature for plants and animals and gave most of the common plants and animals their scientific names). His diary tells us in memorable fashion why he did so:

I noticed that she was blood-red before flowering, but that as soon as she blooms her petals become flesh-coloured. I doubt whether any artist could rival these charms in a portrait of a young girl, or adorn her cheeks with such beauties as are here and to which no cosmetics have lent their aid. As I looked at her I was reminded of Andromeda as described by the poets, and the more I thought about her the more affinity she seemed to have with the plant. Indeed, had Ovid set out to describe the plant mystically he could not have caught a better likeness ... She is anchored far out in the water, set always on a little tuft in the marsh and fast tied as if on a rock in the midst of the sea. The water comes up to her knees, above her roots; and she is always surrounded by poisonous dragons and beasts – i.e. evil toads and frogs – which drench her with water when they mate in the spring. She stands, and bows her head in grief. Then her little clusters of flowers with their rosy cheeks droop and grow ever paler and paler ...



Fiona Feehan



Linnaeus' field-sketch of Andromeda and bog-rosemary