



Botanical Society of the British Isles
Scottish Officer Project
2008/9 Annual Report

Jim McIntosh, November 2009



Background

This is the first report in a new three year Scottish Officer project, which started in November 2008. It builds on the success, and is a continuation of a previous project which began in 2004. The new project aims to:

- Support and build the BSBI membership in Scotland and to
- Support and encourage the membership to undertake conservation initiatives such as Site Condition Monitoring, Rare Plant Registers and the Threatened Plant Project.

The project employs a full-time BSBI Scottish Officer, Jim McIntosh. It is 50% funded by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), largely based on the BSBI's continuing involvement with rare plant monitoring. The BSBI is the other main funder, whilst the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) generously provides office facilities as an in-kind contribution.



A Steering Group meets twice a year. It comprises of Robin Payne and Claire Seymour (both SNH) and Chris Miles (chair), Kevin Walker, Michael Braithwaite (all BSBI) and the Scottish Officer. A feature of the new project is closer working with Plantlife and RBGE, and regular meetings are held with them.

Site Condition Monitoring on Carn Gorm and Meall Garbh, June 2009



Rare Plant Registers

A weekend workshop was held at Kindrogan in April to promote County Rare Plant Registers (CRPRs). Twenty-eight attended of whom 20 were Scottish Vice-county Recorders (VCRs). A report has been compiled and will be distributed shortly. It is also hoped to revise the BSBI guidelines on the production of Rare Plant Registers in light of the event. During the year one RPR was published, that for vc90, Angus, and another was updated, vc106, Easter Ross. Both are available on the BSBI website.

RPRs are local red lists containing details of populations of all nationally and locally, rare and scarce vascular plant species in each vice-county. They are of great interest to botanists, and are particularly useful to SNH, local authorities, conservationists and those working in planning, land-management and conservation. The BSBI's aim is for every vice-county to have an RPR to help safeguard populations of notable species. An ambitious project - particularly in Scotland with its difficult terrain and lack of botanists! However we hope that more VCRs will begin working on RPRs in 2010 with the support and encouragement of the Scottish Officer.

Site Condition Monitoring

The BSBI has an unrivalled wealth of botanical expertise and knowledge of sites, species and populations amongst its membership. SSSI Site Condition Monitoring (SCM) is a great opportunity for BSBI volunteers to use that expertise to influence the conservation of rare plant populations. In addition, it provides valuable data which is fed back to Vice-county Recorders (VCRs) and is useful for Rare Plant Registers and Floras.

SCM is a systematic assessment of the condition of SSSIs. For SSSIs designated to protect rare and scarce plant species, it involves refinding populations and reporting their location, size, extent and noting evidence of regeneration or damage, using GPS, photographs and sketches. SNH uses the information to work with land managers to improve the management of these sites. We are undertaking 33 sites over the current five year period – about one third of SNH's entire vascular plant monitoring programme. A further third is done by SNH staff and the remaining third is done by contractors. Without BSBI's contribution SNH could not undertake this challenging and expensive programme.

The 2008 SCM Programme

During 2008 we surveyed Ardmeanach, Ben Lui, Bennane Head Grasslands, Eigg – Cleadale, Glen Strathfarrar, Hill of Towanreef, Tulach Hill and Whitlaw Mosses SSSIs. An update was also supplied to the previous year's Craigengar report. Over the winter all reports were completed, checked and forwarded to SNH.

SCM Records

During the year a contract, funded through the Scottish Project was let to complete the extraction of SCM target and associated species records from the 1999-2005 SCM reports. It contains some 22,500 records. This is a fantastic dataset – containing detailed and up to date records of our rare and scarce plant populations in SSSIs. In addition it contains records of where species were searched for but not found. The dataset will be of enormous value to conservationists in its own right and to VCRs when

compiling Rare Plant Registers. The dataset will shortly be sent to the BRC Vascular Plant DataBase, the NBN Gateway and to VCRs.



The 2009 SCM Programme

In 2009 we undertook survey work at Carn Gorm and Meall Garbh, St Cyrus and Kinnabar Links, Sunart and Upper Solway Flats with follow-up work at Glen Strathfarrar and Tulach Hill. A subsidiary aim of the project is to involve as many botanists with the fieldwork as possible. Again we engaged a wide variety of people - including SNH staff, reserve management staff, local VCRs and members. Thanks are due to all who contributed.

Moneses uniflora (One-flowered Winter-green), SCM target species at Glen Strathfarrar, 2009, © Lorne Gill / SNH

The BSBI Threatened Plant Project 2009

The BSBI Threatened Plant Project involves detailed surveys of species of conservation concern using a similar method to SCM. The project was launched by Kevin Walker, BSBI's Head of Research in 2008 and utilises BSBI expertise and effort to improve our understanding of these species. The species selected for study in 2009 included:

Narrow-leaved Helleborine (*Cephalanthera longifolia*)

Frog Orchid (*Coeloglossum viride*)

Maiden Pink (*Dianthus deltoides*) - pictured below

Heath Cudweed (*Gnaphalium sylvaticum*),

Opposite-leaved Pondweed (*Groenlandia densiflora*),

Tubular Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe fistulosa*) and

Wood Bitter-vetch (*Vicia orobus*).



Recorders are asked to refind and monitor a random sample of populations. The information gathered includes population count, physical extent, habitat, associated species, and evidence of regeneration, management and perceived threats. Where populations were not found recorders returned a null record with an indication of the reason for the apparent loss, where known. This is a great project to involve local BSBI members, through field meetings and in ad-hoc groups and much fieldwork was carried out in 2009 by VCRs assisted by local members, the Scottish Officer and a volunteer, Eric Meek, on sabbatical from his employer, RSPB.

By providing new information this project is helping us to better understand the ecology of these threatened species, their management needs and reasons for recent declines. In short the project will help to ensure their long term conservation. Detailed results and analysis will be published in a book after the five year project is completed.



500,000 Scottish BSBI records computerised to date!

We recently passed the half million mark in a 5 year project to digitise VCRs' paper records and with one and a half years to go, we are well on the way to exceed our 700,000 target. This is an extraordinary achievement and no small thanks are due to the funders, SNH and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the many contractors and VCRs involved.

This work to computerise VCRs' records vastly increases their usefulness. It is an important first step in projects such as the production of Checklists, Rare Plant Registers and Floras, and allows VCRs to map and analyze their data and respond to queries more effectively. The records also contribute to the BSBI Maps Scheme webpages (www.bsbi.org.uk) which update the maps in the *New Atlas*.

Even more importantly, the mobilisation of paper records benefits conservation. The records will be available to SNH and other conservationists via the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) Gateway, and the BSBI website who will be able to use them in their day to day work to conserve rare plant populations. Which is *exactly* what we want - we don't want valuable records gathering dust in attics whilst rare plant populations continue to be lost!

Taking shelter, BSBI Field Meeting to Tiree, 2009





We hope the project will clear the backlog and complete the computerisation of all important datasets held on paper by VCRs in Scotland and that VCRs will then manage to computerise new records - with our continuing support of course.

Beyond the Computerisation Project

However we realise that computerising records is not everyone's cup of tea, so with the end of the Computerisation project in sight, we have begun to think about how we can help VCRs who are unable or not so keen to do that. The BSBI is speaking to Local Record Centres about help with this and we have advertised for volunteers amongst the membership. Consequently the first such volunteer, Jane Squirrell, has recently begun work. If you would like to get similarly involved please do get in touch. We are also planning how we will make records digitised by VCRs outside the computerisation project accessible to conservationists.



Other initiatives to support Vice-county Recorders...

During the year there were a number of other initiatives in Scotland to support VCRs including:

- A week-long field meeting was organised by Ian Strachan for members to survey the Corrour Estate near Roy Bridge in exchange for free accommodation. Some 5,500 records were collected and together with a report, will help inform the conservation management of the estate. This was a great opportunity for botanists to get into the field together and learn from each other.
- A database containing 225,000 records for Perthshire & Angus, collated by Neale Taylor in the SNH Battleby office, was processed, sent to VCRs and uploaded onto the NBN Gateway via the BRC Vascular Plant DataBase.
- The Scottish Officer continued to work with the Scottish and Records Committees to appoint new VCRs to fill vacancies.

Cook's night off. Corrour Station restaurant. (The cook is Hilary Hawker, front, right.)





Communicating and Stimulating interest...

Some 120 botanists attended a very successful BSBI/BSS Scottish Annual Meeting at RBGE in November 2008. The main talk entitled *The Flora of Rum*, given jointly by David Pearman, Chris Preston and Gordon Rothero, was chosen to celebrate the recent publication of the same name.

The BSBI Spring Conference in Berwick upon Tweed in May 2009 was enjoyed by many Scottish members. It was largely organised by Michael Braithwaite. The theme was recording non-native trees, and there were field meetings on subsequent days to Kyle Wood, St. Abb's Head and Holy Island.

The BSBI organised a full programme of field meetings across Scotland during the year – including four one day beginners' meetings at Arthur's Seat, Shewalton Sandpit, Whitehills and Whitlaw Mosses which were attended by over 70 people in total. Thanks are due to Jane Jones and the many VCRs and members who helped.

Communication is really important, particularly with such a thinly spread membership and a wide range of partners. With the help of Mark Watson, the BSBI launched an internet forum called *Plant Talk Scotland* where Scottish botanists can exchange information and ideas and discuss all matters relating to our Scottish flora. Take a look! It's at <http://bsbiscotland.easyphbb.com/> And we continue to provide news and information on the Scottish BSBI webpages at www.bsbiscotland.org.uk

Working with partners

During 2009 we continued to forge links with partners, such as the Botanical Society of Scotland, Forest Enterprise Scotland, National Trust for Scotland, Plantlife Scotland, RBGE, SNH and SWT - both directly and through groups such as Plantlife Link Scotland and the Scottish Environmental Data Management Forum.

Specifically, we agreed a small contract to provide all BSBI's Scottish notable plant records to Forest Enterprise Scotland, to help inform forestry management decisions and protect rare plant populations. We helped National Trust for Scotland again with their annual ranger wildflower identification course – this year at St Abb's Head - and ran a similar one day event with the Woodland Trust at Glen Finglas.

The BSBI looks forward to working these partners and others involved in plant recording and conservation in 2010. I would like to say a sincere *thank you* to all those BSBI VCRs, members and colleagues and partners who have helped us over the past year.

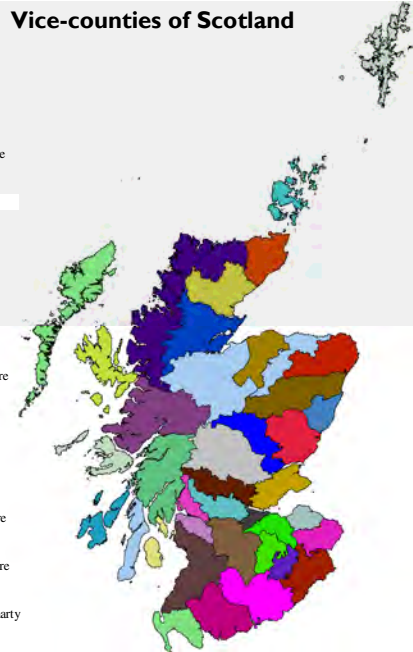
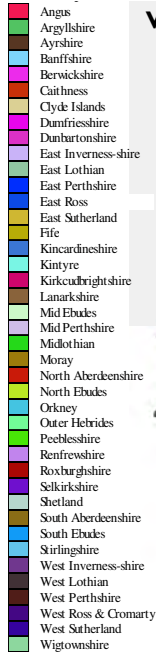
Special thanks to Jane Squirrel for help with the Webpages, Jane Jones for help with administration, Dot Dahl for help with field meetings and to the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh for kindly providing office support and facilities (and workmates!)



The BSBI

The BSBI is the leading charitable voluntary organisation promoting the study and enjoyment of British and Irish wild plants. It can trace its roots back to 1836, and it aims to improve the understanding of British and Irish plants to help in their conservation.

We have about 3,000 members across Britain and Ireland with some 330 in Scotland. The network of 152 Vice-county Recorders - 41 in Scotland - are supported in their botanical record collecting, checking and curation work by a network of experts in particular difficult plant species groups and four staff. The staff comprises Kevin Walker, BSBI Head of Research & Development, Bob Ellis, BSBI Volunteers Officer, Alex Lockton, BSBI Co-ordinator, and me, Jim McIntosh, the BSBI Scottish Officer!



Left, the Corroul survey team, June 2009;

Below Gordon Rothero in his natural habitat, Beinn Eibhinn, near Corroul, 2009



The BSBI

In addition to the BSBI's main role of collecting, checking and curating plant records, we

- Maintain distributional, taxonomic and ecological databases
- Carry out monitoring and surveillance projects
- Publish botanical data such as Rare Plant Registers in books and online
- Publish journals and newsletters
- Promote the publication of Local Floras such as *The Flora of Rum*¹
- Publish expert identification guides¹
- Hold field meetings, workshops and conferences
- Promote research, education and training and
- Provide expert advice on botanical issues.

For more information, including membership application forms, please check out the BSBI web site at www.bsbi.org.uk



¹*The Flora of Rum* (2008), *The Vegetative Key to the British Flora* (2009) and all BSBI handbooks are available through our official suppliers Summerfield Books www.summerfieldbooks.com

Feedback and comments

We would be really pleased to have your feedback or comments on this report or any aspect of our work. Please send them to me, Jim McIntosh, BSBI Scottish Officer at:

Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, 20A Inverleith Row, Edinburgh EH3 5LR
E-mail: j.mcintosh@rbge.ac.uk Tel: 0131 2482894 or 0791 7152580

Botanical Society of the British Isles (BSBI)

www.bsbi.org.uk

Scottish Charity: SC038675