



Fifty years of biological recording since the ground-breaking *Atlas of the British flora*

In 2012, the Botanical Society of the British Isles (BSBI) celebrates fifty years since the publication of the first *Atlas of the British flora*, a seminal work representing a quantum leap in species distribution recording and mapping.

The *Atlas* has had a major and lasting influence on European scientists and naturalists studying diverse taxonomic groups. BSBI is commemorating this achievement with a two-day international conference, organised jointly with the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, where the conference takes place on 20th – 21st September 2012.

Dr. Ian Denholm, Conference Organiser and BSBI President-elect, said: **"This is an important and exciting year for BSBI. Publication of the 1962 *Atlas of the British flora*, and the years of structured recording that preceded it, revolutionised approaches to monitoring our flora and fauna, and greatly influenced similar projects elsewhere in the world. Fifty years on, it is an opportune time to review how this landmark publication came about, to pay tribute to those who brought the *Atlas* to fruition, and to consider its legacy in terms of providing a 'baseline' for documenting and interpreting changes in the abundance, spatial distribution and co-occurrence of communities and individual taxa."**

Ian Bonner, BSBI President, said: "The BSBI Plant Atlases of 1962 and 2002 provide the basis for our understanding of plant distribution in Britain and are a testament to what can be achieved by voluntary effort. They are also the springboard for future atlases capable of more sophisticated interpretation of the changes in the British flora."

David Pearman, one of the editors of the 2002 Atlas, added: "Having spent seven years on the second Atlas, with all the advances of technology, I can pay testament to the extraordinary achievement of my 1962 predecessor. We had their work to build on - they had virtually nothing!"

Kevin Walker, Head of Research and Development at BSBI's Plant Unit, looked to the future, saying: "The first Atlas was a landmark publication that influenced the biological recording of living organisms worldwide; we're all really looking forward to this conference which will bring together amateur recorders, academics and policy-makers not only to celebrate its legacy but also to look ahead to what the next 50 years might hold."

During the two-day conference, twenty-five speakers from the UK, Sweden, Belgium and Czech Republic will:

- discuss the history, legacy and impact of the *Atlas*;
- celebrate the path-finding research that has ensued following its appearance;
- explain how data from biological recording schemes are used to analyse spatial distribution patterns and temporal trends;
- relate these to information on land use, climate and genetics;
- consider lessons learnt in terms of strengthening and standardising recording protocols;
- highlight challenges and advances in species recognition and data analysis;
- consider new opportunities made possible through advances in computer technology, theoretical analyses and molecular genetics

Exhibition stands from BSBI and the National Biodiversity Network Gateway will augment the presentations and demonstrate how the legacy of the *Atlas* continues to influence biological recording in the 21st century. There will also be a display stand featuring *New Journal of Botany*, BSBI's scientific journal, launched in 2011 and published by Maney Publishing, whose Managing Editor, Mark Hull, will also be in attendance.

The full programme of speakers is available at: <http://www.bsbi.org.uk/conference.html>

Further details are available from Louise Marsh, BSBI Publicity Officer, at: publicity@bsbi.org.uk.