

Botanical Society of the British Isles Irish VCR Newsletter No. 1, April 2013



Hello Irish VCRs!

This is the first Irish VCR newsletter. I hope you will find it interesting and useful. Please send me feedback (maria.long@bsbi.org.uk) – this is for you specifically, so let me know what you'd like to see in it. The format, length and content are very flexible, and it will evolve over time as needs be. And feel free to send me content for inclusion – I'll be delighted not to be doing all of the writing next time! (Next newsletter perhaps October 2013?)

Axiophytes

One of the projects listed in the BSBI Recording Strategy (http://www.bsbi.org.uk/Recording_Strategy_v5_comp.pdf) is the creation of axiophyte lists for counties. Some of you may be keen to try this. As the lists are somewhat subjective, and are based on expert (i.e. you!) knowledge, they can often be put together, at least in first draft, quite quickly. And there is no group of people better placed to create axiophyte lists than VCRs. Another point worth noting is that species which could be considered axiophytes in one VC, might not be important in another – and thus the importance of having local lists, rather than a national one, is clear.

Some lists are available already online – for example, Antrim and Waterford for Ireland, and 22 other vice-counties across the UK also (see the links to 'Axiophyte tables' at: <http://www.bsbi.org.uk/axiophytes.html>, or let me know and I can send it to you in a simplified format containing only Irish species, for example). These lists always generate great discussion, as people say things like "I can't believe that species X is on their list – it's everywhere in my VC!" They can in fact be great fun to compile and compare.

But what exactly is an axiophyte?!

Axiophytes are species which indicate good habitat quality. Here is a synopsis of what the BSBI website says:

Axiophytes are 'worthy plants' - the 40% or so of species that arouse interest from botanists when they are seen. They are indicators of habitat that is considered important for conservation, such as ancient woodlands, clear water and species-rich meadows. They are not necessarily the same as rare plants, and don't even need to be very uncommon. Rare species are often only recorded in only a few areas in a vice-county, and their rarity often means that they are not ideal as indicators. Lists of axiophytes provide a powerful technique for identifying areas of conservation importance. Sites with many axiophytes are usually of greater importance than those with fewer. Further, changes in the number of axiophytes in a site over time can give us important information on habitat change (which is very difficult to measure using other parameters), and can also be used for monitoring the outcome of management practices, or indeed help inform decisions about proposed management.

Where do I start?

Firstly - expert judgement is key in the creation of axiophyte lists, so don't feel too constrained by 'rules'. The advice on the BSBI website can be used as a guide:

- Axiophytes are those species which are:
 - 90% restricted to habitats which are of conservation interest in your VC;
 - recorded in few tetrads in the county. (An exception to this rule can be made for species in conservation habitats that are particularly well represented and widespread in the VC in question.)

So if you fancy making an axiophyte list for your VC/region (I don't see why neighbouring VCRs couldn't get together to creates lists?), then just get in touch if I can be of any help.

Pitcher Plant *Sarracenia purpurea* L. in Ireland – request for information (by Kevin J. Walker)

The pitcher plant *Sarracenia purpurea* L. was first introduced from North America to Ireland in the nineteenth century but did not become fully established until the early twentieth century when it was planted on Derrycashel bog near Termonbarry, Co. Roscommon, where it then spread prolifically across about 35ha of bog. In the 1960s this site was threatened by peat extraction and so material was removed and planted on a number of other bogs throughout Ireland. Other plantings are also known to have occurred, mainly by 'CP' (carnivorous plant) enthusiasts, and many have been retained as botanical curiosities because of their exotic appeal and fascinating life-histories.

However, as an introduction *S. purpurea* is far from benign. As at Derrycashel, *S. purpurea* can become highly invasive, and in England at least, populations have increased dramatically at the expense of other carnivorous species, such as *Drosera* spp. and uncommon bryophytes that grow amongst or on *Sphagnum* tussocks (see photo below). As a consequence, eradication programmes are now underway on many English sites, although with varying success.

We are fortunate that much has been written about the occurrence of *S. purpurea* in Ireland and this has enabled us to piece together the historical record. In the Table below we list the known sites with an indication of whether it is known to be still present.

This picture is unlikely to be complete, and so if you have any information about any other sites in Ireland then please get in touch with me at the address below. In addition, any observations on its *known* sites - including habitats, changes in population size, attempts at control, etc. would be gratefully received.

Site	VC	Year of intro	Still present?
Moanveanlagh Bog, Kerry	02	1986	Still widespread at this site in 2013
Lisduff, Laois	14	19th C	Disappeared before 1900
Abbeyleix, Laois	14	1966	Still present in 1980s
Woodfield Bog, Offaly	18	1930	Still present in 1980s
Ballynafagh, Kildare	19	?	Recorded in 2005
Mouds Bog, Kildare	19	1963	Still present in 1999
Coolatore Bog, Westmeath	23	?	Still present in the 1980s
Derrydoan, Westmeath	23	?	Possibly gone by 1980s
Derrycashel Bog, Roscommon	25	1906	Still present in the 1980s
Baylough, Roscommon	25	1966	Possibly gone by 1980s
Bellacorick, Mayo	27	1963	Still present in 2003
Lough Nahaltora, Mayo	27	1998	Presumably still present?
Peatlands Park, Armagh	37	2000	Presumably still present?

Send information to:

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Sarracenia purpurea growing on a bog in Dorset, England. Photo by Robin Walls.

***Campanula rotundifolia* project**

I received an email in December last year (2012) from a PhD student at the University of Virginia in the US. She is studying the evolution of polyploidy in *Campanula rotundifolia*, and as part of her work she needs ripe fruits from Irish plants. Because the species has a broad range, and her funds for travel are limited, she would like to make some local contacts who would be willing to collect and send her some samples this coming summer (2013). Ireland especially is an area of interest for her, because far western England and Scotland and the whole of Ireland appear to have exclusively hexaploid populations. She wants to compare hexaploid plants to similar populations in North America in order to investigate independent ancestries. She is happy to send anything needed for collecting, and will reimburse postage.

The student's name is Brittany Sutherland, and her email is bls3md@virginia.edu. You can contact her directly, and she is happy to provide any extra information that you might want. It would be great if some people could collect a few samples and send them on to her.

BSBI referee requesting samples

Michael Wilcox is currently the BSBI referee for *Aphanes* and *Montia fontana* subsp.. *Aphanes* does not present great problems, but with *Montia Fontana* subsp. there are a number of issues in identification. He would like to encourage recording of these two genera in Ireland. Any vouchers are welcome, and he also recommends you see the note he has sent in for BSBI News in April. For *Aphanes* samples: one to two strands of a plant, no need to be in fruit, but if so all the better. In the case of *Montia*: he is happy to grow live plants on to get seeds, if there are none present at the time of finding, otherwise 5-10 seeds in soft tissue paper for each plant.

He also unofficially does rush hybrids (and *Elytrigia*), and he likes to encourage people to send in any potential records/specimens of these too. He would particularly like to obtain some

live *Juncus acutus* (with a little bit of rooting stock attached - but seeds would suffice if this is too troublesome) to grow on, as part of work investigating hybrids, and winter/spring material would be ideal. Also, 'live' material (or seeds) of *Juncus planifolius* are sought.

Another area of interest is in *Scrophularia x hurstii* [*umbrosa x aquatica*] (see also note in BSBI News, April or October 2013). He has been chasing down specimens from Ireland – two records from Praeger, one from Lough Erne (H33) and one from the River Liffey (H21). He hopes that one day someone can search Lough Erne and the River Liffey site for colonies of *Scrophularia*, as fresh material with some flowers would be useful.

Michael P. Wilcox, 43 Roundwood Glen, Greengates, Bradford, BD10 0HW, United Kingdom.
michaelpw22@hotmail.com

Useful websites – maps, aerial photos, grid references...

www.gridreference.ie

This is a fantastic and simple website. I use it all the time. If you need to pull up the grid reference for a place you've been (or even if you haven't, but you know where it is and need a grid), just zoom in to it (you can do this viewing the map, or the aerial photo), click, and read the grid reference off the panel on the right-hand side. It even gives you the tetrad.

www.osi.ie (main page); <http://maps.osi.ie/publicviewer> (map viewer)

The Ordnance Survey of Ireland website provides access to a lot of mapping and aerial photography, and it is completely free to view. This site is a fantastic resource if you are interested in historical maps, or changes over time. It allows you to choose between aerial photos from 1995, 2000 and 2005 (click on the dot beside the 'layer' you want on the panel in the right-hand side), and between historic (early 1800s??) 6" and 25" maps. To have instant access to these old maps is really great.

Tip #1: Remember to re-click on 'pan' in the top panel on the right after zooming in or out.

Tip #2: You can use the 'search' function (top right panel) to go straight to an area if you know the townland name. This is very handy. (You can obviously search using a whole range of other criteria too.)

www.npws.ie (main page); <http://webgis.npws.ie/npwsviewer/> (map viewer)

On the NPWS website the map viewer is a little more cumbersome than the OSI one, but it does allow you to search by, and turn on and off, the various conservation designations. Additionally, it allows you to view the more recent 6" maps (i.e. from early to mid 1900s). Another valuable resource!

www.biodiversityireland.ie (main page); <http://maps.biodiversityireland.ie/> (map viewer)

Another online resource that I regularly use for accessing maps, aerial photos and data is the mapping system from the NBDC (National Biodiversity Data Centre). This system has a lot of functionality, and lots of data associated with it, as well as being a way to view maps and aerial photos online. It is the most sophisticated and powerful of all the mapping websites that I have listed here, so I won't go into all of its features. One of the things that I have used in the past is the facility to click on a defined area (can be a 10km sq, or other sized grid square, or a user-defined polygon) and generate a species list for it. This requires a few instructions, which can be found on the website – have a go if you are interested, let me know if you want further details.

And finally, two more to think about: the British & Irish Online flora at www.brc.ac.uk/plantatlas/ There is lots of information here, extra to that in the Atlas itself (e.g. Ellenberg values for each species). And CEDaRs new online records system: <http://www2.habitas.org.uk/records/> Seems impressive, with many good features.

'Technology' section:

1. MapMate

MapMate is a great way to digitise, map, query and analyse your county data. It is simple and straightforward to learn to use. And it is FREE to all VCRs." [Just email me or Bob Ellis (bob@elymus.demon.co.uk) to get a copy if you would like one.]

- Recently we had a successful [MapMate workshop](#) in Kilkenny (early Feb). Paul Green taught it, and nine VCRs attended (and one VCR-helper). I plan to organise other workshops this year (perhaps in the west/north-west of the country, and in the north/north-east also).
- [New handbook](#) – many chapters of the new handbook are now available digitally, although in draft form. It is really excellent, very clearly written and comprehensive – but it's a very long document! Everyone who is a beginner with MapMate should make sure that they have a copy of Chapter 3 of this new handbook – I have some copies printed out, so just email me and I can send to you. Contact me if you have specific enquiries about the other chapters.
- [Feedback](#) on the new handbook is required, so please share your experiences. Just send me an email and I will forward it to Martin Rand (VCR for South Hampshire) who is compiling the handbook.
- Online [support videos](#) – I have been hearing good reports about these (available at: <http://mapmate.bsbi.org.uk>). They are specifically for BSBI MapMate users and were prepared by leading MapMate expert Martin Harvey. Few are more than ten minutes, and many are much shorter. The great thing is that they can be viewed as and when required.

2. DDb – the BSBI 'big database'

View it (and register if you wish) at: <http://bsbidb.org.uk/>

- The distribution database (DDb) is the new system developed by the BSBI to store and make accessible the ever-growing pool of records created or collated by the society. It was created so that records which were previously held by the BSBI across multiple databases could be amalgamated.
- The system contains over 30 million records, drawn principally from the VPDB (vascular plant database) and from the MapMate hub (where all MapMate records, if sent in by BSBI recorders, go), along with some other smaller datasets.
- The system is updated frequently with new and revised data.
- Unfortunately, the data available in the DDb for Ireland is currently quite poor (e.g. historical records with duplication and poor levels of additional information), but this is continually being improved. And basically – it's up to us..... The DDb needs up-to-date information from VCRs in Ireland to populate it!
- The DDb allows VCRs to see exactly what data is held by BSBI for their VC. It allows dubious or unverified records to be quarantined, or marked as such, which is a very valuable feature. It has some very powerful search capabilities – too many to go into here.

DDb Tip #1: How to set up alerts for your vice-county.

I recommend all VCRs to do this – it is a great way to have a sense of 'ownership' of your VC, through getting alerts by email any time a new record for your VC goes into the DDb.

1. Firstly, you have to be [registered](#) to do this. Go to <http://bsbidb.org.uk/>. Click 'register' in the top right-hand corner, and fill in the details required (username, first name, surname, email address and your role, e.g. VCR).
2. Once your registration has been approved (you will get an email – it may take a few days), you can go to the website and click '[login](#)', again in the top right corner.
3. Click on the '[Search](#)' tab.

4. In the search box labelled 'County/Region', type your VC number. Pause for a second, and a dropdown list should appear. Choose your VC.
5. Click on the little arrow to the right of the word 'Search' at the bottom of all the search boxes, and choose the option 'Save this query'. A small dialogue box will pop up, and just click 'OK'.
6. Now click on the 'Search History' tab at the top, and click on the tab (slightly lower down on the screen) 'Stored Queries'.
7. This brings up a list of your stored queries, and there is a column called 'Watched'. This contains boxes – so tick the box opposite the query you have just made (i.e. all records for your VC).
8. I think you have to now click on the button 'Refresh' – found above, between the uppermost tabs, and the lower ones.

You will then receive an email (at the email address you provided at registration) once a month with details of any new records which are entered to the DDb for your VC. (But don't be disappointed if the emails aren't flooding in – emails will only arrive if new records are entered!)

[NOTE: If anyone has problems registering, please let me know. Generally it's not complicated at all, but there were previous attempts to register the Irish VCRs en masse, and there's a chance that this might complicate things now. So do just get in touch if you have any issues.]

Local 'plans of action' – we all need one!

I mentioned earlier the BSBI Recording Strategy, and it's worth highlighting that an updated version is now available (http://www.bsbi.org.uk/Recording_Strategy_v5_comp.pdf). This document is important because it outlines in simple terms the BSBI's plans for recording in the period 2010-2020. Of course the largest project on the horizon, and the one towards which many aspects of the strategy are aimed, both directly and indirectly, is the third 'Atlas of the British and Irish Flora', due for publication around 2024. The aim for this project is to have a comprehensive update of hectads for the period 2000-2019 (it is hoped that this will be achieved by recording from a sub-sample of at least three tetrads within each hectad, rather than recording at hectad level itself – for more details see http://www.bsbi.org.uk/Sampling_Guidance_2011.pdf). However, the BSBI Recording Strategy is clear in emphasising that other more local activities and projects are still encouraged, and suggests planning for these in conjunction with any larger-scale work, such as for the Atlas.

This leads me nicely to what I wanted to discuss – local '**plans of action**', a little challenge for you all!

These days we are all busy, and time is precious. Yet the demands on our time seem to always be growing! That's why having a 'plan of action' can be a great idea. It doesn't need to be long and complicated – in fact, the best ones rarely are. Simply a brief outline of plans, along with approximate timescales, are the main ingredients. The key thing is that your BSBI work remains enjoyable. It's therefore important that the plan is achievable and realistic.

In terms of BSBI plant recording, a 'plan of action' can help in particular in the run-up to large projects, such as the Atlas. Keeping in mind that there are only seven field seasons left in which to do the work, it seems clear that having some sort of a plan might be wise! For example, do you know how many hectads/tetrads are in your VC? Do you know how many records you hold for the period 2000-present? Do you have a good handle on the geographic spread of these records? Have you made moves towards digitising this data (if it's not already digital)? Just in case your answers are all 'no', be assured that I'm not trying to scare you here! But I do hope that raising these issues will spur you into writing even a very simple 'plan of action'.

I have copied in below a real 'plan of action' from a VCR in Scotland. She's a retired lady, who has only recently taken over as VCR. I hope that you will see that it is simple, and both ambitious and achievable. When I saw it, I thought that it might make a good example. But bear in mind that everyone's plan will be different, and everyone is starting from a different place, so don't feel intimidated by this one. Plans can be simple and small-scale, if that's all the VCR feels capable of agreeing to at present – having any plan at all is better than none!

I'd be very happy to speak to you about making a local 'plan of action', and will provide any help I can.

I would love if all of you could contact me about this over the coming weeks (good to get it together in advance of 2013 field season), either with drafts, or with comments on the idea.

Example VCR 'plan of action'

Recording plan for VCXX, 2010-2019

Aims:

- To represent the flora of each hectad as fully as possible
- To obtain records which are usable by the BSBI, the Local Records Centre and conservation bodies

Sample size:

- The sample size will be as large as time permits, at least 3 tetrads per hectad

Recording methods:

- In each hectad the first tetrads to be selected for study will be those which include the most important sites and habitats in the hectad
- Each monad will be recorded separately, with 6-, 8- and 10-figure grid references for interesting taxa
- Within each monad, different sites will be recorded separately, identified by site name and grid reference

Extra records

In addition to the planned sample (above), records may be obtained from other monads and sites on an unplanned basis, by other people or by me. All records are welcome.

Record storage

All records will be entered into the MapMate database. The paper copies will be stored by the vice-county recorder.

Name XXX, BSBI Vice-county recorder for VCXX, November 2012

BioBlitz

Check out <http://bioblitz.biodiversityireland.ie/> for details on this year's BioBlitz (24h & 25th May). The four sites involved this year are **Wicklow** Mountains National Park; The **Burren** National Park; Lough Key Forest Park, **Roscommon**; and Colebrooke Estate, **Fermanagh**. I know that some of you are already involved, but for those who are not, it is a fantastic opportunity to meet other skilled natural history recorders, and also budding enthusiasts. It is because of this latter group that, in my opinion, this is an opportunity not to be missed if we are keen to swell BSBI numbers in Ireland.

You should also check out the local (as opposed to national) BioBlitz events scheduled for June 8th at: <http://bioblitz.biodiversityireland.ie/local-bioblitz-challenge/> There are sites in **Laos**, **Limerick**, **Dublin**, **Tipperary** and **Kerry**. In particular, Mark McCorry, (joint VCR for Laos, VC14) is looking for support from other recorders for recording at his site, Abbeyleix Bog (<http://www.abbeyleixbog.ie/>).

Ideas for workshops/meetings

Here are some ideas for possible workshops/meetings, most of which have come from comments from VCRs. Let me know what you think, and any ideas you have yourself...

- Identification for tricky groups:
 - Willows
 - Fumitories
 - Charophytes
 - Aquatic plants
 - Grasses – identifying them vegetatively
- A recording week/weekend – ‘blitz’ an area, perhaps a small publication resulting?
- MapMate – beginners and advanced workshops needed
- DDb – what are its uses, how do I get the most from it? ...
- Working with data in Excel – a workshop for beginners/improvers?
- Field outings with interested groups – e.g. botany students, other local wildlife groups (e.g. regional branches of IWT, local Field Clubs...)

Final words...

If you don't use the internet very often, or are not very comfortable with it and find using the links I provide above difficult, then just let me know (by phone or email), and I can send you any of the information in another format (e.g. a stand-alone file by email, or document by post).

If you are visiting Dublin please remember that you are very welcome to call in and see me at the National Botanic Gardens. You can avail of the great facilities there – the garden, library, herbarium, and of course the fantastic restaurant!

And I would like to thank you for your contribution to the BSBI's work, and here's to some productive and fun botanising in 2013, the year of our 50th anniversary in Ireland, and hopefully the year that the BSBI name-change comes into operation!

Maria Long, BSBI Irish Officer, April 2013.

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PS.... if your contact details (i.e. your postal address, email or phone number) change at any stage, please let me know so that I can keep in touch efficiently with all of you.