

Hello Irish VCRs,

Welcome to the second Irish VCR newsletter. I was really delighted to be able to insert the new logo and use the new name of the society in this newsletter. And it's now fully official! All the necessary legal and behind the scenes changes have taken place, so we can and should use the new logo and new name from now on.

In this newsletter there are three main themes or messages –

- (1) the Irish BSBI Members' Conference, and celebration of 50 years of BSBI in Ireland;
- (2) working towards Atlas 2020; and
- (3) submitting data to BSBI;

– as well as a mix of news, helpful hints and other bits and pieces.

**(1) Irish BSBI Members' Conference, and celebration of 50 years of BSBI in Ireland –
28/29/30 March 2014, National Botanic Gardens, Dublin**

This is really exciting news!

For a few years now the Committee for Ireland (CFI) have been hoping to have a members' conference here in Ireland, along the lines of the very popular Recorders' Conference which is held in Shrewsbury each year. Since I've come on board it's something that I am fully behind, and now that we have decided to go ahead with plans, I will be taking a lead role in organising it, along with the CFI.

Just recently we have tied down plans significantly, and the events will be held over 3 days (though the conference itself will be a day and a half) in late March 2014 at the National Botanic Gardens, Dublin.

I have provided a rough outline below – but remember, things are at an early stage of planning so many of the finer details may change. The most important thing at this stage is...

**put the dates in your diary:
28/29/30 March 2014**



Aidan Walsh speaking at BSBI AGM, Killarney, Sep 2013

Note that there may be a charge for attending some or all of the conference, but if so, this will be kept low, and will be largely to cover catering.

Irish BSBI Members' Conference – 28/29/30 March 2014, National Botanic Gardens

Provisional outline of events:

MapMate workshop - Fri 28th March

This is not part of the conference proper, but an add-on to capitalise on the visit of MapMate experts from the UK for the event. We may run more than one workshop depending on demand (e.g. beginners, improvers, advanced, Q&A). This will be a great opportunity to learn from the masters, and it will be free of charge. Remember, there is no obligation on anyone to use MapMate, but if you do, this will be well worth attending.

Irish BSBI Members' Conference, Day 1 - Sat 29th March

- **Talks** in the morning and **workshops** in the afternoon. Details to be confirmed, but we have lots of ideas and plans afoot, and there will be lots to interest recorders. There will be plenty to learn at the workshops, e.g. identification help with some critical groups – we will have experts from both Ireland and the UK. (Don't hold me to it, but possible themes include: aquatic plants, *Euphrasia* ID and *Viola* ID.)



National Botanic Gardens
(Photo: askaboutireland.ie)

- **Celebration of 50 years of the BSBI in Ireland** in the evening. We hope to have a small exhibition and a few short talks, followed by food. We hope that this will be a nice, relaxed, but well-attended and enjoyable celebration.

Irish BSBI Members' Conference, Day 2 (half day) – Sun 30th March

Morning:

- Further **workshops, VCR reports** and general **discussion** of issues important to BSBI and recorders in Ireland.
- Unveiling of the new '**Irish Project**' – another very exciting development!

=> Optional **tour(s) of the Botanic Gardens** in noon.

(2) Working towards Atlas 2020

At a recent BSBI gathering, a recorder asked the following question:

“Is it a given that all Irish recorders are now working systematically toward the Atlas?”

What an important question! The emphatic answer from the CFI Chairperson who was present was “**Yes**”. So, are *you* on track?

Don't panic if the answer is no. There are six fieldwork seasons left, and I think it's fair to say that many VCRs, both here and in Britain, are just starting to come to terms with the task. Some of you are well aware of your recording effort and coverage, but those of you who are newer, or perhaps not using some of the digital facilities available to their full capacity, may be less aware of where your gaps are. Of course, some people may also be saying – don't mind the gaps, I don't know where to start!

Ok... so regardless of whether you are top of the class or just getting started, everyone really needs **a plan to help prepare for Atlas 2020**. This doesn't need to be long, or formal, but it does need to help you put a bit of structure on your recording, and to help you to assess how you are doing in terms of achieving some sort of coverage. The minimum coverage to aim for is to have visited **three tetrads within each hectad** in your vice-county. (You are free to choose which tetrads.)

Below are some steps which may be helpful in starting to put a plan together.

Step (i) – Tetrads per year

List your hectads. Every recorder should have a list of their hectads (and notes on shared/partial hectads). From this you can get a count of the number of tetrads you will be aiming to visit to achieve minimum coverage for the Atlas. As an approximation, divide that number by six to determine how many tetrads you might aim to cover each year over the coming years.

Step (ii) – Stocktake of post-2000 records

All records between 2000 and 2019 count towards the Atlas, so you could do a 'stocktake' on what you already have from that period. Maybe you will be pleasantly surprised, and if not, then maybe you will be spurred into action!

Step (iii) – Make a plan, and/or make contact

If you attempt (or have already undertaken) steps (i) or (ii) above and things are not looking good, you might want to think about what you can do to tackle the issues. You might also want to talk to either me or one of the CFI. We are well aware that our network of recorders is stretched. In some areas there are gaps, and in others there are recorders who, for one reason or another, will struggle to achieve coverage for this Atlas. We are working hard to help put supports in place where we are aware of issues.

Please do get in touch we have a better chance of helping you out, or finding someone who can, if we know clearly what and where the weaknesses are. On a positive note, there have been a couple of instances over recent years where existing recorders have been put in touch with someone who may be able to help them out. Sometimes a help with the digital side of things can make a big difference, or in other cases, a set of younger/fitter legs to get up those hills is the key!

(3) Submitting data to BSBI

This winter it would be really great if all VCRs could submit at least some data to the BSBI.

For a whole variety of reasons, some Irish VCRs are not submitting data regularly to the BSBI. In the majority of cases, this is largely to do with not being in the habit of doing it. So submitting something, however small, is a good step on the road to getting into the habit of regular data submission. Also, and a little selfishly, one of the measures of my success as Irish Officer will be more data arriving in from Irish recorders! This means that I have all the more reason to follow up on this! But seriously, this is a very important point – unless there is some very important reason not to, all recorders should be sending in data, even if it's a small amount, or in fits and bursts... it all counts, and is gratefully received!

Sending in records... .. So what's needed, and how does it work?

New records should be **digital**, at **tetrad resolution or better**, and have **precise dates**. (However, old records at lower precision are also accepted.) BSBI is willing to accept data in many formats – Excel, Recorder, MapMate, and a number of others are accepted too. If you use a database format, please make contact to discuss how best to send data, rather than trying to flatten structured fields into a spreadsheet. (If you use MapMate, see the final paragraph.)

Data can be sent to me (maria.long@bsbi.org), or to Tom Humphrey who manages the DDb (tom.humphrey@bsbi.org).

Regardless of the format, make sure that all records consist of the following minimum elements (see list below), but please also include all the additional information you can. Everything you send will be databased and will make your records more valuable.

Minimum requirements to constitute a biological record:

- Taxon name
- Recorder name
- Grid reference
- Date

Other particularly useful things to include:

- Location/site name
- Habitat type
- Status (native/alien)
- Determiner
- Comments

If you use MapMate the easiest way to submit your data is to 'sync' with the BSBI (CUK code to use is 2QG – that gets through to Bob Ellis). If you use MapMate but that sentence still sounds like double-Dutch, get in touch and I can give you more detailed info. If you want to read more yourself, don't forget that the excellent MapMate Handbook is available online, and Chapter 5 deals with 'sync-ing' data (<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/abr9bpwoh5n4ge9/RI3wBSB-DX>). And remember, when you 'sync', you decide exactly what to send – it doesn't need to be everything! VCRs are very welcome to do 'trial' syncs with me first if they'd like to. My CUK is bt4.

OTHER NEWS:

Axiophyte lists

After the note in the last Irish VCR Newsletter on the creation of axiophyte lists for vice-counties, I was delighted to receive an enthusiastic response from one of the recorders. Here is a snippet of the communication:

“Congratulations on the VCR Newsletter; ... It inspired me to make an axiophyte list ... It took me at most 2 hours to copy and paste the list from the BSBI website, fill in the column with zeros, and then put a one opposite the [my vice-county] axiophytes. I came up with 406 axiophytes in [my vice-county]. I think would be an easy thing for every VCR to do.”

So there you have it! It might be more achievable than you think!

Irish Botanical News (IBN) – submissions, field meeting reports from 2013

Please don't forget that IBN will be coming out as usual in early 2014, and Paul would love to hear from you (paulnewross@eircom.net). The deadline for submissions is end of January.

Paul would particularly like to hear from those of you who haven't put pen to paper (or tapped a keyboard) for a while! Anything, even a short snippet telling us of an interesting find (or gap!), is welcome. Photos are welcome too – but Paul may have limits on how many he can include.

Finally – anyone who lead a field meeting in 2013 and who hasn't yet sent either myself or Paul a **field meeting report**, please could you do so? These are a great record of the enjoyable events.

Vascular Plant Red List project

The Vascular Plant Red List project aims to fully and comprehensively update the Red List of plants for Ireland. This is a long overdue task. BSBI CFI are involved as project partners, which is great. The CFI Chair, Gerry Sharkey, has written a letter to all VCRs to let them know about this exciting new project. The letter is included with this newsletter.

BSBI Ireland Facebook page

The BSBI Ireland Facebook page which was set up during the summer has been a great success. We have advertised outings and other events there, and posted photos afterwards. We have also had discussions and links to other interesting and relevant pages/sites.

I am delighted to have VCRs, members, or other interested individuals post on the page, or send me material. For anyone who is interested, here is the link to the BSBI Ireland Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/BSBI-Botanical-Society-of-Britain-Ireland-Irish-section/518954561473019?fref=ts> Or search for 'BSBI Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland - Irish section'.

Galway Botanic Gardens, and a special request to BSBI members and recorders

Have you heard about the ambitious plans for a botanic garden in Galway? If not, have a look at <http://galwaybotanicgarden.ie/> to find out all about them. An enthusiastic group of people have been hard at work for a few years now, trying to bring these plans to fruition. And it seems like they are making significant progress, with negotiations on-going in relation to a potential site.



Drawings and plans from the Galway Botanic Garden website

The group state that their aims are to educate about, research and conserve native Irish plants. Their educational plan includes adult workshops, student and schools programmes, and exhibitions, as well as a chance for visitors to learn about the plants they will encounter on their adventures in the west of Ireland. They also aim to have a living seed bank with the aim of protecting our biodiversity for the future. And here's where they feel that BSBI members can help!

The organisers want to ask BSBI members if they could **collect seeds from native Irish plant species to help them build the seed bank** for the Galway Botanic Garden. They hope to have lots of common plants, as well as rarities eventually, and they want collections from all around the country. They would like seeds **collected, dried and sent to them in paper envelopes**. The more information that can be provided the better, e.g. who collected it, what species, where it was collected, etc.

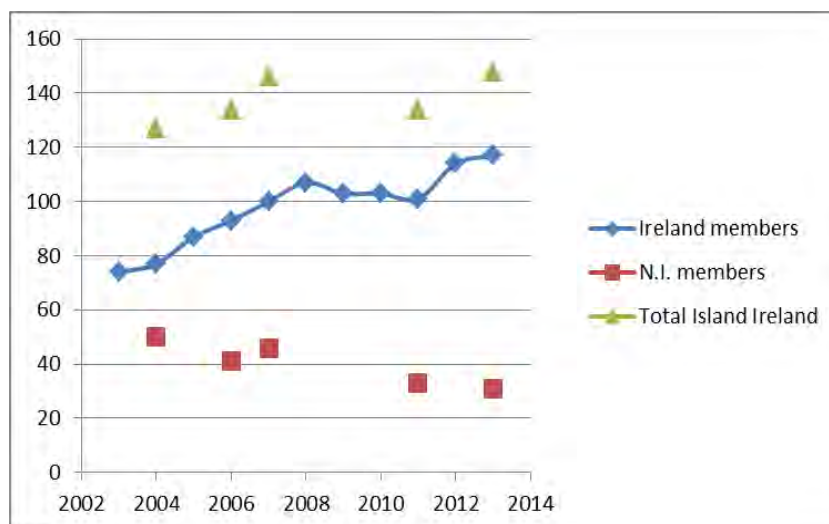
If anyone would like send in seed, or to get any more information about anything to do with this project, contact Phoebe O'Brien at: phoebeob@gmail.com

BSBI membership numbers in Ireland

BSBI currently has about 3,000 members overall. In Ireland, there were 117 paid-up members as of Sept 2013, and 31 members in Northern Ireland. I did some investigating of past numbers (with help from Gwynn Ellis, membership secretary), and plotted them to see the trends (see graph below). I did not have data for NI separately for some years, but overall we can get a rough idea of the picture.

We appear to be on a steady upward trend from the early 2000s for the Republic, but worryingly, the numbers in Northern Ireland seem to be dropping off. This has been a valuable exercise for me, and has

concentrated my mind on the need for recruitment and outreach in NI in particular. Thoughts, suggestions and feedback on this topic are very welcome.



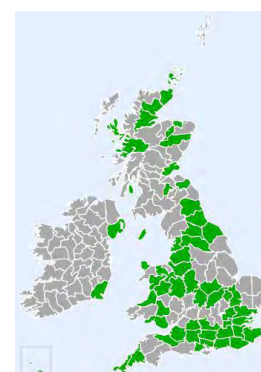
Vice-county webpages

On the right you can see the number of VCs that have websites or pages. Very few for Ireland - what a shame!

You can pretty much do whatever you like on your webpage, but they are generally used for telling people where to send records; saying where they can get hold of records; and announcing when meetings are taking place.

It costs nothing and requires few computer skills – just send me/Alex Lockton (alex.lockton@bsbi.org) some text and photos. I'm happy to discuss with anyone interested, and hope to have a number of pages up over the coming year.

[Note based on text in Alex's December BSBI eNews (thanks Alex!)]



Botanical art exhibition, Greenacres Gallery, Wexford Town

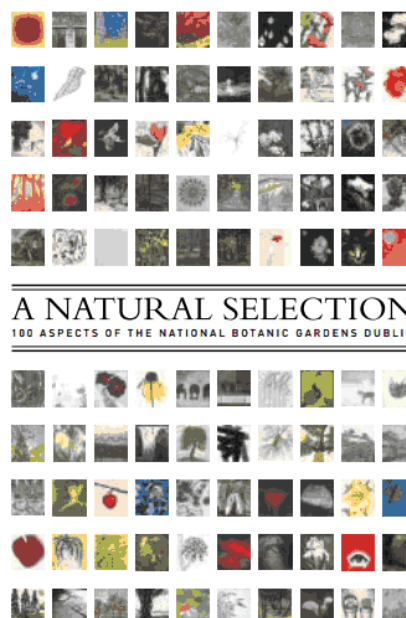
This exhibition is fantastic, with beautiful prints for sale at very reasonable prices. (They might make nice Christmas presents for botanists!)

Two of the artists are related to Laois joint-recorder Fiona MacGowan – her sister Niamh MacGowan and her aunt Jean Bardon.

The exhibition has been in the National Botanic Gardens, but has moved to the Greenacres Gallery, Wexford (7 Dec 2013 – 17 Jan 2014).

Have a look at the website, and tell me you're not tempted! ...

<https://www.greenacres.ie/product-category/art/a-natural-selection-exhibition/>



New plant records from 'new' botanists

This year has seen quite a few new faces joining in BSBI outings, and indeed, joining the society. This is great to see, and it is up to all of us to encourage interest at every opportunity. This is one of the main ways that we can help to ensure the success and continuity of the BSBI as a botanical recording society in Ireland. We all have a responsibility to encourage and teach those with an active interest in recording wild plants.



Crambe maritima (Photo: Hannah Mulcahy)

A plant record by one such new BSBI recruit who was on holiday in Kerry generated a bit of excitement from the relevant VCR. This was a record for *Crambe maritima* on the Dingle peninsula in Kerry (H01), recorded by Hannah Mulcahy (recent NUI Galway Botany graduate). This record re-establishes a plant not seen in the VC for over 2 centuries! Well done Hannah!



Distribution of *Crambe maritima*, Atlas 2000.

USEFUL RESOURCES:

Botanical resources – downloadable from NBG website

The National Botanic Gardens have a great website, but a lot of the content is quite well hidden. Perhaps people would be interested in some of the material that I recently came across here: <http://www.botanicgardens.ie/herb/census/resource.htm> There are multiple papers and books available to view or download, including some which are very old. There are multiple works by Praeger and Webb, for example.

Smartphone users – grid reference app

Smartphone users might like to use the following free app: Grid Reference (OS Grab-A-Gridref 1.13) by Iain Downie. This is available from Google Play for Android (not sure about Apple) and uses the phone's GPS to give your position (works for Ireland and Britain). You will need to have a WiFi or network connection to get the maps/satellite pictures, but you don't need this (just GPS enabled) to get a grid reference, position in latitude and longitude, and tetrad (e.g. M22S) for wherever you are. This note came from Chris Peppiatt (H17), so thanks for that Chris!

Data available from NPWS

Dr Mike Wyse Jackson, the person with responsibility for rare plants within NPWS (National Parks and Wildlife Service), and representative on the CFI, wants to re-iterate that data requests from VCRs are always welcome in NPWS. Material held which may be of interest includes:

- plant records for particular sites within your vice-county (these may come, for example, from NPWS-commissioned surveys such as the national native woodland survey, etc., and this data is generally available at a very high resolution);
- rare plant reports for your county (most counties have had surveys done);
- photocopies of old records from Monk's Wood, etc.

All are available on request.

1. MapMate

MapMate is a great way to digitise, map, query, analyse, back-up, (and share if you wish), your county data. It is relatively straightforward to learn to use, and it is FREE to all VCRs. Email me or Bob Ellis (bob@elymus.demon.co.uk) to get a copy.

[Remember... no-one is obliged to use MapMate. It's just that lots of VCRs do so, and BSBI has consequently decided to provide support for it.]

Unsurprisingly, things have been relatively quiet on the MapMate front here in Ireland over the summer while recorders focussed on getting out in the field. This coming winter and spring, however, will see a number of opportunities to learn about MapMate.

- **Training:** A small beginners workshop is planned in the west very soon, and there may be an opportunity for recorders in the northern part of the country to have a MapMate get-together in the new year (TBC). The Irish BSBI Members' Conference at end March 2014 will, however, be the main focus of MapMate training, with a number of experts and advanced users being on hand to help us all out. These will include Bob Ellis (BSBI MapMate expert), Jim McIntosh (Scottish Officer and long-time MapMate user and tutor), as well as a number of others. If you are keen to start, improve, or fine-tune with MapMate, then the MapMate support at the conference is not to be missed.
- Home visits – I emailed out earlier this year to ask for expressions of interest for one-to-one MapMate support visits in the home. This was being co-ordinated by Jim McIntosh, the Scottish Officer. Unfortunately this project has been put on hold due to funding constraints, but hopefully funding might be released in the new year. If this happens, I'll get back in touch with those of you who expressed interest.
- New handbook – The MapMate handbook is available to download, chapter by chapter, at: <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/abr9bpwoh5n4ge9/RI3wBSB-DX> Just let me know if you have any difficulties and I can email any chapters you need directly to you, or even print them out. It is lengthy, but easy to read, and very comprehensive. Note that Chap 9 is still not complete.
- Online support videos – Don't forget the support videos: <http://mapmate.bsbi.org.uk>. These are an excellent resource and really helpful.

2. DDb – the BSBI 'big database'

If you want to see up-to-date BSBI maps for species the DDb website is now the place to go. The 'Maps Scheme' or 'AUP – Atlas Updating Project' maps are now static – i.e. they are not being updated. You get to the DDb at the following address: <http://bsbidb.org.uk/>

All VCRs should register with the DDb (just a few clicks) so that they get the best out of it. Non-registered users can see maps, but cannot download the data behind the maps, make any changes to data, or ask complex (or even simple) queries. To engage properly with your vice-county and to manage the data for your vice-county, you really do need to be using the DDb. Note that registered users are limited to VCRs, BSBI staff and a very small number of external people (e.g. CEH staff who are involved with BSBI data management).

While some VCRs have been frustrated at some issues with the DDb (e.g. duplicate records, errors in records, incomplete old records, date anomalies), many of these issues have been tackled, and the data held for Ireland is now improved, though of course it's not perfect! Remember, no dataset ever is perfect, and particularly one which is so full of old records or summary records. So it is very important to realise that the data on the DDb will only be improved when Irish VCRs engage with it. And just to note, I have had plenty of positive feedback too, and our CFI Chair is fully behind the push to have all VCRs using the DDb as soon as possible.

Following on from my call for data submission above, the DDb needs data from Ireland... modern data and plenty of it! So get registered and start using it, if you are not already!

Technology Tip for this month: How you spell your name!

When you use MapMate or the DDb, or indeed when you put your name to any records, use the same version of your name *every* time. This may seem like a small point, or even an unnecessary one... but, in fact it is a big issue with records which are held digitally. If for some reason I wanted to search for all records by a particular recorder, if that person has used different versions of their name, however subtle, it could make my search incomplete or at least more tricky. As an example, Maria Long, Maria P. Long, Maria P Long, Long M. and Long MP are all different people as far as a computer is concerned!

My advice... .. Have a think about how you want to enter your name, and stick to it! The general convention is to use "surname, initials". I am using "Long, Maria P". Also remember to ask others to use your preferred name/spelling if they might be entering records with your name attached (such as after a field meeting).

Some other BSBI news in brief:

=> **Paul Green** is continuing in a part-time capacity as **Welsh Officer**. Polly Spencer-Vellacott is back from maternity leave, and they will job share.

=> The **BSBI website** is being reviewed and is likely to get a significant facelift soon. Jane Houldsworth, Alex Lockton and Tom Humphrey are working behind the scenes on this.

=> **Atlas 2020**. In recognition of the fact that there are only six field seasons left before **Atlas 2020**, the Records Committee have asked Paul Smith (the new Chair) and Kevin Walker (Head of Science & Development, Plant Unit) for a **review of progress** and the production of a plan. They will report back in February.

=> **TPP – Threatened Plants Project**. Survey work is now complete and remaining data is being digitised. Analyses will be carried out next year on the data, and a booklet/report will be published in 2015. I asked about how many Irish VCRs had submitted data.... Figures were available up until May 2013, and then I added in the ones I was aware of which came in since that time. So while there may be a few more, I know of **at least 16 vice-counties for which data were submitted**.

Final words...

As usual, just get in touch if you want further information on anything in the newsletter. I hope you find it interesting and useful. It is written specifically for you the VCR, so please let me know what you'd like to see more of (or indeed, less of!). It will be available soon on the Irish page: <http://bsbi.org.uk/ireland.html>

Don't forget that you are always welcome to call in to me in the Herbarium at the National Botanic Gardens, be it for a chat or just for coffee and a bun!

Maria Long, BSBI Irish Officer, November 2013.

Tel: 00353 87 2578763 **Email:** maria.long@bsbi.org

[Note: all BSBI staff emails have changed from @bsbi.org.uk to @bsbi.org All emails sent to the old addresses are automatically forwarded. If your contact details change please let me know (postal address, email or phone number).]