

# Field Botany in Renfrewshire

Newsletter - Spring 2021

## **New Beginnings**

Welcome to the brand new Renfrewshire Botany network.

Our purpose is to support botanical fieldwork in Renfrewshire, increasing our understanding of the local distribution of plants in the wild. We record what grows, and where it grows - it's as simple as that!



View across Kilmacolm

Our fieldwork consists of visiting all sorts of sites and listing as many species of plants as we can find there. Usually most of the species are common and familiar, but occasionally something uncommon or rare turns up. In such cases, a detailed location is recorded so that the plant or population can easily be found again.

We will be circulating a programme of field outings to all in the network, as well as offering support for any recording you can do on your own. The resulting lists of data are checked centrally before being uploaded to the national database run by the BSBI (The Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland).

Here is a link to the Society's distribution map: simply type in the name of a plant, wait for a moment, and all known occurrences of that species will be displayed. And the map is zoomable, so you can check whether that plant grows near you!

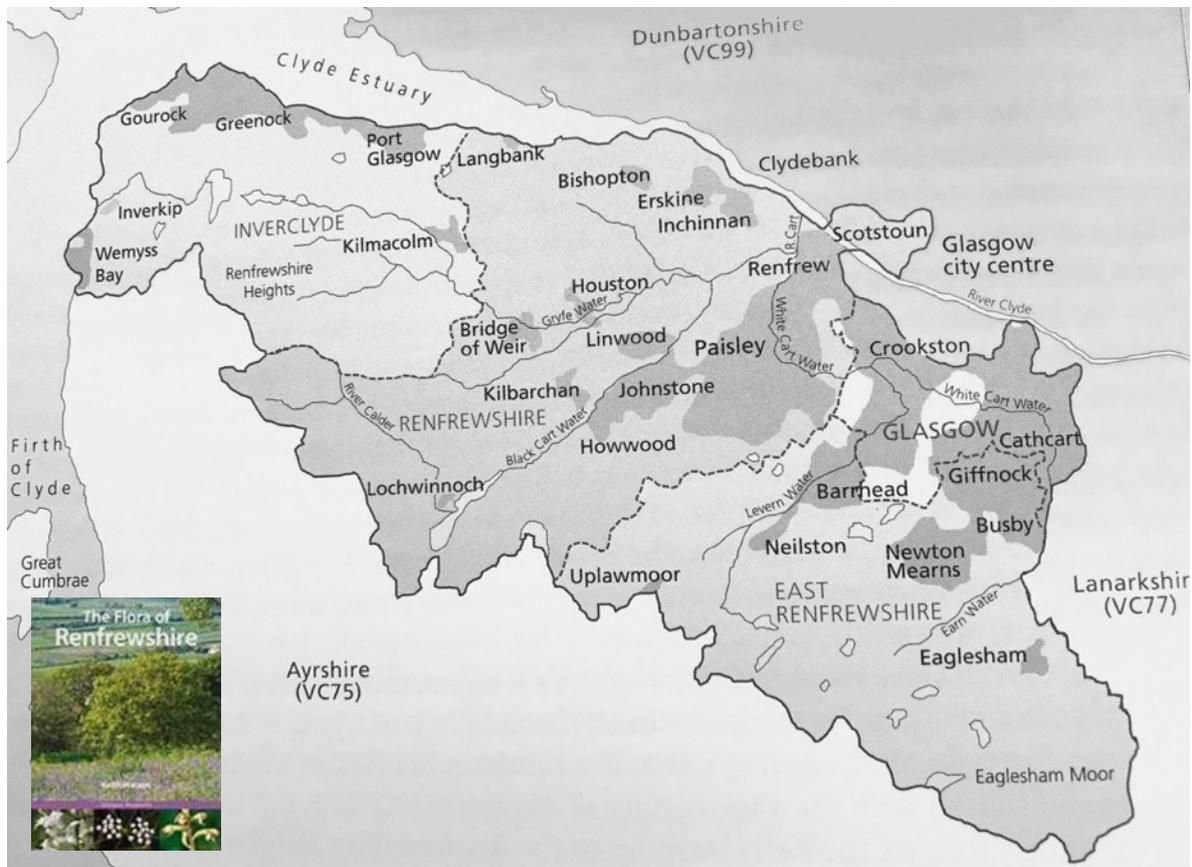
<https://bsbi.org/maps>

The BSBI website also offers lots of assistance in identifying plants, including videos and courses.



## Background

The vice-county of Renfrewshire includes most of the current Local Authority areas of Renfrewshire, East Renfrewshire and Inverclyde, plus parts of the City of Glasgow and a tiny portion of North Ayrshire. The old county boundaries are used for biological recording because they have remained stable since the 19th century - untroubled by various governmental reorganisations.



The vice-county of Renfrewshire [illustration taken from 'The Flora of Renfrewshire' by Keith Watson]

This territory includes all or part of 752 **monads** (the familiar 1km squares on Ordnance Survey maps). Plants have been recorded in 91% of these squares, but there are still some areas where no recording has ever been done, and others where existing records are already several decades old.

The BSBI appoints Vice-County Recorders to oversee and quality-assure the gathering of botanical data in every part of the British Isles. **Keith Watson** was appointed the Vice-County Recorder for Renfrewshire in 1993 and has personally contributed over 100,000 plant records to the database.



Keith Watson

Keith is currently Curator of Botanical Collections at Glasgow Museums, but his availability for active local fieldwork is now much reduced. Our new network is being set up to ensure that the flow of data continues and that the Renfrewshire record is kept up-to-date.

He is also author of 'The Flora of Renfrewshire' (published in 2013 by Glasgow Museums and Pisces Publications). This is the definitive reference book, but don't just rush out and buy it without getting in touch first (a better deal may be possible for readers of this Newsletter . . . !)



*Sedum anglicum* (English Stonecrop)

### Some facts and figures

Our most botanically diverse monad is **NS4355**: Uplawmoor and Loch Libo.  
**354** species have been recorded here!

There are still **70** monads in Renfrewshire which have no botanical record so far.

A further **46** monads have had no recording activity since 1987 or earlier.

**28** monads have fewer than 10 species listed.

Launched in **February 2021**, our new network of people with an interest in field botany in Renfrewshire already has **24** members.  
We look forward to meeting you before long!

### Early-season finds

One unusual plant to be found early in the season is *Lathraea squamaria* (Toothwort). Eagle-eyed members of our network have reported it from three different parks in the Renfrewshire sector of south-west Glasgow.

This somewhat 'alien' or sinister-looking plant is parasitic, deriving its energy from the roots of a host tree or shrub.

It doesn't need chlorophyll for photosynthesis - hence the lack of green colouring.



*Lathraea squamaria* (Toothwort)



Another reclusive, hard-to-find species is *Chrysosplenium alternifolium* (Alternate-leaved Golden-saxifrage).

Occasionally seen on stream-banks in dark, damp woodland, this plant is much rarer than the more familiar Opposite-leaved Golden-saxifrage.

The leaf-shape is quite distinctive - like flattened or notched cog-wheels.



*Chrysosplenium alternifolium* (Alternate-leaved Golden-saxifrage)

## Team and networking

Our new initiative is being co-ordinated on the 'loose network' model, which has already proved highly successful in a parallel botanical recording effort in Lanarkshire.

Interested people are joining the network simply by introducing themselves and asking to be added to the contacts list. Everyone on the list will receive information, Newsletters and outings programmes from time to time and can opt into whatever recording activities they choose at any point.

The network co-ordinator is **Michael Philip**, the current BSBI Vice-County Recorder for Lanarkshire (vc77).

## Here we go!

A programme of field outings will be sent out soon. Fieldwork will commence towards the end of May, with each outing subject to any prevailing restrictions. Outings will include visits to all kinds of terrain, near and far, from tramping urban streets to clambering up steep hillsides. There will be accessible training walks with a focus on learning common plants, and challenging moorland environments where specialist knowledge of sedges and grasses will be an advantage. In other words, something for everyone!

Lists of plants are welcome from anyone, anytime. If you'd like some guidance on the best way to do recording, please get in touch. All records will be received and collated by **Peter Wiggins**. You are welcome to send him scanned lists or Recording Cards, spreadsheets or Word documents - or even paper lists by post! Please email him if you're unsure what method to use.

Photographs, especially views of the Renfrewshire landscape or stunning pictures of plants, are always welcome. Any (but not all!) photos you submit may appear in Newsletters, the webpage or other literature.

Please request and complete our team Questionnaire if you have not already done so. And remember to spread the word that we also need people in various supporting roles, who can offer to help facilitate plant recording even if they do not feel able to take part personally in field activity.

You are welcome to email Keith or Michael at any time. They are also willing to have a go at identifying plants from photographs if you get stuck!

And please check out the Renfrewshire page on the BSBI website: <https://bsbi.org/renfrewshire>

## Contact details

**Keith Watson** (Vice-county Recorder)

email: [keithjwatson76@gmail.com](mailto:keithjwatson76@gmail.com)

**Peter Wiggins** (receiver of data)

email: [pswiggins@gmail.com](mailto:pswiggins@gmail.com)

**Michael Philip** (network co-ordinator, photos, inquiries, newsletter)

email: [botany@opus44.co.uk](mailto:botany@opus44.co.uk)

### **Photo credits:**

View over Kilmacolm

Keith Watson

Keith Watson

Glasgow Museums Collection

*Sedum anglicum*

Keith Watson

*Lathraea squamaria*

Liza Downie, 6th April 2021, Pollok Park

*Chrysosplenium alternifolium* (both)

Jim Blackwood, 31st March 2021 near Lochwinnoch