

Field Botany in Renfrewshire

Newsletter - Autumn 2021

“Outstanding first year’s recording by the new Team 76!”

Keith Watson, BSBI Recorder, vc76 (Renfrewshire)

2021 Summary

Well, it’s been quite a season, hasn’t it?

We’ve been part of a brand new botany network and met new people who share our interest in plants. **36** people are now subscribed to the Renfrewshire network, **21** of whom have taken part in fieldwork.

We’ve organised **13** outings in a wide variety of locations, from cities and towns to remote countryside, and from seashore to hilltop.

We’ve recorded at least something in **189** different monads (map squares), over 100 species in **79** monads, over 200 in **7** monads, and made a first list in **24** monads where there was no previous record.

In all, we’ve recorded over **900** different species of plants growing as wild.

And we’ve gathered over **15,000** records for the national plant distribution database. (The previous best total for records made in a single year in Renfrewshire was 11,493 - back in 1999.)

Teamwork

Our Renfrewshire Botany network, formed only in March this year, is co-ordinated with similar networks in Lanarkshire and Dunbartonshire - indeed some readers have signed up to all three! Together, we encircle most of the Clyde river-system, from source to sea.

Greetings to Team 76 from Dunbartonshire - friends across the water!



Renfrewshire panorama - from Erskine to the Cloch lighthouse - as seen from Kilcreggan pier on a perfect summer’s day

Team 76 - 2021 season

When Michael Philip first suggested attempting to replicate the successful recording activities of Lanarkshire's 'Team 77' into neighbouring Renfrewshire, I hardly expected that 12 months on there would be over 15,000 records ready to upload into the BSBI database! It is a remarkable achievement and I extend my gratitude to all the many folk who have been involved.

Michael deserves special thanks for kick-starting the initiative, and his efforts have been expertly supported by Peter Wiggins through his fast turnaround of data and the production of recording 'dot maps', which have provide the focus for directing the fieldwork and allowing us to readily assess (and gloat over!) the fantastic coverage. (The maps are shown on the next page.)



Lunderston Bay on a grand day, looking north up the Clyde estuary

It is pleasing to see the spread from the Glasgow periphery into urban areas of Renfrewshire in the east. This has been the product of many recorders involved with Team 77 and some welcome new faces. It is particularly pleasing to note that Malcolm Macneill has extended his urban sweeps into our area and he has continued to excel at finding many new and unusual species.

There has been a scatter of records through more rural or remote areas, but there have been major contributions in two localities: Jim Blackwood and a few local colleagues have done sterling work in the area about their Lochwinnoch base - some nice countryside matched by many similar finds - and in the remote far west I am grateful to Angus Hannah for popping over to the mainland and applying his expertise to this also attractive part of the vice-county.

Peter's map readily shows the achievements and also shows that there is plenty more to do. I would appreciate any feedback on what you have enjoyed about the last year and what could be improved or what further support would help. Any thoughts on sites or species that you would like to visit or see will be helpful; I will endeavour to provide you with any further details I may have of such sites or species. Many of you are happy to work independently but we will aim to provide some targeted monads for more organised field meetings in next year's programme.

There remain a few (but not now too many!) monads with no records, or lacking any since 1987, and these will provide an appealing target for the coming season. If we can maintain anything like this year's remarkable progress, we will be well on our way to providing excellent coverage for this millennium.

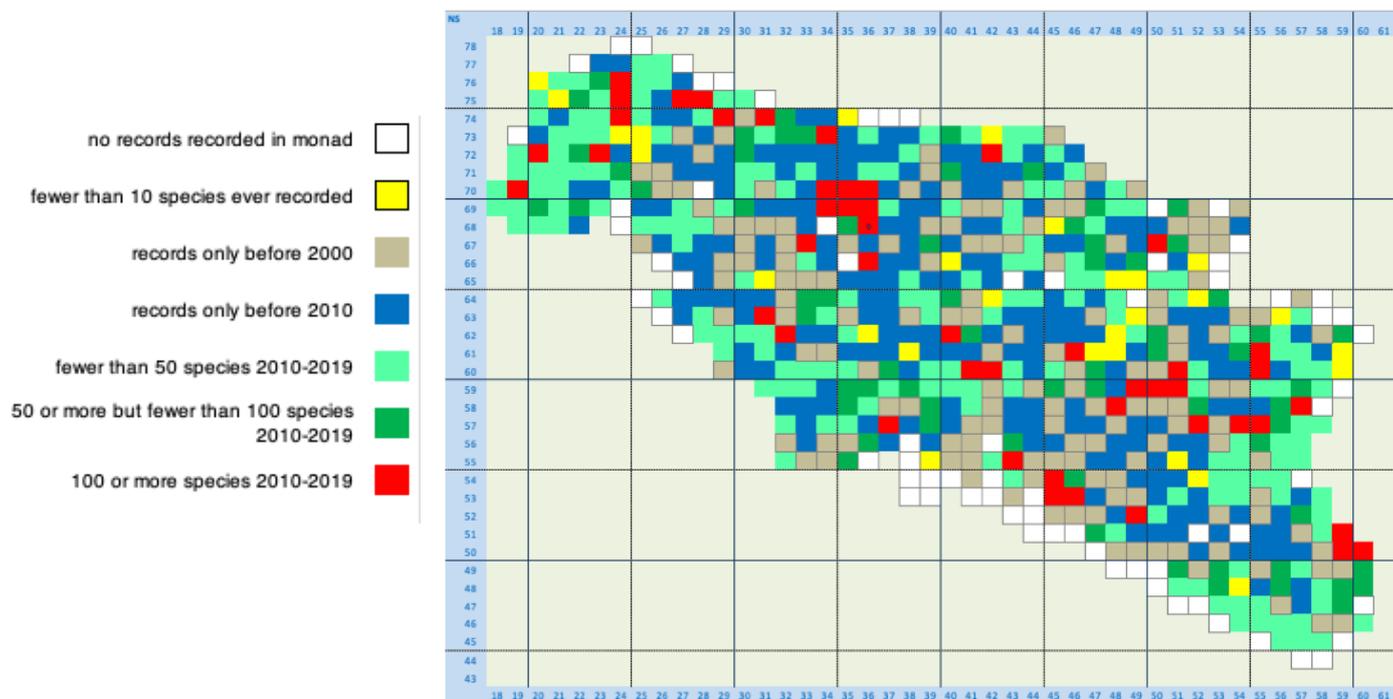
Keith Watson

Progress

For those who like to their information visually, here's the Renfrewshire 'dot-map' as at 1st January 2021.

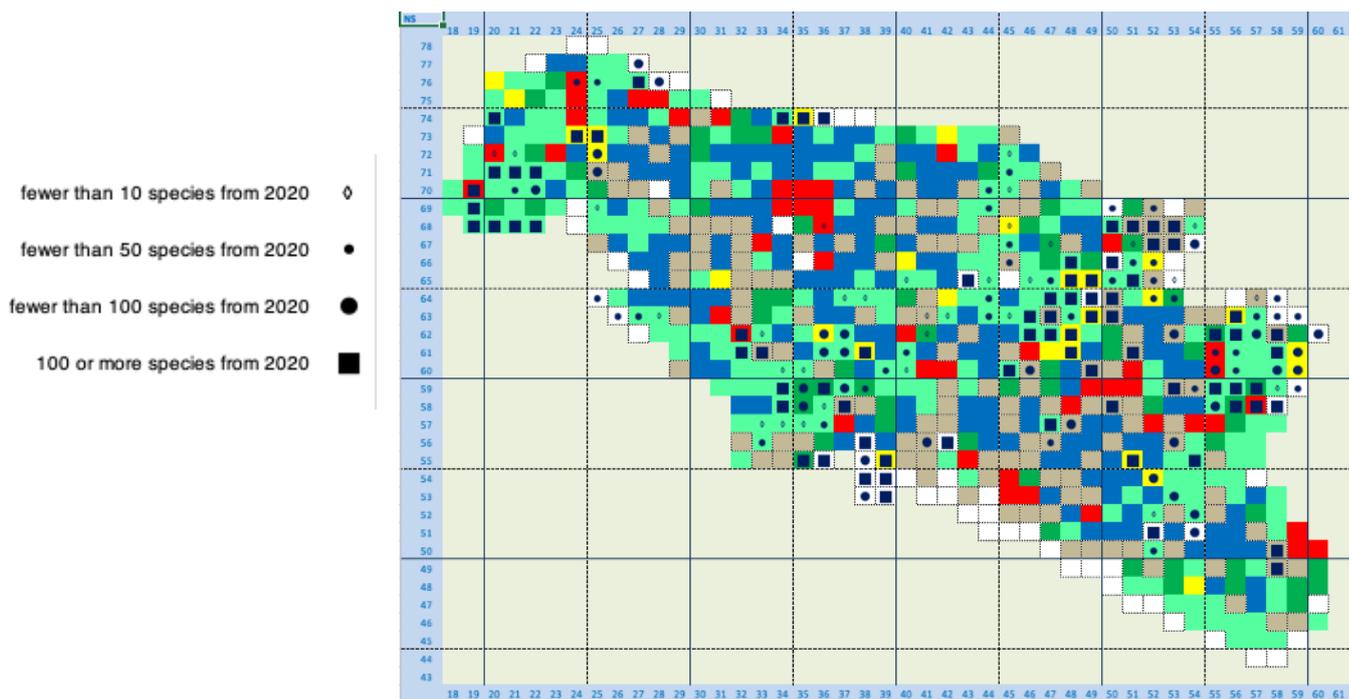
The white squares were monads with no botanical record at all.

Yellow were under-recorded; brown/blue not visited in more than 10 years; green/red with recent records.



And here is the situation as at 10th November 2021.

The overlay of black marks indicates recording activity, and the bold black squares show the 79 monads with over 100 species recorded this year.



[automated maps generated by Peter Wiggins, updating in real time as data is received]

Highlights

Here are some more pictures from our busy season:



Lathraea clandestina (Purple Toothwort)



Aster tripolium (Sea Aster) - now *Tripolium pannonicum*



Asplenium adiantum-nigrum (Black Spleenwort)



Sedum villosum (Hairy Stonecrop)



Peter in the tunnel - urban botany in Paisley

Remember: you're always welcome to share your photos.

Please send them in anytime!

Marginal squares

One of the challenges of recording plants monad by monad is the matter of 'marginal squares' - those small scraps of territory along the county boundary which refuse to be constrained by the map grid.

On the coast, the situation is straightforward - though Angus Hannah here recommends assimilating any fragment of less than 5% of a square into the larger, neighbouring one. This is clearly sensible, running in contrast to the more literal approach which says, "the line is the line".

But in other places, where a boundary line may have seemed more intuitive when drawn centuries ago, the twists and turns through a modern streetscape or farmland now appear quite abstruse! (Keith mentions that the Renfrewshire incursion across the Clyde into western Glasgow may be a legacy of a Bishopric in the time of King Malcolm . . .)

How hard should we try in using modern GPS and mapping technology to ascertain where the boundary is? Moreover - does it matter? People have differing, and often strongly-held, views on this - so by all means add your own comments to the debate!

Peter Wiggins says: "I've done half a dozen marginal squares this season. The smallest was a railway embankment only visible from a station platform with a corner of carpark thrown in.

Make sure you know where you are. I use this really helpful website:

<https://www.bnhs.co.uk/2019/technology/grabagridref/gagr42.php#map>

I personally find it so satisfying to record these small fractions of monads. I've often thought, "Why don't they fix it so that one vice-county 'owns' a monad?" However, often the border is a stream, river or even a railway line, so these daft slivers may make more sense when you're actually there. Also, I suppose very nearly 170 years of records would be hard to change. I'm aiming to look at the slivers on the border between Renfrewshire and Ayrshire. Maybe I'll even brave the Lanarkshire and Ayrshire slivers one day."

One person who has grappled with this problem more than most is Malcolm Macneill. He has assiduously listed plants in numerous monads in the Jordanhill/Knightswood/Braehead areas of western Glasgow this year, where Renfrewshire, Lanarkshire and Dunbartonshire interact in a relationship of some complexity. Separate lists for separate vice-counties, sent to separate people on separate days.

Malcolm has encapsulated the lore of such recording in typically poetic terms:

"I want instinctively to shy away from marginal squares that are slivers thin enough to slip between the ribs, or that require to be teetered along more tentatively than a tightrope walker - my brain can do without such tests.

But I have tackled a few fragments - and one in particular, on the edge of Hillington, NS5266, was enjoyable for its enforced minimalism: it's 50 yards of thin roadside verge (the rest of the 'sliver' was arid Arnold Clark car park).

The joy was in trying to be picky as hell, gazing close, thorough, up and down that same meagre strip. I find that I am slowly getting to envy those botanists that fix and mark off just a square metre of landscape, and record forensically, like an archaeologist, everything within.

The Renfrewshire sliver of NS5266 gave me 48 species (including Black Nightshade). There is becoming a buzz, a hit, in guzzling numbers, scribbling species down frenetically!"

(Malcolm Macneill)



Malcolm Macneill near Anniesland, at the 'Three Shires Point' where Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire and Dunbartonshire meet.

Information

The winter need not be spent hibernating! Have a look at some of the many instructional videos on the BSBI YouTube channel; spend time with your favourite flower book, revising what you've seen this year; take part in the BSBI New Year Plant Hunt (see the main website for details); or join in one of the Winter Study Groups that Peter has organised, with participants from all three sister networks.

Peter is also the person to send plant lists to. These are welcome from anyone, anytime. If you'd like some guidance on the best way to do recording, please get in touch. Records can be in the form of scanned lists or Recording Cards, spreadsheets or Word documents - or even paper lists by post!

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.

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

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

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Photo credits:

Renfrewshire panorama	Michael Philip, Kilcreggan, 15th July 2021
Lunderston Bay	Liz McTeague, Lunderston Bay, 19th June 2021
<i>Lathraea clandestina</i>	Alison Moss, River Gryffe near Bridge of Weir, 24th April 2021
<i>Aster tripolium</i>	Kirsty Menzies, Parklea, Port Glasgow, 31st July 2021
<i>Asplenium adiantum-nigrum</i>	Keith Watson, Loch Thom, 27th June 2021
Peter in the tunnel	Kirsty Menzies, Paisley, 12th June 2021
<i>Sedum villosum</i>	Keith Watson, Loch Thom, 27th June 2021
Malcolm at 'Three Shires Point'	Michael Philip, Anniesland, 15th November 2021 (the actual point lies within the tenement building, so Renfrewshire emerges towards the left of the tree, Lanarkshire to the right, and Dunbartonshire out onto the street at the front of the building)