

Field Botany in Dunbartonshire

Introductory Newsletter - Spring 2021



New Beginnings

After the long endurance event to which the pandemic has subjected us, with all its unwelcome personal impacts, nature is fast reminding us of new beginnings and drawing us back into the great outdoors.

The meticulous recording of Dunbartonshire's wild plants is due for a fresh impetus: while the flora of more populated and accessible areas is well-understood, there remain tracts of more remote ground which have never been studied. Further, much of the recorded data is already more than two decades old, so the task is now being handed down to a new generation of botany enthusiasts.

Dumbarton Castle

The challenge

The vice-county of Dunbartonshire (known as vc99) covers an area of around 700 sq. km. (around 273 sq. miles) and is known to be home to over 1,600 species of plants growing in the wild.

The challenge we have set ourselves is to muster the people-power, and build the skill-levels needed, to re-survey the whole of this territory over the next ten years. Folk will be out hunting for plants and noting where they grow, from the highest hills to the coast, and from the busiest residential and industrial areas to places very seldom disturbed by the squelch of a boot.

Will you join us in this great effort?

New season,

new generation,

new opportunity.



Anemone nemorosa (Wood Anemone)



View northwards from Stuckgown, above Tarbet

Background

A huge dataset of Dunbartonshire's wild plants was achieved in the 1970s, 80s and 90s, through the dedicated fieldwork of Allan Stirling and Alison Rutherford.

In addition to wide geographical coverage, and a record of the local distribution of many hundreds of species, they undertook some more specialised work - such as a local study of different Bramble microspecies.

The most recent surge of recording, co-ordinated by Pam Murdoch, ensured that the flora of our county will be well represented in the new 'Atlas 2020' (a complete botanical record of the British Isles, now in preparation by BSBI - the Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland).

Previous work by various people gives us a firm foundation for the task ahead. For example, we know where to look for some rarer things - but will they still be there . . . ?

The task in more detail

The familiar grid of 1km squares on Ordnance Survey maps is now the accepted unit of biological surveying. So we will be visiting each map square (known as a **monad**) and making a list of every species of wild plant we can find there. In total, there are 700 monads in Dunbartonshire which include at least some portion of recordable land.

'Wild' plants include naturally-occurring species, species introduced unintentionally (perhaps by seeds brought in on the muddy tyres of a truck), and species which have escaped into the wild from gardens.

Lists can be gathered and sent in by anyone at all. Use of the scientific ('Latin') names is best, and use of the official Recording Card is preferred. This will be explained more fully to everyone coming forward to help. Full instructions are available on request. People can record plants in their immediate, familiar local area - or choose to be directed to places a bit farther afield.

Much of the recording will be carried out on the many group outings organised for that purpose. You are very welcome to participate in these outings whenever you choose. Please get in touch for more information.



The vice-county includes at least a part of both East and West Dunbartonshire, plus a slice of eastern Argyll and part of western Glasgow.

Some facts and figures

The top priority for our fieldwork effort will be visiting the **108** monads which have **never** been recorded. (It's always exciting to write down a list of plants in territory where that has never been done before!)

We also need to revisit a further **103** monads which have not been recorded at all since 1987.

Then there are **34** monads with fewer than **10** species ever recorded (where we expect to be able to compile a bigger list) and another **55** monads with no record this century.

Who can join in?

Absolutely anybody is welcome to contribute lists of plants. This might just be the moment you've been promising yourself for ages - to get to know wild plants better. There will never be a better opportunity!

If you're a complete beginner, join us on an outing or two and see the recording process in action: it's the best way to learn. Once you get started, the learning curve can be rapid and you'll gain confidence quickly.

If you're more experienced in fieldwork, we look forward to meeting you - and you will have ample opportunity to extend your knowledge further through informal training and mentorship.



Foxgloves near Stuckiedhu, Tarbet

If you're a career ecologist, or are used to conducting surveys, please let us know what you come across.

And if you're not able to get out and about as much, your help could still be vital: perhaps you're good at plant photography, or researching, or organising and processing data, or planning field outings, or editing newsletters, or setting up a website, blog or Facebook page . . .

. . . Let's do this!

Team and networking

The project is being co-ordinated on the 'loose network' model, which has already proved highly successful in a parallel botanical 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 project co-ordinator is Michael Philip, the current BSBI Vice-County Recorder for Lanarkshire (vc77).

He is experienced in organising and leading fieldwork, and will frequently be present at outings. But he is very keen to see people develop their own skills - whether in plant identification, or the recording method, or leadership and organisation.

He is also happy to provide advice and mentorship to enable Team members to reach the 'next level' in any of these areas, with the aim of delegating tasks and sharing leadership.

His goal is to establish the sort of vigorous momentum in which field groups and individuals can organise themselves and work independently, thus covering much more ground.



He says, "I'm greatly looking forward to working with a brand new Team to explore the wonderful landscape of Dunbartonshire and to experience and record its fabulous diversity of wild plants."



Tragopogon pratensis subsp. minor (Goat's-beard)

Get in touch

We want to hear from anyone who would like to take part in exploring and recording Dunbartonshire's wild plants, so please spread the word!

We'll be delighted to answer any questions and to provide fuller information.

And please send in photos of plants or landscape (taken in Dunbartonshire - refer to map above) to help illustrate our BSBI webpage and future editions of this Newsletter.

Here we go!

A programme of field outings will be sent out soon, as restrictions are gradually being lifted. Fieldwork will commence towards the end of May. 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!

Please request and complete our team Questionnaire if you have not already done so. And remember to spread the word that we 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 Michael at any time. He will also be happy to have a go at identifying plants from photographs if you get stuck!

Please look out for the Dunbartonshire page on the BSBI website: <https://bsbi.org> (it's due to go live very soon)

Our project is already off and running: we're looking forward to meeting you!

Michael Philip (BSBI Acting Recorder, vc99) email: botany@opus44.co.uk



Photo credits:

Dumbarton Castle	Michael Philip
<i>Anemone nemorosa</i>	Michael Philip
View from Stuckgown	Sue Furness
Foxgloves near Stuckiedhu	Sue Furness
<i>Tragopogon pratensis subsp. minor</i>	Michael Philip