

Field Botany in Dunbartonshire

Newsletter - Spring 2022

Team 99 - what a Team!

Our first year together was energetic and we accomplished more than anyone expected. 31 different people took part in plant recording at some point and many were on numerous outings.

In total we gathered over 19,000 records - making Dunbartonshire the top vice-county in Scotland!



Our stated goal remains:

“to achieve a fresh botanical record for every monad in ten years”.

With 704* monads to tackle, this sets us an annual target of at least 70 monads in which to begin or increase the species list, and to try to re-find as many species as possible previously recorded there. Last year we surpassed our goal, achieving significant lists in 83 monads, so we're already ahead of the pace!

We visited 31 monads which had never been recorded before, and another 29 monads with no recording activity since the 1980s, beginning lists which can be further built upon.

And in case anyone should think that we're just recording huge numbers of common plants to make the statistics look good, we can point to the fact that more than half our 19,000 records were of species never recorded before in that monad (10,738 New Monad Records) and that we recorded 884 distinct plant species altogether.

Congratulations all round - and huge thanks to everyone involved!

So . . . a whole vice-county in ten years? **Can we do it in nine??**

While we're in celebratory mood, we might as well have a Birthday Cake since our Dunbartonshire Botany Network was formed in March, 2021.

Remember to check out the Dunbartonshire page on the BSBI website:

<https://bsbi.org/dunbartonshire>

All past Newsletters are archived here, and the Outings Programme will be publicised here as well.

If you know anyone who has an interest in wild plants, please invite them to get in touch - there's nothing better than joining a winning Team!



* The eagle-eyed among you will have noticed that the stated number of monads (i.e. map squares) in the vice-county changes from time to time. This is because close scrutiny of the vice-county boundary can reveal that a fragment of territory must be added or taken away - or, most recently, because three monads containing only open water in Loch Lomond do in fact have a record of plants on the loch floor!

Early flowers

The letter we sent out in January called for help in reporting Snowdrops and other spring flowers. The first response was immediate, with a photo taken just the day before!



Left:

Galanthus nivalis
(Snowdrop)

Above:

Chrysosplenium alternifolium
(Alternate-leaved Golden-saxifrage)

Learning

There is no better way to learn plants and to build your knowledge than to take part in a field outing. We are organising over 20 outings this year in a wide diversity of locations and, whoever you are reading this, you are warmly and personally invited to join in at any point.

Many of you have commented about how much you learned last year, and the overall capability of our big Team is increasing all the time. Learning can be rapid as plants become more familiar, as we hear their names spoken and features described - often in helpful ways we've not heard before.

If you are daunted by the very thought of joining us in the field, please don't be! It's perfectly fine just to be a silent member of the party and simply listen, watch and ask questions.

For those who'd like to take their learning to another level, there are many ways to do that:

- Attend a BSBI Workshop. This year there will be several Workshops - on Grasses; on Sedges; and on Yellow Composites (those tricky flowers that look a bit like Dandelions, but aren't).
- Join a BSBI Field Meeting. These are larger-scale events bringing together people from all over the country, often including some very experienced botanists. There are one-day events (we're hosting one in Dunbartonshire on 2nd July) and occasional one-week residential events in wild country.
- Make full use of the wide array of videos on the BSBI website and YouTube channel. Whatever group of plants you may want help with, there will be video, blog or PDF material to browse through.

Full details of all these options can be found on the BSBI website: <https://bsbi.org>
Members will see fuller information and further options in the BSBI Yearbook.
Before long, members will also be given direct access to the marvellous BSBI plant distribution database - so now might be a good moment to join!

Identiplant Course

Deeper training in plant identification is available in the form of the Identiplant Course.

Cathy McVean undertook this course two years ago, and we asked her to tell us more about it.

Q. *What is the Identiplant Course?*

- A.** The course aims to teach beginner botanists how to identify plants by first recognising family characteristics, and then looking for specific features to home in on the particular species.

Q. *Why did you decide to do it?*

- A.** We (the Greenspace volunteers) had been doing some surveying of road verges and other green spaces, and found that the combined knowledge of the team members was 'patchy' at best. So when Gillian Neil asked if I would be interested in doing the course I jumped at the chance to make myself useful. She even made the application on my behalf.

Q. *Had you done any other botany courses or workshops previously?*

- A.** I had done a 1-day workshop on Sedges and Rushes, which I would thoroughly recommend. From knowing nothing at all before the course, I can now recognise the most common ones, and even some of the less common ones. Otherwise my botanical knowledge was limited to O-level biology, and that was a very long time ago!

Q. *How was the Course run and what did it entail?*

- A.** The course consisted of a number of modules issued at fortnightly intervals from Feb to Oct. Each module consisted of a tutorial and a practical assignment which were downloaded from the website. Completed assignments were uploaded to the web for my designated tutor to provide feedback. The first few modules dealt with terminology, naming conventions, and use of keys, and thereafter each covered a different family, or group of families. Assignments would usually involve finding specimens and answering questions about them. The plants required were mostly very easy to find, often growing on road verges or out of pavement cracks. There are no scores and no Pass or Fail, just Complete or Incomplete.

Q. *How long did it take to complete?*

- A.** The course runs from Feb to Oct, but assignments do not have to be completed within that time, and can be completed the following year if necessary. I was doing it during lockdown, so I had no trouble finishing within the year. I probably spent more time on it than was strictly necessary because it was such a great way to pass the time.

Q. *What difference has it made to your knowledge and skills?*

- A.** When I find a plant that I haven't seen before, I can now usually place it in the correct family relatively easily, which saves an awful lot of time rummaging through books. I have also learnt to look more closely, and to notice features such as touch and smell which can be significant. It's not all about looks!

[The Identiplant Course is currently in a transition year and being re-designed, but will officially relaunch in a new form in 2023. Details can be found here: <https://identiplant.co.uk/identwp19/>]

Gillian Neil (seen here with Cathy) is the Biodiversity Officer for West Dunbartonshire Council, having previously been the Council's sole Countryside Ranger.

She takes a keen interest in our botanical recording project and will be glad to offer support to local residents and volunteers who wish to attend Courses and Workshops.



Two January highlights



Saxifraga tridactylites (Rue-leaved Saxifrage)

In recent years, Malcolm Macneill has made a particular study of this species. Having found huge populations of this normally coastal plant on waste ground sites in Glasgow, he has recently found it also in several Dunbartonshire locations.



Polystichum aculeatum (Hard Shield-fern)

This species of fern is always nice to see. Stan Campbell found this example on 31st January by the River Leven in Renton - a new record for that monad. Winter can be a good time to look for ferns.

Nasties

Nature can be a danger to us, and we can be a danger to nature. Here's some important advice:

Ticks

In our area, ticks are very prevalent. They are small, spider-like creatures that sometimes get brushed onto clothing as we walk through long grass or overhanging branches. They rapidly seek an area of skin to burrow into and feed on our blood. They can carry Lyme Disease.

Here are some counter-measures you can take:

- wear light-coloured clothing and brush ticks off when seen
- tuck socks over trousers
- cover all skin with 'Smidge' (or similar) before getting dressed
- use a deterrent chemical as a 'wash-in' or spray for outdoor clothing
- inspect yourself thoroughly when you get home
- remove ticks with tweezers or a tick removal tool
- https://www.dartmoor.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0031/85189/PHE_Tick_Leaflet.pdf

Boot hygiene

Pathogens can be collected on our boots, or on plant material we gather, and carried unknowingly to the next location we visit.

Thus plant diseases present in soil, mud or water can reach new areas and have devastating effects.

Please be aware of this, and **clean your boots** thoroughly after every walk!

Introduction

Hi everyone,

I am the new Countryside Ranger for West Dunbartonshire. I hail from London originally but have bounced around the world working on various projects, mainly with fauna such as birds, bats and bugs. I moved to the area in 2016 and have spent the past 5 years as the local Red Squirrel Conservation Officer for the Scottish Wildlife Trust. In my time here I have fallen in love with the area and am excited to be working to highlight our amazing local flora and fauna. I am looking forward to meeting you all and learning both from and with you as we strive to uncover the wonders of our local area. Please get in touch if you have any questions or ideas for events or activities you would like to see in West Dunbartonshire.

Mary-Anne (also known as MAC)

Mary-Anne Collis
Countryside Ranger

Greenspace

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Mary-Anne Collis, Countryside Ranger (centre), with Gillian Neil, Biodiversity Officer, and Michael Philip - all squinting into the winter sunshine outside the office at Balloch Castle Country Park



QUIZ! (just for fun - please don't send your answers in!)

Here are some examples of the TLA* relevant to our botanical activities. It is unlikely that anyone will be able to translate them all (even using Google), but you may pick up clues from each other.

NVC	SWT	AEM	RPR	RLS	VCR	UFP
WOB	SVG	GPS	PSW	WSG	BSS	BFT
LNR	SBC	NBN	SNH	BRC	DDb	NTS

Hint: some of these are official, but some are unique to our networks. Listen out on our outings . . . Be patient! The answers will be revealed in the Summer edition of the Newsletter.

* TLA is itself a TLA: a Three-Letter Acronym

Statistics

The popular 'Totaliser' returns with a new look for the new season. The right-hand column is now activated, in this second year of our Project.

Totaliser

	<u>2022</u>	<u>Project total</u>
Total records made	347	19,730
Monads visited, with at least one record made	51	369 (52%)
Monads visited with no previous record at all	nil	31
Monad with highest species count	NS3977 (115) (Renton)	NS5169 (282) (Yoker)
Monads regarded as 'well-recorded'	1	84 (11.9%)
Total species recorded	199	897
Number of people joining 'Team 99' network	2	56

(correct as at 5th March, 2022)

Here we go!

The 2022 botany season is off and running! (As you can see from the Totaliser, some people have been busy already). You will have received the Outings Programme along with this Newsletter.

We're looking forward to seeing you whenever you can join in - especially if you've not taken part before. Choose any outing that appeals to you: the more pairs of eyes in the group, the better!

Michael Philip (BSBI Recorder, vc99)

email: botany@opus44.co.uk

Photo credits*:

Gillian and Cathy	Mary-Anne Collis, Balloch Castle Country Park, 17th February 2022
<i>Galanthus nivalis</i>	Fiona Merrilees, Ardmore, 27th January 2022
<i>Chrysosplenium alternifolium</i>	Stan Campbell, Vale of Leven, 9th February 2022
<i>Saxifraga tridactylites</i>	Fiona Merrilees, Dumbarton, 27th January 2022
<i>Polystichum aculeatum</i>	Stan Campbell, Renton, 31st January 2022
Michael, Mary-Anne and Gillian	taken by a colleague, Balloch Castle C.P., 9th February 2022

* Remember you're always welcome to send in photos, either for potential inclusion in the Newsletter or the webpage, or to request help in identifying a plant.