

# Lanarkshire Botany

Autumn 2021



## An extraordinary season

2021 has seen the adoption of the 'loose network' concept in two of our neighbouring vice-counties: Renfrewshire and Dunbartonshire. It has already proved astonishingly successful, with over 15,000 records achieved in the first season Renfrewshire and over 18,000 in Dunbartonshire.

These new networks have acquired a momentum of their own, thanks in no small part to the involvement of numerous Lanarkshire people in supporting them, joining field outings and sharing both enthusiasm and expertise.

This has been much appreciated, and several of our number have now opted to join one or both of the new networks in addition to a continuing involvement in botanical recording in Lanarkshire.



*Deschampsia flexuosa* (Wavy Hair-grass) in typical moorland habitat

Lanarkshire is more than three times the size of either of our two networked neighbours so, having helped launch their new initiatives this year, our attention will now re-focus on the larger task of building and refreshing the record in our own vice-county.

Read on for details of progress and what we will be doing in the near future.



Some photos taken on fieldwork in Lanarkshire:



*Equisetum sylvaticum* (Wood Horsetail)

This fern is fairly common in damp woodland. The branches are themselves branched, and droop down.



*Agrostis scabra* (Rough Bent)

An uncommon and easily overlooked grass, with a tall, delicate habit. It appears occasionally here and there - this time on Byres Road in western Glasgow.



*Centaurium erythraea* (Common Centaury)

More associated with coastal areas, this attractive plant can colonise stony waste ground, sometimes in large numbers.



*Thlaspi arvense* (Field Pennycress)

With distinctive fruits, this plant is not common in Scotland, but can be found as an arable weed or on waste ground.



## 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 Watson 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)

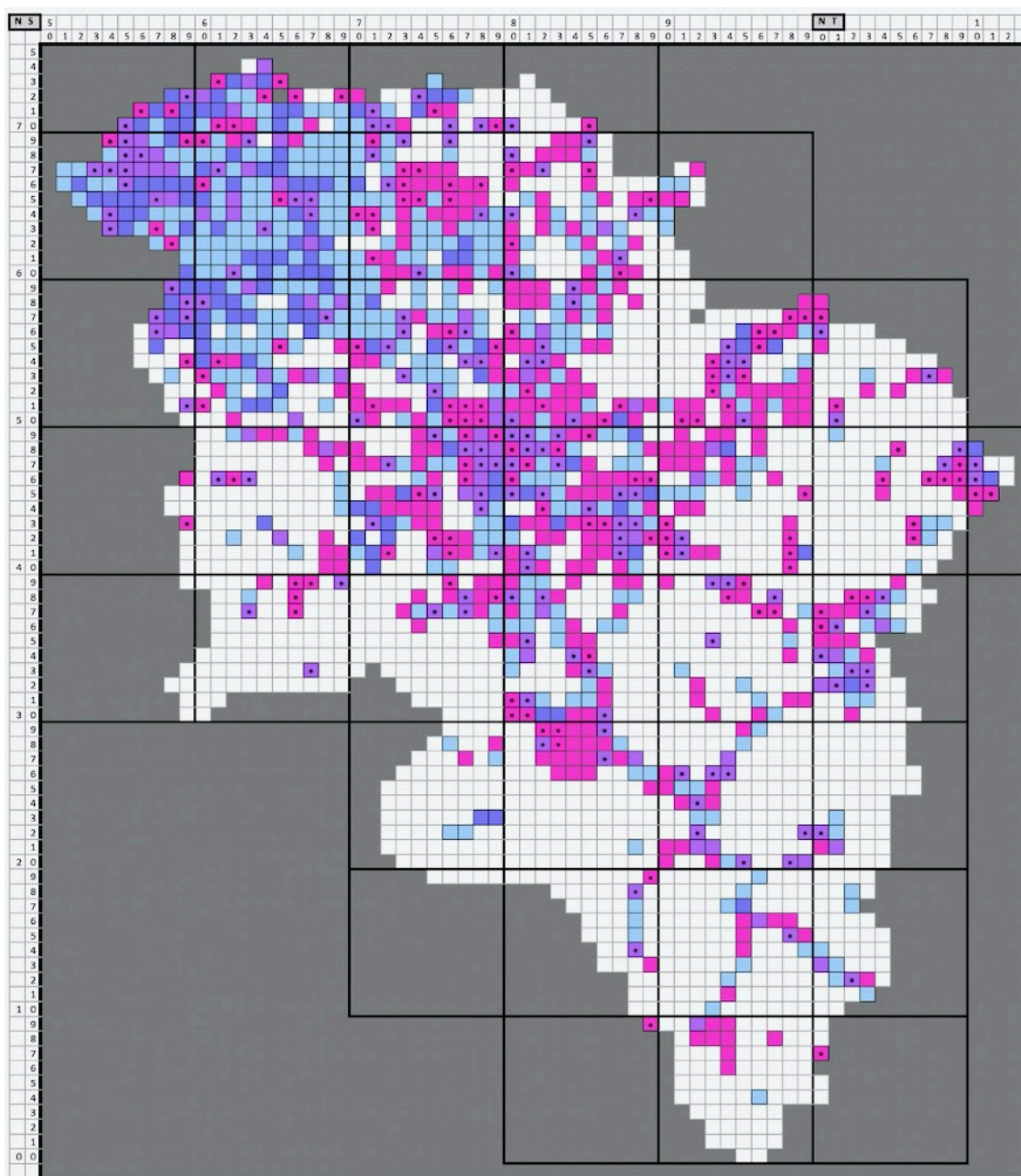


Malcolm Macneill near Anniesland, at the 'Three Shires Point' where Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire and Dunbartonshire meet.

## Recording progress

Lanarkshire is a BIG vice-county and, although it is generally fairly well-recorded, many of the records up to 2016 were at tetrad, quadrant or hectad resolution. Put simply, this means that we are faced with the major challenge of upgrading the Lanarkshire record to monad resolution (i.e. making a good botanical record for each of the 2,468 individual map squares).

Since the start of 2017 we have done well in making such records for 284 monads (11.5% of the total area). The map below summarises the current situation. Squares with a dot are well-recorded: in purple squares, over 75% of species have been found or re-found in the last 5 years while in pink squares 100% of species have been seen in the same period. (Pink is therefore our 'gold standard'!) Pink or purple squares without the dot have high percentages of current records, but not yet a big enough list to be considered 'well-recorded' - and blue squares have had some less intensive recording activity.



Our main focus next year and beyond will be to target as many white squares as possible - monads with no previous record at all. Obviously, if a good list can be made in any previously unrecorded monad, it immediately achieves 'pink-with-a-dot' and becomes one of the best on record!

To ensure real progress, we need lots of people involved, both within and beyond the Outings Programme.

## Strategy for 2022 and beyond

**Overview:** In 2021 we organised 13 outings in Lanarkshire and we intend to continue with a similar outings programme next year. But one of the strengths of 'Team 77' is the additional contribution made by a growing number of people who have been doing recording either on their own or by getting together in twos or threes informally.

**What you can do:** **1. Attend group outings when you can.**



Our official outings have always been well-supported and are a great way to meet people, learn plants and get to places you would never visit otherwise. If you've never yet been on an outing, please aim to give it a go in 2022 - it's a great experience in the company of some great people!

**2. Have a go at doing some recording on your own.**



Botanical recording simply means making a list of every plant species you can find in whatever area you choose. This does not mean that you have to be able to identify everything! We all suffer from 'blind-spots' or incomplete knowledge: all we can do is record what we are certain of, and at the same time commit to learning more and ask for help from others when we need to.

For instance, one good project is to build a list for your 'home monad' (i.e. the square where you live or work - or regularly take dogs or children for a walk).

If you would like to have a go at this, please get in touch and we'll explain one or two simple steps you can take to provide good data.

**3. Offer to host an outing.**



There is a limit to the number of group outings either Michael or Peter can lead, since both are also committed to helping with recording in Renfrewshire or Dunbartonshire. But if you could 'hold the fort' now and then, it will be possible to have more outings.

This entails simply being present as people arrive at the meeting-point, explaining the plan for the day, and ensuring that someone in the group writes down whatever plant species are found. The person co-ordinating on the day does not have to have a high level of expertise: the group, working together, will be capable of a lot.

**4. Ask for help.**



We all run off the end of our knowledge from time to time! That's why we're a Team. Use of a key or a good field guide, and discussion of the plant, often produces the answer. Another way of getting help is to take good photos of the plant and send them to someone who will probably know what it is. And getting a precise 8-figure grid reference or location description will enable someone else to go and have a look.

(You'd be surprised how often such help is sought by the very people you might regard as the most experienced!)

**5. Commit to learning.**



However much we know, there's always more to learn. And the learning-curve can be steep and rapid when we make up our minds to get serious about plant groups we have hitherto found difficult or challenging. The BSBI runs regular Courses and Field Meetings, and there are great instructional videos on the BSBI YouTube channel.

Any of these steps deepens our capability. Support, advice and encouragement guaranteed. Give it a go!



## Winter Study Groups

We've just launched a brand new initiative, open to folk from all three networks: monthly Study Groups on Zoom.

Pioneered by Peter Wiggins, these give us the chance to revise and learn plant identifications - especially of some of those species that we find awkward.

Two groups have been set up, but if you haven't taken the plunge yet, don't worry! Further groups may be formed according to demand.



Peter hosting the very first Winter Study Group

## vc77 Website

Do remember to visit our Flowers of Lanarkshire website: <https://www.vc77botany.org/>

There are thousands of photos of hundreds of species - all taken in Lanarkshire - clearly indexed, together with helpful notes which highlight some key points for identification.

If you have photos you'd like to contribute to this growing resource, particularly if they are spectacular pictures, or close-ups showing detail of stems, leaves, flowers or seeds - please contact Peter Wiggins for more information.

## Keep in touch

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; or take part in the BSBI New Year Plant Hunt (see the main website for details).

You are welcome to email at any time with comments, ideas, questions or photos.

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

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

Thanks for a great year - have a winter full of interest, study and recuperation!

Michael Philip & Peter Wiggins (BSBI Joint Recorders, vc77)

### Picture credits:

<i>Deschampsia flexuosa</i>	Peter Wiggins, near Douglas, 11th July 2021
<i>Equisetum sylvaticum</i>	Peter Wiggins, near Carmunnock, 6th May 2017
<i>Agrostis scabra</i>	Michael Philip, 'lab' photo of specimen, 27th August 2021
<i>Centaureum erythraea</i>	Peter Wiggins, Greengairs, 25th July 2021
<i>Thlaspi arvense</i>	Peter Wiggins, Hamiltonhill Claypits, Glasgow, 7th July 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)
Study Group	Laura Wiggins, at home, 22nd November 2021