

Field Botany in Dunbartonshire

Newsletter - Spring 2023

[At the beginning of the new season, with the continuing expansion of our local botany networks, several pages of content in this edition also appear in the Renfrewshire and Lanarkshire newsletters.]

New season, new opportunities

Thanks to the growing scale of our big Dunbartonshire Botany team, with both its geographical reach and the wide range of expertise and experience amongst us, we begin the new season in a strong position.



A perfect summer's day on the western slopes of Ben Vorlich, looking across Loch Sloy towards Ben Vane

In the first two years of our ten-year project, we have added over 19,000 new monad records (species new to their respective 1km map squares), increasing the overall Dunbartonshire dataset from under 74,000 monad records to over 93,000. So this year we should see that total reach 100,000 and beyond.

Through widening and strengthening partnerships with various organisations, we are able to offer a rich variety of outings in the new programme - including our first full day of recording on one of Loch Lomond's islands, and an adventure by ferry from Ardlui across to the eastern shore of the Loch later in the summer.

Whether you've been with us from the start of our project or are reading the Newsletter for the first time, we look forward to seeing you out in the field before long. And remember to send in records and photographs whenever you can. If you'd like some suggestions of places you can do recording on your own, please ask: such contributions have already added enormous value to the overall effort.

There are many other ways to support what we do together, as you'll discover below. Engage your imagination and take the plunge - and thank you in advance for whatever you can do!

Network Zoom

On Saturday 4th March we held our first ever Zoom get-together across all three of the local botany networks in our wider area (Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire and Dunbartonshire). Many positive comments and ideas were put forward, giving us some new things to look forward to.



A Herbarium is a collection of preserved plant specimens

For example, in our Interview feature, we heard from Keith Watson who, as well as being the BSBI Vice-County Recorder for Renfrewshire, is Curator of Botany at Glasgow Museums. He has proposed a new project to mark the centenary of J.R. Lee's 'Flora of the Clyde Area', published in 1933. (see article below)

Keith has also underlined the value of visiting the Herbarium collections at either Glasgow Museums or the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh (RBGE). It is hoped that we can arrange a group visit later in the year for those who are interested.

Another thing to come out of the Zoom event was a plea from many to do this more often! As a result, there will be something new on our programme this year: a couple of Zoom events where anyone can share photos of plants they want identified. It is not always possible to arrive at a conclusive determination from photos, but in a forum where people can contribute their own thoughts we should be able to do well.

Those who had taken part a year ago in the Study Groups held on Zoom by Peter Wiggins requested more of this. So planning is now underway for two new opportunities:

Firstly, a repeat of last year's Study Group topics will be run during the coming summer for those who have not taken part before. This is an excellent opportunity to build deeper plant knowledge in a collaborative group setting, with loads of photographs and tips (see the feedback article in the [Spring 2022 Newsletter](#)).

Secondly, a brand new programme of Study Groups is being devised for next winter - aimed at those who have taken part before.



Peter in action with a Study Group



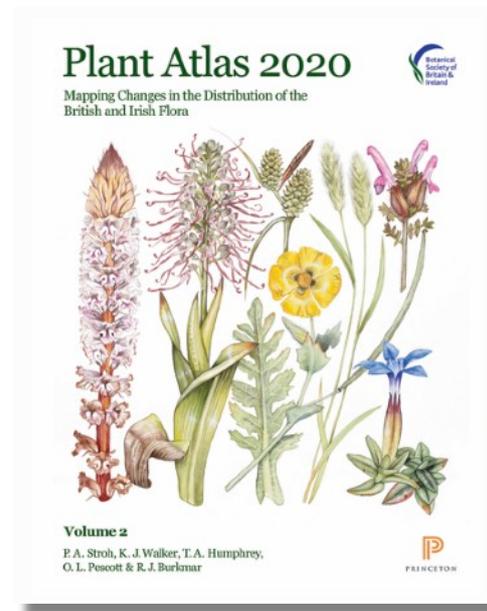
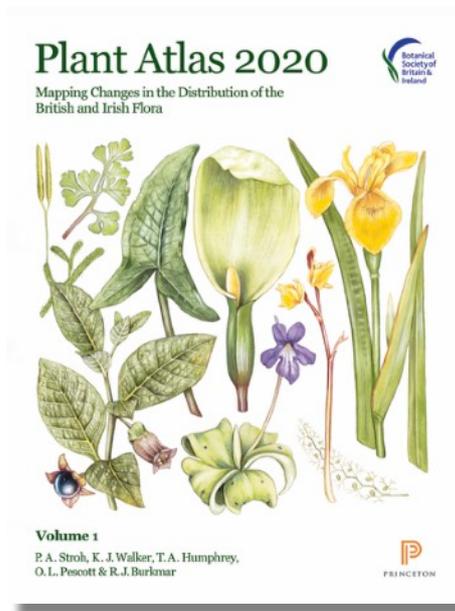
A field outing in progress

Our networks continue to grow (150 people are connected now) and Michael Philip listed a whole variety of things for which practical help is needed. The full list can be found at the end of this Newsletter: please challenge yourself to pick an item! One key to building our capability and running our wide-ranging programme is spreading the burden of leading outings. Several people have kindly offered to do this from time to time and it is very much appreciated. It must be stressed that advanced botanical experience is not a requirement: it's more a question of welcoming people as they arrive, following an outlined route or task, and making sure someone is writing stuff down. The group will record according to their combined skill level - which is all we ever do anyway.

Please contact Michael anytime - especially to indicate your interest in taking part in Study Groups, or with offers of practical help or involvement in other ways.

Plant Atlas 2020

Just a few days ago, in early March 2023, the BSBI published the eagerly-awaited Plant Atlas 2020.



Based on a dataset of some 26 million plant records gathered by 8,500 recorders over 178,000 recording days across the British Isles, this monumental work provides the most detailed picture ever achieved of the distribution of our wild plants.

The resulting printed version, in two large and heavy volumes, is of the very highest quality. In full colour throughout, and printed on heavy, glossy paper, this major work includes species text, trend analysis, dot maps and graphs of phenology and altitude occurrence for each of 2,863 species. Although the price tag is significant at £132, the value is unquestionable.

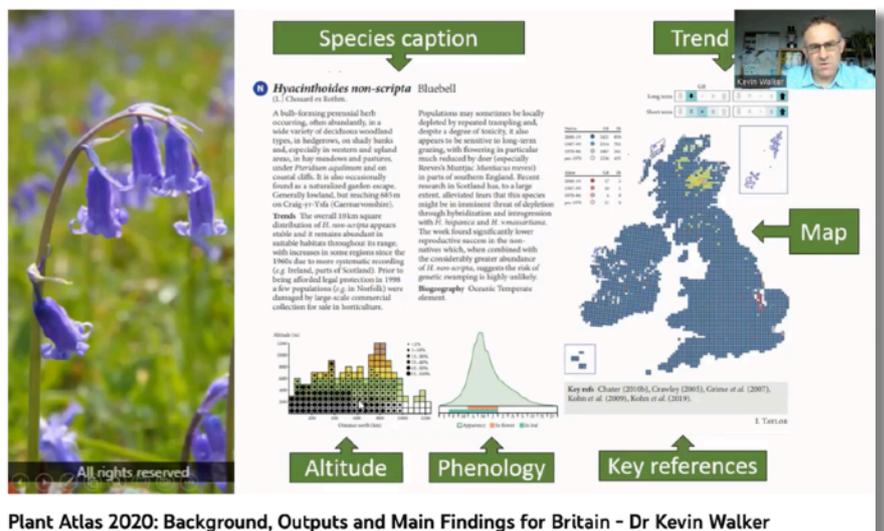
However, BSBI has also made the entire output available as a free-of-charge, public-facing website:

<https://plantatlas2020.org>

This online version has exactly the same data, plus many species photos, and coverage of a further 600+ species not included in the print version. Please visit the website and enjoy exploring! As a starting-point, go to the link above, click on 'Atlas' in the top bar and type in a species name.

Please tell your friends and contacts about this unparalleled resource, and please also do anything you can to bring it to the attention of politicians, NGOs and local officials. In pursuing the increasingly urgent environmental agenda, policy-makers and local decision-makers now have at their disposal a brand new tool to provide the latest evidence base for plant conservation and management.

BSBI Head of Science, Dr. Kevin Walker, introducing the content and findings at the launch of Plant Atlas 2020.



Plant Atlas 2020: Background, Outputs and Main Findings for Britain - Dr Kevin Walker

Rare Plant Register (Now you know what RPR Project stands for on the 'Things you can do' chart below!)

The first-ever Rare Plant Registers for Lanarkshire and Dunbartonshire are currently being compiled by Peter Wiggins and Lucy Hollingworth respectively. This project is essentially about the filtering of lots of data to form a list of relevant plants, followed by the writing of material for some form of publication.

The core data for wild plants in Dunbartonshire was gathered in the 1970s, 80s and 90s by Allan Stirling and Alison Rutherford. Their meticulous paper record exists in the form of a huge collection of maps and binders. After a period when it was all in the care of John Holland, a previous Vice-County Recorder, this collection returned to Alison's home in late 2021 awaiting eventual permanent relocation.



Alison and Lucy outside Alison's house in Helensburgh

In March last year, Lucy was introduced to Alison and was so impressed by the archive that she immediately offered to give it a temporary home while she got to work on the Rare Plant Register.

Provisional lists of contender species have been extracted from the BSBI database, and there will now be much discussion about what counts as a rare plant locally and what does not. Thereafter work will be needed to write up the data and prepare a document for submission to the BSBI.

If you'd like to assist with this process, please contact Michael in the first instance. We'd be delighted to hear from anyone who can offer skills in data-handling, word-processing, proof-reading, design or photography - and in due course organising some fieldwork to find our more elusive rare plants!

PS - Lucy has already stated that we should aim to photograph every plant species included in the new Register. Now there's a challenge!

RSPB Partnership Project

We're delighted to announce a brand new local botany project in partnership with the RSPB Loch Lomond Reserve near Gartocharn.

The aim is gradually to record the plants present in each of 39 Compartments on the site. Most of the recording will be carried out by RSPB volunteers with an interest in plants, supported by our Dunbartonshire Botany network with some visits, training and mentorship.

As part of that process, RSPB volunteers have been invited to take part in any of our programmed outings to build their plant knowledge and confidence, so there will no doubt be some new faces to meet!

As with several items in this Newsletter, readers are warmly invited to offer assist in this project, perhaps by offering to meet up with the volunteers and walk parts of the site with them as they compile plant lists.

Hawkweeds

Last summer, specialist Hawkweed botanist Tim Rich visited Ben Vorlich. He succeeded in re-finding the mountain's unique species, *Hieracium vorlichense*, and added records of a further five Hawkweed species.

We're planning to focus particular effort this year on Hawkweeds, with help from Brian Burrow (the BSBI referee for the genus).

Some brief items

Sedge course

Jay Mackinnon, Lecturer in Applied Sciences at Edinburgh Napier University and BSBI Vice-County Recorder for West Lothian, has asked us to mention an online short course in the identification of Sedges:

I wonder if you would please circulate details of this online course to your local botany networks in case anyone is interested? It's about 20 hours of study at one's own pace over the spring to gain skill and confidence with keying out a variety of sedges.

More detail and sign-up at:

<https://www.napier.ac.uk/study-with-us/short-courses/introduction-to-sedges>

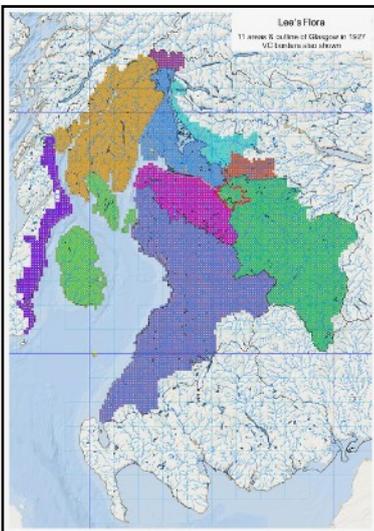
Dandelion alert

Following the success of our drive last year for photo-sets of Dandelions to send off to the referee, we invite you to participate again. The very brief window for Dandelion identification runs from mid April until around 10th May.

Please ask Michael to send you our PDF guide on what's required!

Centenary of Lee's Flora

Keith Watson has proposed a project to celebrate the centenary of J.R. Lee's 'Flora of the Clyde Area'.



Published in 1933, this Flora includes many hundreds of species found within the drainage area of the Clyde river system and estuary, from upper Lanarkshire all the way to eastern Kintyre and even Ailsa Craig.

The aim of the new project will be to account for the presence or absence of each of these species in the period since 2000, county by county.

Initially this will require digitising Lee's data, before making the comparison with current data from the BSBI database. Finally, in due course, there may be a need for some fieldwork to hunt for any species that can't otherwise be accounted for.

As in the case of the RPR Project, please offer help if you can. Much of it can be done without even leaving the house!

[Peter Wiggins has prepared this map showing the area covered by Lee's Flora]

A personal note (Michael Philip)

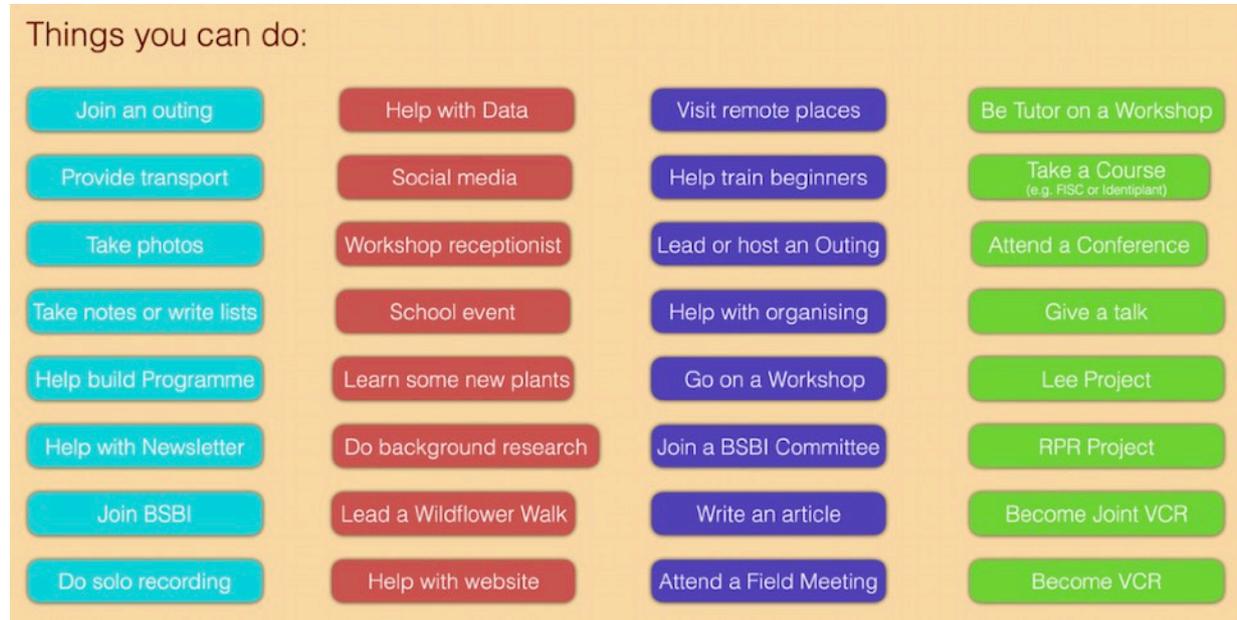
"Almost 43 years ago I began my career in schools, teaching 9-18 year-olds to play woodwind instruments. As of the school Easter holiday this year, I'm retiring from Music Education. I'll deeply miss the privilege of working with young people, seeing them develop as people and as musicians, but the time has come to leave behind the challenging environment of schools and the stress of music exams, ensemble rehearsals and concerts (and trying to remember bassoon fingerings!)

The good news is that I'm now embarking on a deeper involvement in field botany: network-building, recording and training, in our own networks and beyond, in both a voluntary and a professional capacity."

What you can do to help

Why not treat yourself to a Course or Workshop this year, or attend the Scottish Botanists Conference? Could you give a hand with data or research? Or act as receptionist at our Ferns Workshop in September? Or help on a Wildflower Walk for complete beginners? Or offer your expertise in websites or social media?

If you've not done so before, do come on one of our outings (or one of the BSBI's Field Meetings in other parts of the country) and enjoy new places, plants and people!



The challenge to everyone is to find something on this list that you can do to continue the momentum of our network.

Please contact Michael for more information.

Keep in touch

We appreciate your emails on all sorts of botanical matters - keep them coming!

You can also keep in touch via the Dunbartonshire page on the BSBI website, which is updated regularly: that's the place to read past issues of this Newsletter, and our Outings Programme.

Michael Philip (BSBI Recorder, vc99)

email: botany@opus44.co.uk

Photo credits*:

Ben Vorlich view

Stan Campbell, 31st August 2022

Alison and Lucy

Michael Philip, Helensburgh, 23rd March 2022

The Herbarium illustration is from the RBGE website.

The study group and field outing photos have been credited in previous Newsletters.

The Plant Atlas illustrations are taken from BSBI Atlas Launch material.

* 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. Photos of 'people doing botany' are especially wanted!