

Field Botany in Renfrewshire

Newsletter - Autumn 2023

Review of the season

This edition of the Newsletter is a patchwork of short items of interest, looking both backward at another busy year of botanical recording and forward to some of what next year may hold in store.



Barcraigs Reservoir on a perfect summer's day

Paisley Natural History Society

Michael Philip led an evening outing for the Paisley Natural History Society on 6th July. It was an evening of incessant rain, but when did a little dampness put botanists off?!

Here is a link to the Report:

<https://paisleynaturalhistorysociety.files.wordpress.com/2023/07/beginnersbotany-2023-07-06.pdf>

Incidentally, Michael has also been invited to give a talk on 1st February next year on the subject of 'Botanical Recording in Renfrewshire'.

Urban Flora Project

2023 has been the final year of data collecting for the Botanical Society of Scotland's 'Urban Flora Project'. As in recent years we have played a full part, ensuring that west central Scotland will be well represented. Since the start of 2021 we have contributed detailed records from outings in numerous Renfrewshire towns:

Barrhead (2021); **Bridge of Weir** (2023); **Erskine** (2022); **Giffnock** (various); **Gourock** (2022); **Greenock** (2021); **Johnstone** (2022); **Kilmacolm** (2023); **Linwood** (2022); **Neilston** (2021); **Newton Mearns** (2021); **Paisley** (2021); **Port Glasgow** (2023); **Renfrew** (2023)

Outings

Here is a flavour of our Outings Programme in 2023:



Keith led an expedition to Knockmade Moss



The outing to Barscube Hill on 2nd July produced this fine specimen of *Botrychium lunaria* (Moonwort).

This primitive fern species can lie dormant for several years before choosing to re-emerge.

It's what we call "a good find"!



Jim led an outing at Gibshill, above Greenock

Study Groups

Peter Wiggins will again be running study groups over the winter. They will follow the same pattern as the series which he ran two years ago, where the group looks together each time at a different family of plants.

If you are interested in taking part, please let Peter know.

Peter says, "This series will cover largely the same material as the previous winter course. Every session you will be asked to look at one or two species in advance and come prepared to contribute information briefly about these species. Together we will all learn about plants such as Bedstraws, St. John's-worts, Speedwells or Forget-me-nots."

These sessions will be using Zoom on Monday evenings starting at 7.30pm on the following dates:

13th November 2023

11th December 2023

15th January 2024

5th February 2024

26th February 2024

18th March 2024

Please note that this is a formal group activity: so if you choose to take part, please commit to full attendance if at all possible. The size of the group will be limited to 8 people (though, if there is sufficient demand, Peter will be happy to arrange a separate timetable for a second group).

Contact Peter to book your place - and it's free of charge!

pswiggins@gmail.com

Develop your skills

Do you want to develop your plant identification skills?

One of the most effective ways is to take a walk in familiar territory and try to identify all the plants you see, and then regularly repeat this walk throughout the year. You will learn to see things, and learn to identify plants, in all stages of their growth. This means that you will be able to identify plants more easily when they are not yet in flower or when they have 'gone over'.

Many of us started doing this during the lockdowns and it has really improved our botany knowledge.

We would like to encourage you to try this next season starting in March. To help, Peter and Michael will be delighted to accept pictures of plants you would like help with and we may be able to join you on a walk. We will also hold a monthly Zoom meeting to learn from each other and discuss what we are all finding. We will send you an email throughout the season highlighting what to be looking out for in the streets and waste ground around us.

Whether you want to improve your plant identification skills for work, for fun, or just to make those dog walks more interesting, this is a great way to do it!

If you are interested, let Peter know:

pswiggins@gmail.com



Network update

Our Renfrewshire Botany Network was formed in the spring of 2021 and has grown steadily ever since. There are currently 46 people on our contacts list, many of whom have joined us in fieldwork whether regularly or occasionally.

With this upsurge in interest in wild plants has come some spectacular achievement! Since the start of 2021, through regular field outings, occasional special events and partnerships, and lots of dedicated work by some busy individuals, we have contributed over 31,000 plant records to the BSBI Plant Distribution Database.

And as people join in, they bring ideas with them. As you have read above, the use of Zoom has made possible not only a programme of Study Groups but also occasional meetings for a wider audience.

For example, the recent Zoom evening on the subject of people's favourite flower books and reference material produced some great stories - as well as bringing to our notice some titles we might like to put on our Christmas list!

We have played a full part in the BSS Urban Flora Project (see above) and we've hosted a BSBI Workshop on Brambles (in 2022).

In total, we have recorded plants in 332 monads (1km map squares) in the last three years, which is roughly 40% of the total area of the vice-county of Renfrewshire.

However, for this activity to be sustainable in the years ahead, we are now at the point of having to restructure a little. During the coming winter we will be consulting with those of you who have been most involved and inviting your feedback and creative ideas. We envisage a preparatory questionnaire followed by a Zoom get-together to explore options. Some things may be scaled back, some things may be rethought - and no doubt some brand new ideas will be implemented.

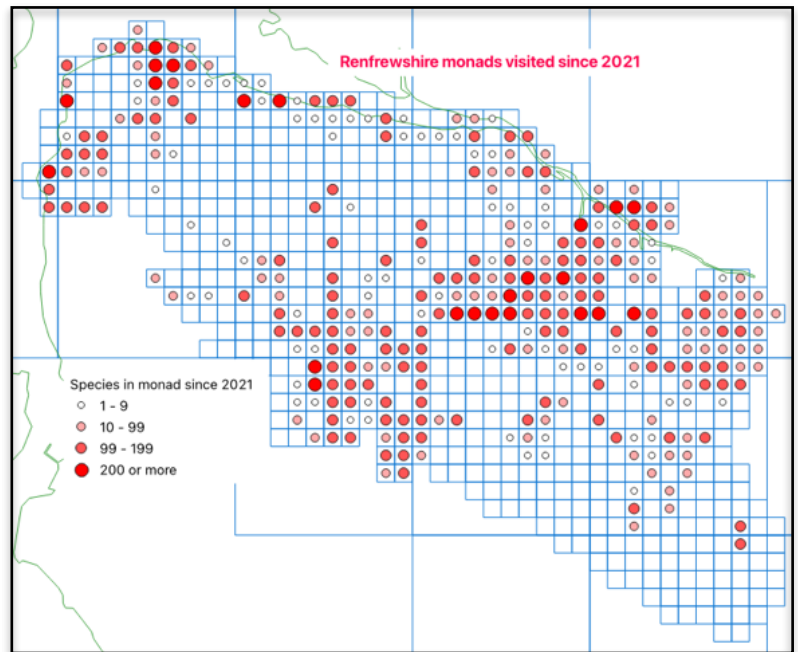
Whether or not you are directly approached, please feel free to feed in your own thoughts to this process by contacting Michael at any time. What have you most enjoyed? What have you learned, or what would you like to learn more about? What suggestions do you have to offer about our Newsletter, our website, our Zoom activities? Who else should we be talking to as we seek to record plants as widely as possible? Can you offer practical help with leading or hosting outings, taking photos, organising events, providing transport (car, minibus, boat, mountain bike), or doing data or research work?

Michael's email address is: botany@opus44.co.uk

As the network grows, there are always opportunities for people to step up and lend a hand in all sorts of ways. Although we are the local face of BSBI, our network operates informally for the most part as a bunch of enthusiasts: so there are no committee meetings, no budget, no regular commitments. This informality and shared load-carrying has been the secret of our success.



Big thanks to everyone who has already shared time, skills and experience to get us to this point.



Schematic map showing our recording activity since 2021

Although we have yet to visit a significant percentage of the territory, there are many squares with over 100 records and some with over 200.

[map generated by Peter Wiggins]

Lee's 'Flora of the Clyde Area'

By way of marking the centenary of this celebrated book (in 2033) we will be part of a wider effort to compare current data with that of 100+ years ago across the whole River Clyde catchment. J.R. Lee noted where each species occurred, simply as a presence or absence in each of the vice-county territories.

Thanks to dedicated work by Liza Downie, we now have Lee's data in digital form. Comparison between the two data-sets can now be undertaken and, once all current records have been accounted for, the hunt will be on to attempt to rediscover any species recorded 100 years ago and not seen this century!

If you'd like to be involved in some way in this fascinating project, do let us know. We'll need people good with data analysis, report-writing, planning - and organising and implementing targeted fieldwork.

Information

Please join in our activities whenever you can. Some people may fear that recording plants will require expertise they don't possess: however the very opposite is true! It's fine just to tag along and be a 'silent' member of the party. You can watch, listen and ask lots of questions - how do you think everyone else learned what they know?

Peter is the person to send plant lists to. These are welcome from anyone, anytime. Do get out and record plants on your own - 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 or photos of the scribbles in your notebook!

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>
Here you can refer to our Outings Programme and read past issues of the Newsletter - and if we should ever get out of touch, contact details can be found here as well.

Contact details

Keith Watson (BSBI Vice-county Recorder, vc76)

email: keithjwatson76@gmail.com

Peter Wiggins (receiver of data)

email: pswiggins@gmail.com

Michael Philip (network co-ordinator, photos, inquiries, newsletter)

email: botany@opus44.co.uk

Photo credits*:

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|---------------------------------|---|
| Barcraigs Reservoir | Jim Blackwood, 10th July 2023 |
| Knockmade Moss outing | Liz McTeague, near Uplawmoor, 29th July 2023 |
| <i>Botrychium lunaria</i> | Liz McTeague, Barscube Hill, 2nd July 2023 |
| Gibshill outing (Leafy lane) | Liz McTeague, above Greenock, 16th July 2023 Michael Philip, nowhere-in-particular, 25th August 2023 |

* 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!