

Field Botany in Dunbartonshire

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.



A stunning view northwards towards Loch Lomond from the summit of Dumbarton Muir

RSPB Project

This year we launched a Project to record the wild plants of the RSPB Loch Lomond Reserve.

The site is organised into 39 Compartments and, whether working with staff and volunteers or holding outings of our own, we have now gathered a good spread of records for around half of it. We look forward to continuing this valuable partnership next season.

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 Dunbartonshire towns:

Alexandria (2022); **Bearsden** (2021); **Cardross** (2023); **Clydebank** (2022); **Dumbarton** (2022); **Garelochhead** (2022); **Helensburgh** (2021); **Kilcreggan** (2023); **Rhu** (2023)

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



Outings

Here is a flavour of some of our Outings Programme in 2023:



The Ardlui ferry returning with botanists after a wet day



Cathy enjoying finding Fragrant Orchid above Glen Douglas



The tranquility of Ring Point on the RSPB Loch Lomond Reserve

Network update

Our Dunbartonshire Botany Network was formed in the spring of 2021 and has grown steadily ever since. There are currently 84 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 new partnerships - and lots of dedicated work by some busy individuals - we have contributed over 53,000 plant records to the national 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 2021).

In total, we have recorded plants in 500 monads (1km map squares) in the last three years, which is over 70% of the total area of the vice-county of Dunbartonshire.

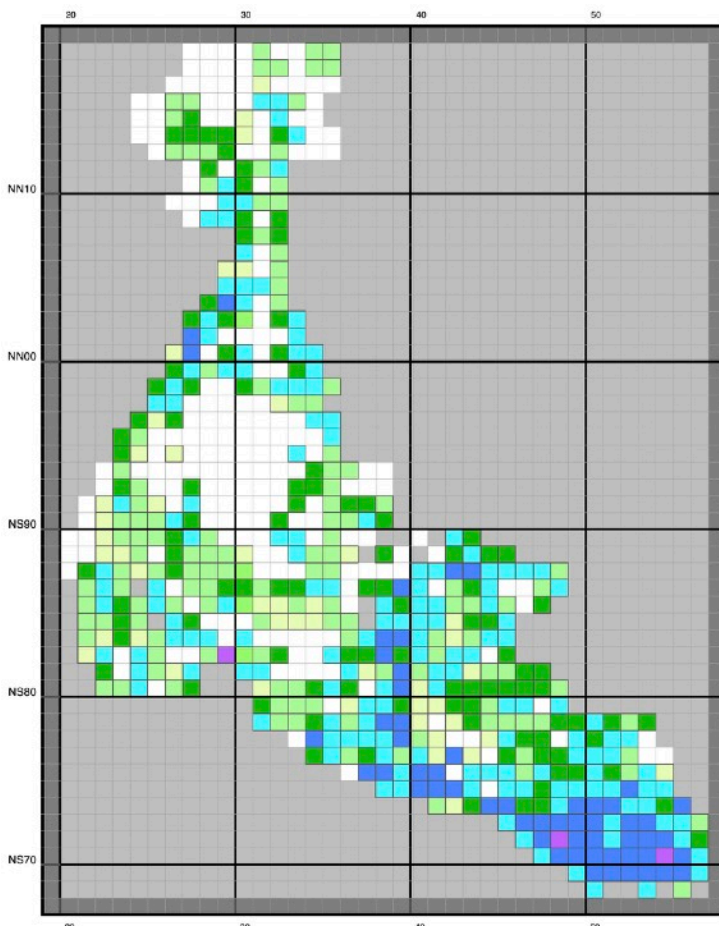
However, for this activity to be sustainable in the years ahead, we are now at the point of having to restructure a little. During the coming winter we will be consulting with those of you who have been most involved and inviting your feedback and creative ideas. We envisage a preparatory questionnaire 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.



Plant recording activity in Dunbartonshire from 2017 to date.
Each square is a 1km map square (monad)

Key: Green = under 100/50/10 species
Light blue = over 100 species
Dark blue = over 200 species
Purple = over 300 species!



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.

Rare Plant Register

As we've reported previously, a similar exercise is underway to compile the first ever Rare Plant Register for Dunbartonshire. Again there are opportunities for research, authoring, data-handling, photography and careful fieldwork. It's a big project to cover, but we're a big team now!

Please get in touch if you'd like to be involved.

Abutilon theophrasti (Velvetleaf).
Our only known example turned up in Helensburgh in 2021.



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 Vice-county Recorder, vc99)

email: botany@opus44.co.uk

Photo credits*:

<i>View from Dumbarton Muir</i>	Grahame Jarvis, 26th July 2023
(Leafy lane)	Michael Philip, nowhere-in-particular, 25th August 2023
Ardlui ferry	Michael Philip, Ardlui, 5th August 2023
Cathy and Fragrant Orchid	Grahame Jarvis, north of Invergroin, 2nd July 2023
Ring Point	Michael Philip, RSPB Reserve, 30th August 2023
<i>Abutilon theophrasti</i>	Michael Philip, Helensburgh, 27th August 2021

* 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!