



Botanical Society
of Britain & Ireland

BSBI Annual Review
31 March 2024

BSBI: Who We Are and What We Do

The Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland is for everyone who is interested in the wild plants of Britain and Ireland. Since our inception in 1836, we have welcomed all botanists - professional and amateur, beginner and expert - and the Society remains the biggest and most active organisation devoted to the study of botany in Britain, Ireland, the Channel Isles and the Isle of Man.

BSBI's goals are to:

- build a diverse community of botanists to sustain and develop the skill base;
- provide high quality, impartial data and interpretation for research and to help address biodiversity loss and climate change; and
- disseminate information to drive a passion for plants.

BSBI has a long and influential publications history, including plant distribution Atlases and our series of identification Handbooks. Our research, training and outreach programmes benefit botanists across Britain and Ireland, whether beginners or experts. BSBI pioneers new approaches to data collection and distribution mapping, and has become one of the world's largest contributors of biological records. BSBI's distribution mapping projects record new plant arrivals and changes in the distributions of both native and non-native plants.

All these achievements are only possible thanks to our many members, whose records are validated by BSBI's network of around 200 County Recorders and almost 100 specialist taxonomic Referees, and to our voluntary officers, committee members and trustees, who are responsible for the governance of the Society.

With fifteen full-time or part-time staff members during the period under review, we have been able to provide effective support to our members and ensure efficient management of the Society and its finances.

This Annual Review includes messages and updates from many of these staff members and voluntary officers, telling you about our activities and achievements during 2023/24, starting with a message from BSBI President Micheline Sheehy Skeffington.

BSBI Staff:

<i>Julia Hanmer</i>	Chief Executive
<i>Kevin Walker</i>	Head of Science
<i>James Drever</i>	Data Support Officer (from Aug 2023)
<i>Gwynn Ellis</i>	Membership Secretary
<i>Julie Etherington</i>	Finance Manager
<i>Jen Farrar</i>	Botanical Skills Officer - Northern Ireland (from Oct 2023)
<i>Paul Green</i>	Ireland Officer (to Jun 2023)
<i>Matt Harding</i>	Scotland Officer
<i>James Harding-Morris</i>	Countries Manager
<i>Chantal Helm</i>	Training Coordinator
<i>Tom Humphrey</i>	Database Officer
<i>Bridget Keehan</i>	Ireland Officer (from Jun 2023)
<i>Louise Marsh</i>	Communications Officer
<i>Peter Stroh</i>	Scientific Officer
<i>Sarah Woods</i>	Fundraising and Engagement Manager

Message from the President

Enhancing diversity and inclusivity is a key aim of BSBI and work is ongoing to develop these on an individual and a regional basis.

Attending field meetings is a core activity and main attraction for BSBI members and the Annual Summer Meeting (ASM), held in a different jurisdiction each year, thus addresses one aspect of diversity. In May 2023, we hosted the ASM in Killarney. As it was soon after the *Plant Atlas 2020* launch, it got local press interest and some members of the public came as a result of hearing about it on air. Of the 90 people who attended, most were Irish, giving BSBI a real boost island-wide. Opened by Minister for Heritage Malcolm Noonan, much of it was run by National Parks & Wildlife Service and local County Recorders in the Killarney National Park, centred on its lakes, islands and woodlands, with excursions further afield to intact blanket bog and sand dune systems. Deemed a huge success, BSBI experts generously gave patient and detailed instruction on more difficult species. Above all, it was fun and we had good weather for the four days!

A new departure was the joint BSBI - Royal Entomological Society meeting at Daneway Banks, Gloucestershire. Home to the Large Blue butterfly, talks recounted its history and site management, followed by a hugely enjoyable outing on-site with many rare plants, as well as sightings of the butterfly in action.

We received funding under the Nature Networks Programme to launch a 'Priority Plants on SSSIs in Wales project. In Scotland, BSBI made a presentation about *Plant Atlas 2020* findings to Ministers and Members of the Scottish Parliament, and an associated parliamentary motion received cross-party support. Our Identiplant training course continued to expand to great demand, and plans are underway to roll it out across Britain and Ireland.

Michèle Sheehy Steffens

Yellow Flag Iris *Iris pseudacorus* in Co. Sligo (Eleanor Stamp)



BSBI Science and Data

Our members and recording networks, supported by BSBI staff and officers, continued to provide data of the highest quality, vital for achieving our scientific and conservation objectives. Our ongoing partnerships with other organisations have also helped us build robust networks, extend our reach and deepen our understanding of changes in the British and Irish flora

Following consultations with members and key partners, a new Science Strategy was developed and published, to guide our objectives, strategy and tactics for the coming years. Members continued to contribute plant records to targeted country level recording projects. Twelve new County Recorders were appointed, swelling the network to 208 and working alongside 91 taxonomic expert Referees, and several new recording groups and regional networks were set up. We also put in place enhanced support for data management, including developing documentation and user guidance for our Distribution Database on a new website and continuing to develop and test the new BSBI Recording App, ready to roll out in Summer 2024 and make available in app stores.

docs.bsbi.org

Building on *Plant Atlas 2020*

BSBI's third plant distribution atlas, *Plant Atlas 2020*, was published in March 2023 and the website plantatlas2020.org had attracted 686,872 pageviews by the end of March 2024. Since the launch, we have been working in partnership with Natural England and the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology to update the International Union for the Conservation of

Nature's threat status list for vascular plants, to guide conservation prioritisation. We aim to publish a new GB Red List, which compares trends between *Plant Atlas 2020* date classes, in March 2025. We also led on an update for plant taxa on the UK Species Inventory with the aim of ensuring smooth and efficient data-flows between different organisations and across data platforms.

bsbi.org/plant-atlas-2020

BSBI Distribution Database: members' access

The BSBI Database currently holds more than 56 million botanical occurrence records collected by our members and supporters. These records supported the recording and validation work for *Plant Atlas 2020*; they also provide external users with reliable data for academic research, education, conservation and land management. Systems and guidance were put in place to implement members' access to the Database in April 2024, with the aim of encouraging more recording amongst members and increasing the conservation, research and educational activities carried out by the Society and our partners throughout Britain and Ireland.

bsbi.org/maps-and-data

Botanical heatmaps

BSBI continued to build on the success of our botanical value maps and heatmaps, which guide land use decision making based on records of rare, threatened and indicator plants held in the BSBI Distribution Database and were developed in partnership with Natural England. Work is ongoing to develop an interactive app for practitioners and we are working with NatureScot to develop heatmaps in Scotland, and with National Parks and Wildlife Service to look into the feasibility of developing heatmaps in the Republic of Ireland.

National Plant Monitoring Scheme (NPMS)

BSBI continued to be an active partner in the scheme which measures long term changes in the abundance and diversity of plants.

BSBI sits on the Management Group, drawing out trends, helping with training, promotion and verification, and encouraging members to adopt squares to monitor.

bsbi.org/npms

Early Spider-orchid *Ophrys sphegodes* on the South Downs (Les Binns)



Building a diverse community of botanists to sustain and develop the skill base

2023/24 saw the first full year of BSBI coordinating both the Field Identification Skills Certificate (FISC) tests, the industry standard for assessing field plant identification skills, and Identiplant, the online tutor-led plant identification course. We also awarded 37 Training, Plant Study or Science & Research grants.

New procedures and policies were introduced for FISCs to ensure quality and consistency and in 2023/24 we broke all previous records, delivering 26 FISCs to 392 candidates; six new FISC Providers and seven new Assessors were recruited and work is ongoing to meet the growing demand for FISCs across Britain and Ireland.

201 students undertook Identiplant training in 2023, supported by 44 tutors. Extensive recruitment of tutors was then undertaken to increase capacity and a bespoke online learning platform was developed in-house to deliver the course. 2024's intake saw a record number (460) of applications, of which 292 students were accepted, supported by 66 tutors (32 of these were new tutors).

We reached out to the next generation of botanists and plant science students by supporting the Young Darwin Scholarship programme and the Gatsby Plant Science Summer School and then attended the finals

of Botanical University Challenge 2023, where we offered an exhibit about BSBI resources, contributed to panel discussions and workshops, led a plant ID walk and provided digital student membership of BSBI to competition quarter-finalists.

26 in-person or digital training sessions were offered during 2023/24, with workshops on urban plants, conifers, plant families, dandelions, brambles, sedges, rushes and grasses; two webinars and nine field training events were also held under the Aquatic Plant Project banner, thanks to funding from Ireland's National Parks & Wildlife Services.

Wherever possible, workshops and training sessions and talks given at online and hybrid events were recorded and uploaded to the BSBI YouTube channel; by the end of March 2024, the channel had attracted almost 4,000 subscribers and many of the webinars had been viewed thousands of times.

bsbi.org/training

Scarlet Pimpernel *Lysimachia arvensis* on Jersey (Alli Singleton)





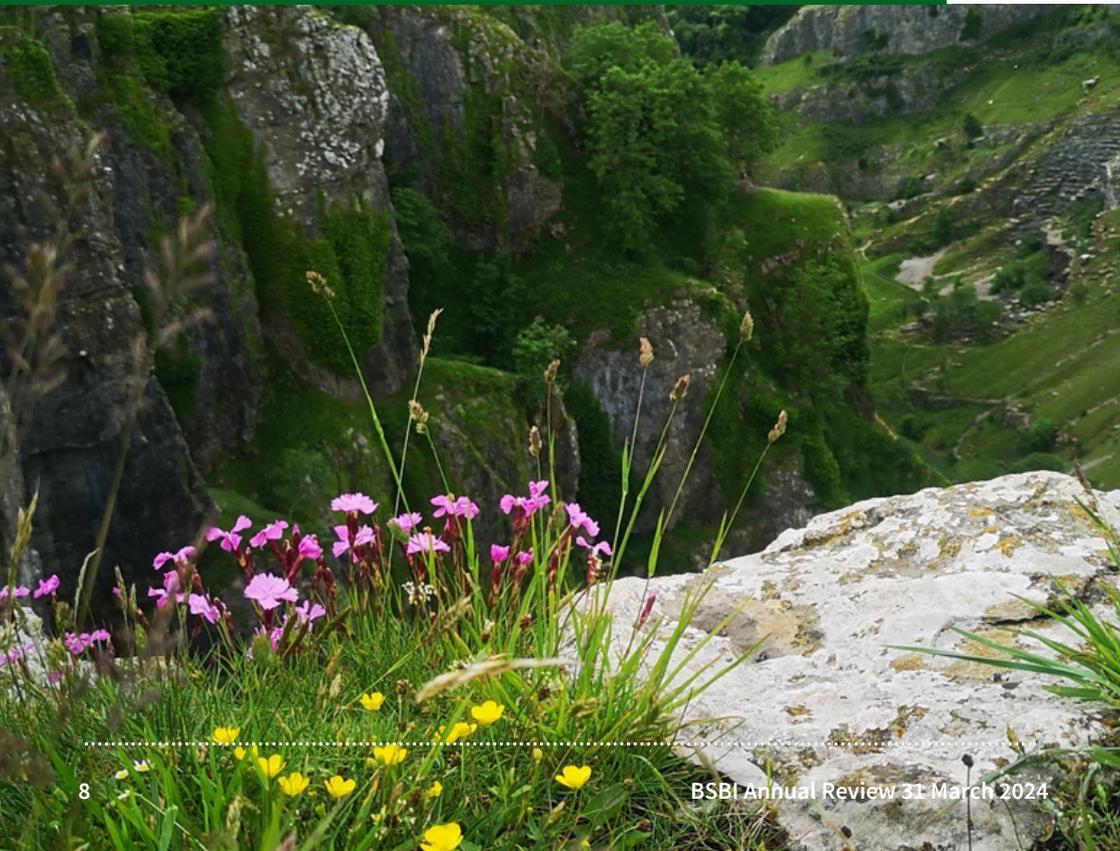
Driving a Passion for Plants

Botanists were once again able to enjoy a programme of national and local field meetings and indoor events across Britain and Ireland, augmented by some online events and with many talks recorded and subsequently uploaded to the BSBI YouTube channel.

In total, a record number of 53 field meetings and indoor events were held during the period under review, including field meetings aimed at beginner botanists; recording days from Donegal to Essex and from Devon to West Ross; a pilot event run jointly with the Royal Entomological Society, aimed at bringing together those interested in conservation management for both plants and invertebrates; events for intrepid botanists – examples include a survey of lakes in Co. Galway (chest waders advised)

and a week-long boat journey to gain records from the Barra islands in the Outer Hebrides; workshops, residential recording weeks and specialist training meetings targeted at both improver and expert botanists; and conferences in England, Scotland and the Republic of Ireland aimed at bringing together beginner and expert botanists from all backgrounds to share plant finds, to publicise the results of recent research, and to drive a passion for plants.

Cheddar Pink *Dianthus gratianopolitanus* in Somerset (Patricia Gilroy)



Spreading the Word

BSBI's local botany networks, national media contacts, outreach activities, website, YouTube channel and social media platforms helped us reach new audiences, attract new members and disseminate information to drive a passion for plants.

Media coverage of *Plant Atlas 2020*, launched to great acclaim in March 2023, continued during the period under review, with references to *Plant Atlas 2020* key findings in *The Guardian* and on the BBC website, articles on partner websites and in local newspapers, and a glowing review in *British Wildlife* magazine. BSBI has increasingly become the first port of call for print and broadcast media covering stories involving wild plants: our distribution maps and data were used in articles in *The Independent*, the *Daily Mail* and *Horticulture Week*; we advised the BBC Winterwatch team on filming locations and several County Recordors were interviewed by local newspapers and radio stations.

BSBI Countries Manager James Harding-Morris appeared on BBC Countryfile in May 2023 in a feature about a wild flower meadow; BSBI Ireland Officer Bridget Keehan was interviewed across Irish media outlets about the New Year Plant Hunt in Ireland; and Dr Kevin Walker, BSBI Head of Science, published an article about wildflower seed sowing in *Countryside Land Management* magazine and co-authored a paper published in *Nature*. Our network of local recording groups continued to flourish in 2023/24, with three new groups and one regional network founded; many counties ran local event programmes, publicised via their own county pages, blogs and social media accounts hosted by or accessible via the BSBI website.

The BSBI News & Views blog also continued to offer the botanical community across Britain and Ireland a chance to share the latest news about BSBI projects and publications, reports on national events and local activities, and links to plant ID resources.

bsbi.org/news-views

We also continued to build our social media profile: by the end of the period under review, we had seen an increase of 7% in followers across our social media platforms. More than 43,000 organisations and individuals were using the BSBI Twitter account to keep up with the latest botanical news from BSBI and to share plant photos and ID tips. We launched BSBI accounts on several new platforms – TikTok, Threads and Bluesky - and our Instagram account attracted more than 10,000 followers by the end of March 2024; all these platforms and our long-established Facebook pages helped us reach a wide range of different audiences and demographics.

twitter.com/BSBIbotany

facebook.com/BSBI2011 and

facebook.com/IrishSectionBSBI/

instagram.com/bsbibotany/

BSBI Website

Our website now features more than 400 pages, a separate digital archive of botanical publications and an ever-expanding 'members-only' area. The site attracted more than 1 million visits by more than

200,000 visitors during the period under review, with the Maps page remaining the most popular, although the New Year Plant landing page saw a 125% increase in traffic and the Field Identification Skills Certificate (FISC) page saw a 93% increase - a testament to the ever-increasing importance of these industry standard botanical skills tests.

New Year Plant Hunt

Our thirteenth New Year Plant Hunt was the most successful yet, attracting 3,336 plant-hunters from across Britain and Ireland – almost twice as many as our previous Hunt. Innovations to support this annual outreach event included a pre-registration facility, guidance on taking plant photographs to upload for identification via our recording app, and helpful digital spotter sheets. Plant hunters went on to submit 2,205 lists comprising 21,096 plant records of 629 wild or naturalised plant species or cultivars in bloom in the middle of winter. These data are adding to a growing dataset and providing us with a clearer picture of how our wild plants are responding to changing autumn and winter weather patterns.

bsbi.org/new-year-plant-hunt

Membership

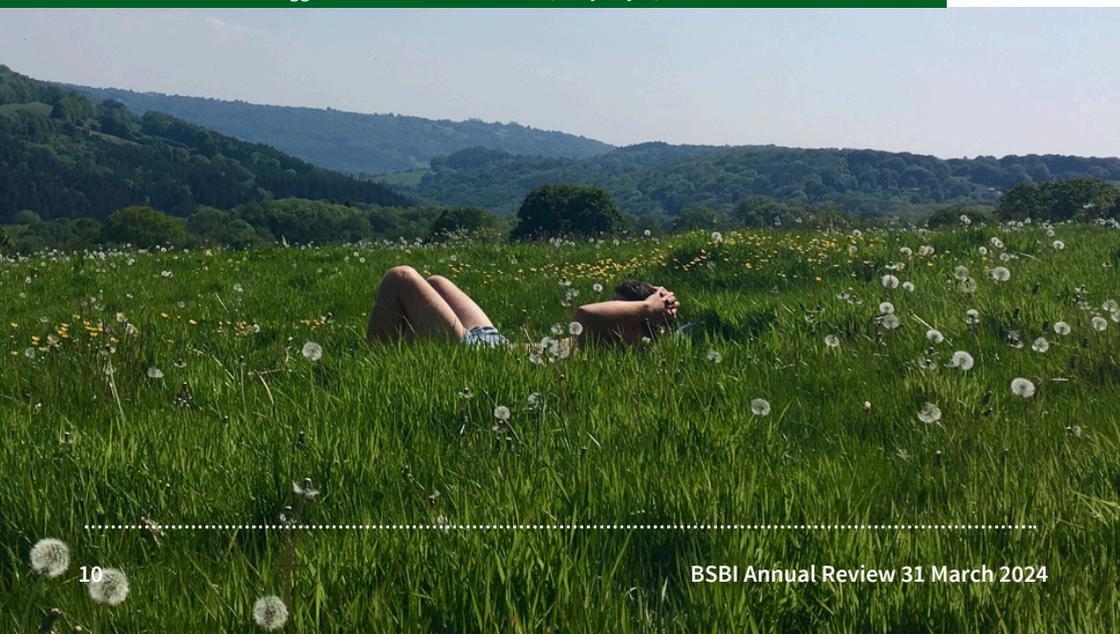
BSBI membership grew by 6% during the period under review, with 4,056 members by 31 March 2024. This represents an increase of more than 29% over the past three years, far outstripping the target set in the BSBI Strategic Plan to grow the membership by 10% over the period 2021/24.

BSBI staff, officers and members continued to work together to find new ways to engage with, inform and inspire botanists at all skill levels, and to expand the range of services available to members and supporters.

We are very grateful to the many volunteers across Britain and Ireland who contributed their time, expertise and enthusiasm to record plants in their local areas and to join in activities such as the New Year Plant Hunt and Wild Flower Hour, and who regularly promoted the society, and botany in general, via social media platforms.

bsbi.org/wildflower-hour

Dandelion *Taraxacum* agg. clocks in Monmouthshire (Holly Sayer)



BSBI Publications

BSBI's reputation and influence in botanical publications continued to grow following the publication in March 2023 of *Plant Atlas 2020* our third ground-breaking plant distribution atlas. Our series of highly respected Handbooks went digital and we saw ever-increasing audiences for our membership and online periodicals.

During the period under review, key findings from *Plant Atlas 2020* appeared across the print and broadcast media. Although no new BSBI Handbooks were published during the period under review, BSBI Handbooks Editor, Liz Kungu, worked behind the scenes to support the publication of Handbooks already in the pipeline, and to bring new titles on-stream, and our digital Handbooks proved very popular.

bsbi.org/handbooks

BSBI's online, Open Access, scientific journal *British & Irish Botany*, published 22 papers during the period under review. Prof Ian Denholm handed over the editorship to Dr Stuart Desjardins and the journal continued to disseminate the latest botanical research relevant to the study of the British and Irish flora at no cost to either authors or readers.

Under John Norton's editorship, our colourful newsletter *BSBI News* provided members with another platform for sharing the latest botanical news, while digital samplers of each issue acted as eye-catching advertisements for the benefits of membership. A digital subscription option for *BSBI News* and other periodicals – including the *Annual Review* and the *BSBI Yearbook* – made it possible for members to enjoy immediate access to the Society's periodicals portfolio while minimising the environmental impact of their membership. By the end of the period under review, more than 33% of members had opted in to this paperless format.

With two monthly electronic newsletters – one aimed at keeping all members, and any supporters who opt in, updated about BSBI's activities, projects, fundraising, news and events, and one targeted at the botanical recording community - and annual newsletters for England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, all available to view or download free of charge from the BSBI website, we believe that we are meeting the challenge of providing a portfolio of books and periodicals which will appeal to both BSBI members and the wider botanical community.

bsbi.org/periodicals



Financial Report 31 March 2024

BSBI’s 2024 Summarised Statement of Financial Activities (SOFA), Balance Sheet and Notes thereto appear on the following pages.

For the year under review, the Board is delighted to report Total Income of £818k (2023: £538k) a 52% increase vs 2023. Net Income is £174k (2023: Net Expenditure -£154k); an Operating Surplus of £121k plus investment gains £53k (2023: Operating Deficit -£84k plus investment losses -£70k). Net Assets at year-end were £1,008k (2023; £834k).

The below sets out the last few years of Operating Surpluses / (Deficits) on the General Fund:

Operating Surplus (Deficit) on the General Fund £000 *	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017
	120 *	(27)	3	(15)	(25)	(33)	(61)	(146)

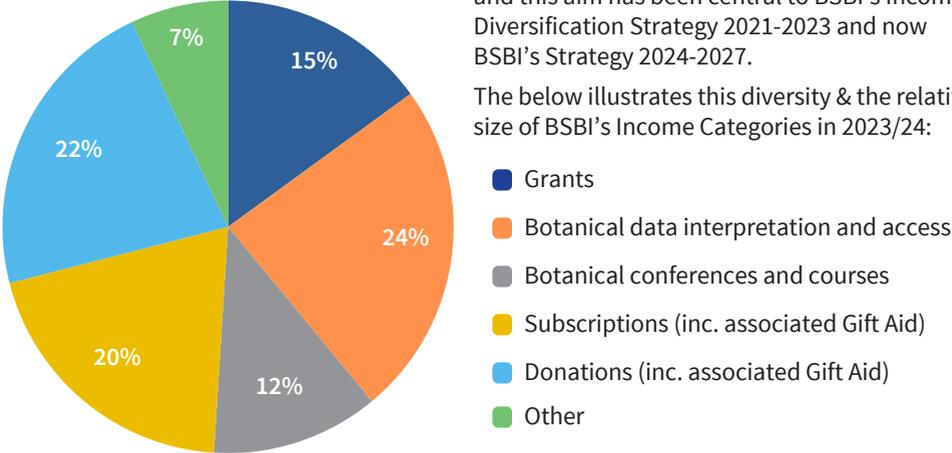
*This, together with the deficit of (£28k) on the Unrestricted Strategic Development Reserve, £29k surpluses on Restricted Reserves, altogether comprise the total net Operating Surplus of £121k as per the SOFA.

In Spring 2023, the Board set a 2023/24 Budget for a small Operating Surplus on the General Fund, so the £120k here exceeds expectations and this is thanks to a single, unusually large, donation of £120k from an individual who asked to remain anonymous.

Another key highlight was the first year of delivering the Field Identification Skills Certificate (FISC) and Identiplant, thereby creating two new income streams, with student demand outstripping all expectations and generating £70k revenue. This is visible in the large increase in Botanical Conferences, Courses & Education income reported overleaf (2024 £99k vs 2023 £31k).

In this Report last year, we examined income diversity. It is the hallmark of a healthy organisation to have several stable and diverse income categories (sources). This profile reduces the risk of a reduction in any one category threatening the future of an organisation and this aim has been central to BSBI’s Income Diversification Strategy 2021-2023 and now BSBI’s Strategy 2024-2027.

The below illustrates this diversity & the relative size of BSBI’s Income Categories in 2023/24:



At £137,831 (2023: £95,406), Expenditure on Raising Funds now includes Direct costs of member publications to sit with the Staff Costs of Membership already reported here. These costs of £39,907 (2023 - £38,058) were previously within Expenditure on Charitable Activities; Botanical Publications. This change improves transparency as all Membership costs are now visible in this single place.

The picture painted by simply examining the numbers here would be significantly lacking depth without mention of the immense value generated by BSBI's cohort of active members.

Voluntary contributions of members' time and expertise make a huge difference to what we can achieve in our work towards a world where wild plants thrive and are valued and understood.

The vast amount of time volunteered is inspirational and is central to the identity of BSBI and its reputation. Almost 11,000 days were volunteered in 2023/24, similar to the year before, which are valued at a huge £1.6M.

⋮ **11,000 days volunteered by members in 2023/24,**
⋮ **valued at a huge £1.6 million**

This Treasurer's Report is just a snapshot of the financial highlights of the year. For a more in-depth analysis, please take a look at BSBI's Annual Report and Accounts 2024.

Trustees take their responsibilities seriously and continually look ahead and scan the horizon, ensuring BSBI has the financial and other resources to thrive. This Report now ends on a high note about the future. In July 2024, Trustees were humbled to learn of a £250k legacy from a long standing, loyal member who is sadly missed. The Board is now carefully considering the opportunities this could unlock for BSBI's future, how to ensure its uses are fitting and the impact far reaching.

The Board manages its financial affairs and future sustainability with the support of its Finance Committee. The Board of Trustees has this year delegated authority for preparing this Report to the undersigned Trustees.

Dr Chris J Miles Chair of the BSBI
Board of Trustees

Miss K N Jones
Chair of the BSBI Finance Committee

Harebell *Campanula rotundifolia* in Bedfordshire (Richard Hollis)



Financial Report 31 March 2024

SUMMARISED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES (SOFA)	Year ended 31 March 2024 £	Year ended 31 March 2023 £
Incoming Resources		
<i>Voluntary Income</i>		
Subscriptions and Donations	340,161	220,314
Grants	123,166	89,632
Legacies	9,982	291
Investment Income	22,499	20,594
<i>Charitable Activities Income</i>		
Botanical Data Interpretation and Access	196,068	134,199
Botanical Conferences and Courses	99,109	31,368
Botanical Publications	17,598	17,769
Journal Support and Royalties	9,656	24,260
	818,239	538,427
Resources Expended		
<i>Cost of Generating Funds</i>		
Membership Stewardship, Fundraising, Publicity and Investment Management	137,831	95,406
<i>Charitable Activities Expenditure</i>		
Botanical Data Interpretation and Access and Grant Delivery	379,006	310,418
Botanical Conferences and Courses	73,310	34,825
Botanical Publications	9,814	92,931
Governance	97,100	98,886
	697,061	622,466
Net Income (Expenditure)		
Unrestricted Fund Net Income (Expenditure)	92,407	(82,986)
Restricted Fund Net Income (Expenditure)	28,771	(1,053)
Net Operating Income (Expenditure)	121,178	(84,039)
Gains (Losses) on Investments	53,265	(69,675)
Net Income (Expenditure)	174,443	(153,714)

Financial Report 31 March 2024

SUMMARISED BALANCE SHEET	Year ended 31 March 2024 £	Year ended 31 March 2023 £
Fixed Assets		
Investments at Market Value	729,190	694,839
Current Assets		
Stock	24,919	26,962
Debtors	150,971	62,562
Cash at Bank	401,293	276,029
	577,183	365,553
Liabilities		
Creditors	(297,505)	(225,967)
Net Assets	1,008,868	834,425
Funds		
Unrestricted Fund - General Fund	716,360	670,351
Unrestricted Fund - Strategic Development Fund	260,048	179,167
Restricted Funds	32,460	3,468
Total Funds	1,008,868	834,425

Notes to the Summarised Accounts

The Summarised Accounts presented here are not the full Statutory Accounts. The full statutory Annual Report and Accounts of the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland for the year ended 31 March 2024, which have been approved by the Board of Trustees and have been subject to statutory audit, will be filed with the Charity Regulators and at Companies House in the

Autumn. They may also be downloaded from the "About Us" page on the BSBI website and a paper copy can be supplied to any member upon request.

bsbi.org/about-bsbi

Thank You

BSBI gratefully acknowledges grants, donations and continued support from these individuals and organisations:

Biological Records Centre/ UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, Wallingford
Britford Bridge Charitable Trust
Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs
Environment Agency
Greenwings Wildlife Tours Ltd
Habitat Aid Ltd
Happy Porch
Joint Nature Conservation Committee
Josh Styles
Lynne Farrell
Mariposa Nature Tours
National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin, Dublin
National Botanic Gardens, Wales
National Lottery Heritage Fund
National Museums Northern Ireland
National Parks and Wildlife Service
Natural England
Natural History Museum, London
Natural History Society of Northumbria
Natural Resources Wales
NatureScot
Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh
The Reed Foundation

Thank you also to the many other unnamed individuals and organisations who have made donations, often anonymously: we are very grateful for all your support. For example, a generous anonymous donation this year has allowed us to put in place enhanced support

for the recording community and data management, including the roll out of the new recording app.

The Society also wishes to thank all those members who have served, both nationally and regionally, as officers, on committees, as editors and indexers, in leading and arranging meetings, events, training and skills assessments; as chairs and secretaries; and the many members who have participated in surveys, prepared reports, represented the Society at outreach events and promoted our work via social media. BSBI would especially like to thank our County Recorders and expert Referees, acknowledging the invaluable work they do and their huge contribution to BSBI's success.

Many of these members have served for very many years and, while this is only a selection, the Society notes the sad deaths during the period covered by this review of David Allen, B.J. Bonnard, Michael Braithwaite, Alec Bull, David Nicolle, Rob Randall, Alan Silverside and David Welch. Without the voluntary contributions of our members, the work of the Society would not have been possible.

Plant images used throughout this Review were submitted as entries to BSBI's annual Photographic Competition

bsbi.org/photographic-competition

Front cover: Yellow Saxifrage *Saxifraga aizoides* in Fisherfield (Bert Barnett)

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Registered Company No.:

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