January 2022 Sample Issue
See inside for a selection of articles from BSBI News no. 149 and details of how to join the BSBI. Members receive three print copies of BSBI News each year as part of the package of membership benefits.
BSBI News features regular articles on the identification of plants, whether common species or the most challenging taxa.

BEGINNER’S CORNER

Yellow-flowered trefoils and medicks – a guide to our commoner native species

JOHN NORTON

These five yellow-flowered native legumes all resemble drivers in their trifoliate leaves and creeping habit. All usually grow as annuals, especially in short turf and disturbed habitats. Although familiar to all botanists, they are a common source of confusion to beginners and even the more experienced. Here is a short guide to the main ID features and typical habitats. Photographs by the author.

Lesser Trefoil (Trifolium dubium). The commonest of the three trefoils and found throughout the whole of Britain and Ireland. Flowerheads are round (globular), less than 1 cm across, on a long stalks, usually with about 15–20 individual bright yellow flowers (each 3–4 mm long), but become poorly developed heads with only a few flowers, which make it identifiable with Lesser Trefoil. Leaves are glabrous (hairless) above or may have a few hairs around the margins or underneath. The middle leaflet does not have a green tooth at the apex like Black Medick, but there may be a tiny bristle. Occurs in various types of neutral to mildly acidic short grassland, which can be dry, or water-logged, and in disturbed habitats and sometimes urban environments.

Least Trefoil (Trifolium micranthum). Similar to Lesser Trefoil but has only a few (2–4) deeper yellow flowers, which are distinctly smaller (1.5–3 mm long), in clustered (not globose) heads. As the name implies a truly diminutive species which rarely grows more than a couple of centimetres tall. Favours well grazed pony fields and dry acid grassland. Common in lowland areas but mainly a coastal plant in Scotland and Ireland.

The difficult plant problem

TIM RICH

We have a problem. There are lots of ‘difficult’ vascular plants in Britain but there are very few botanists able to identify them. The scale of the problem is shown in Table 1; taking our total flora as about 2000 species, about 46% are difficult to identify in one way or another. There are very few national experts and those we do have are amateurs, retired or both and there currently no taxonomists specialising in the British flora employed in any of our museums or universities. So if you want to identify difficult plants, contribute to biodiversity conservation or find new species, you will probably have to do it yourself. In this article I will set out some approaches for dealing with difficult plant groups, with particular reference to dandelions Taraxacum.

There are many reasons why particular plant groups may be difficult to identify. Hybridisation is widespread in some groups (e.g. willows Salix) and there may be little agreement on when a species is part of the normal spectrum in a species or due to misinterpretation from one or more relative, let alone where to draw the lines between the resulting taxa.

Dandelion heaven, Wolvies Newton 2019. Tim Rich

Some groups are morphologically highly reduced, resulting in few identification characters being available (e.g. glassworts Salicornia or dandelions Taraxacum) whilst in others features only available at specific times of year are needed, such as spring leaves in dandelions. Some species are very variable, either geographically (e.g. smooth sow-thistle Sonchus oleraceus) or environmentally (e.g. leaves of brambles Rubus in shaded woodlands can look very different to the more typical ones in open habitats) or both. These may be unresolved problems where evolution is ongoing, and the taxonomic treatments have not yet caught up with what is actually happening (e.g. sea-cabbage Crambe maritima. The groups with a large number of species which look superficially similar (such as umbellifers or crucifers) can result in keys having to use both flower and fruit characters, and specimens are often found without one or the other. Finally, some taxa reproduce asexually (i.e. as direct clones of the mother) resulting in a
Some interesting plant records from a Winchester allotment

TRISTAN NORTON

In mid-September 2021 I paid a visit to Highbury Community Allotments in Winchester, a long-established allotment site in the city just a few tens of metres inside the c.11 South Hampshire boundary. I had kindly been granted access by the Allotment Committee, having asked if I might have a look for interesting plant species. Allotments are often home to some interesting native species usually lost from the wider farmed landscape and I thought that it was well worth a look, especially on the bare, rich soils of the mid-Hampshire chalk. My lunch was right, and I was not to be disappointed.

Like many older allotments (about 120 years old in this case), the site is a varied mix of plots growing vegetables, fruits and flowers from all corners of the globe. It’s fair to say that in common with all the allotment sites I’ve visited, there is a high degree of variability in the ‘weediness’ of plots, ranging from exceptionally neat and tidy to wholly overgrown. As ever in life, there is a middle way sweet-spot, and it is often the tended but not-too-tidy plots that yield the best botanical interest.

I was soon noting some interesting species such as Wood’s Stout (Minuartia squamosa) locally quite frequent, and also Round-leaved Fleabane (Erigeron annuus) and Sharp-leaved Fleabane (E. altissima), so things were looking good for something even more interesting turning up. I’d spent about a half-hour looking around before walking past a green plastic ‘Barnes Bag.’ The front was slightly unpacked and I happened to glance inside and spot a large ramping-fumitory. The inflorescences were large, pinkish-white and with recurved pedicels – immediately though it might be White Ramping-Fumitory (Fumaria capreiformis), a species I was reasonably familiar with, having studied a recently-discovered population from Kings Worthy just outside Winchester. On closer inspection this plant didn’t look quite right; the sepals were not obviously large and notched as in F. capreiformis but

Ginggioidium napata (Lesser Galium), Winchester, South Hampshire (loc. 11), September 2021. Photographs by the author.

An exploration of orchid records in the BSBI database in four regions of the British Isles

DAVE TRUDGILL

This article uses the BSBI Distribution Database (BDD) to explore the changing status of eighteen species of orchids, all of which occur in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland. This was done for four periods from 1886, 1936, 1986 and 2006. The aim is to look at whether these species have been increasing, decreasing, or remaining static. In some, such as the Spotted Orchid, there has been an overall reduction, whereas in the Twayblades, the data were less clear. In the case of the Lesser Butterfly Orchid, there is no doubt that the data are based on a much larger sample size, in which a species were included in the earlier period, but in the later period were no longer included. In the case of the Common Spotted Orchid, the data are based on a much larger sample size, in which a species were included in the earlier period, but in the later period were no longer included.

Lesser Butterfly and Pyramidal orchids, Pentire, Cornwall. Dave Trudgill

An historic herbarium: what can it tell us about the changing flora of Britain in the 20th and 21st centuries?

RICHARD G. JEFFERSON

Herbarium sheet of Phleum arenarium (Sand Cocksfoot) collected by Peter Jeffers from Llandudno, N. Wales, 2 June 1940.

Over the last eight decades, the native flora of Great Britain has undergone substantial change with some species extinctions but in the herbarium was collated and documented by the author prior to donation to the Natural History Museum, London (BM). This provided
The 'Adventives and Aliens' section features vice-county roundups of recent discoveries of escaped and naturalised plants, plus other articles on non-native species.

**ADVENTIVES AND ALIENS**

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Compiled by Matthew Berry


V.c. 83 (Midlothian) Urban carthusianum, Medipan (NT 2320131), 13/6/2021, R L Milne: one plant on side of road near other species e.g. *Urbania longiflora*, Common Nettle, and *Catenaria angulata* (Hemlock), Whitehall Road. New to v.c. 83. Since 2015: 365.

V.c. 94 (Banff) *Rubus nepalensis* (Hook.f.) Kunze: a previously unrecorded Bramble in the UK

GRAHAM LAVENDER & ROB RANDALL

*Rubus nepalensis* (Hook.f.) Kunze: a previously unrecorded Bramble in the UK

The purpose of this article is to draw attention to the first record in the UK, for *Rubus nepalensis* in the wild, a previously Bramble without prickers or thorns and attributable to subgenus Dolichandrastrum, which currently has only one entry; *Rubus brambles* (Sect. 1999).

*Rubus nepalensis* is distinguished from other Rubus species by its lighter trifoliate leaves, abundant purple stem tendrils and entire stipules. *Rubus brambles* is a more robust plant with simple leaves, which are usually darker green, red blush-brown and bicolorate stipules.

*Rubus nepalensis* was found on the east bank of Hovilstone Coomb stream under oak canopy, covering some 6 x 4 square metres with a maximum possible, given that rhododendrons are known to have been introduced to the area from Nepal in the 1940s, that it may have been accidentally introduced with them.

Currently *Rubus nepalensis* is not in the DDBs although a request has been made and the purpose of this article is to seek out further records of this potentially invasive Bramble.

References


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