1. Introduction to collecting and identifying dandelions. BSBI 2018
• Bored of the usual spring flowers and want something to do in April?

• Writing a county flora?

• Want to find new species and see things nobody else has seen?

• Want to pretend you are a credible botanist?

• ...then dandelions are for you!
Pros

• It’s a challenge
• Find new things
• See things nobody else sees
• Have an impact

Cons

• 1 manic month, many hours changing drying papers
• Only 50-200 collections/yr
• Confirmation can take months
• Fresh plants do not look like herbarium specimens
• 3-5 yrs to become proficient
• Everybody thinks you are mad
Tim’s experience in Cardiff

began looking at local species in Cardiff - amazed at the diversity

• 8 species in garden
• 11 on Pantmawr A470 verges + 1 ‘new’ species
• 14 species on lawns of NMW
• 110+ in Cardiff with 2 new taxa

• Despite all material being named by AJR still takes a lot of time to learn, and each year seem to forget what learned last year…
Resources:

1. John Richards!

40 yrs studying dandelions (amongst many other things!), world expert, fantastic knowledge

John demonstrating *Taraxacum* on BSBI Scottish *Taraxacum* workshop, May 2013
Essential, but hard to use or get answer from without experience…
New photographic guides (Plant Crib 3, as free downloads on BSBI website)

• Sections **Celtica**, **Erythrosperma**, **Hamata**, **Naevosa**, **Palustria**, **Spectabilia** and **Ruderalia**

• Have adapted these to Ireland, but as very under-recorded be careful!
Resources

3: Herbaria

• Welsh National Herbarium
  (National Taraxacum collection, 6200+ specimens of 560 species)
• Oxford University, Natural History Museum London, Edinburgh also have reasonable collections
• unsure of anything significant in Ireland?
  (Declan’s material in DBN)
Resources 4:

- On-line pictures
- iSpot

Be very careful...
Online computer keys
• tried developing an online Bayesian computer key to Section *Erythrosperma* using data in handbook in 2011
• trials showed little success, not released

Example of Bayesian computer key; manual keys still give better results!
Resources 5:

- Pictures

Pedersen Danish pictures

John pictures (many contributors)
Resources

6: *Taraxacum* database

- helps to have some idea of what is around and what is common, but not that much!
- Ireland very under-recorded so little use

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<th>Key</th>
<th>Species</th>
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</table>
Number of records by VC in National Database (courtesy Bert Reid 2012)
*Taraxacum* database 2017, species diversity
Resources

7: Cultivation

Can be grown, may or may not look like wild plants

Les Tucker’s buckets

Our Royal Horticultural Society show exhibit Cardiff

102+ Dandelions in Cardiff ... – how many in your garden?
Be warned, plants in cultivation can look very different to those in the wild

Wild, Ben Lawers (1050 m)  
Cultivated (Les Tucker)

*T. cymbifolium*
General advice:

1. Have clear idea of what you want to do (learn them all, learn some, ‘stamp collect’ for flora)

2. Come on field training course to learn art of Taraxacology and how to interpret characters

3. Get to know few local ones and build up knowledge over time

4. Do it properly
   - Collect plants
   - Take photographs
   - Make notes
Advice: Collecting

• Visit range of sites and spend time looking for different things
• Collect only good material in right season
• Do not collect everything!
• Keep each plant separate
• Take field photos, and link them to specimens
• For some groups it helps to have ripe seeds
Things to note when fresh

- Petiole colour (at base and outside) of outer and inner leaves
- Presence of spots on leaves
- Interlobe blotching
- Midrib colours
- Size, shape, coloration of outer bracts of mature buds
- Capitulum width (if fully opened)
- Ligule strip colour
- Style colour
- Presence of pollen
- Write on label or post-it or attach to material
T. subericinum

In all probability this material refers to a new and very distinctive member of section Culcina. Its nearest relative is undoubtedly T. punctata CC Haworth, but that species has less abruptly acute end-lobs and no big teeth, and larger erect heads. Whether this species should be described depends on whether it can be found in a number of localities over a reasonable area. It should be collected again and searched for in that part of Devon.

Photos to take when fresh

- Mature buds from side

- Can also do flowers at same time
• Several outer and inner leaves (heterophylly)
• Petiole colour

Photos can be printed (best) and put with specimens or put on cd
Advice: collect a good specimen

• Cut them at top of root
• Strip down to 8-10 leaves showing inner to outer petioles, with buds and flowers, notes and label, photos
• Dry quickly to retain colour
Drying quickly: in an ideal world…

- Plants in flimsies
- Flimsies in drying paper changed every day
- Corrugated cardboard between drying paper to help with air circulation
- Sprung-loaded press to keep pressure on shrinking plants

Drying oven with air circulating, 30 degrees
In a more realistic world…
What makes a bad specimen?

Too many leaves, slow drying, no notes
Visit different habitats

*T. lamprophyllum* – allotments

*T. angustisquameum* – lawns

*T. ekmanii* – verges

*T. britannicum* – paving slabs

*T. fulviforme* – gravel
It can still be a daunting task!

“That’s half a field collected….”