

BSBI eNews – September 2016

From Jim McIntosh, Senior Country Officer, jim.mcintosh@bsbi.org

BSBI Recorders' Conference 2016

Seventy four members enjoyed a very interesting [programme](#) of talks, workshops and field meetings at the BSBI Recorders' Conference in Shrewsbury over the long weekend of 2nd-4th September. There are short reports [here](#) and [here](#), and speakers' PowerPoints will soon be posted [here](#)!

[Louise Marsh](#), BSBI Communications Officer

BSBI Field Meetings

The 2016 field season is beginning to wind down, although there are quite a few meetings still to take place (thank you to all who have held one), but it is time to begin thinking about plans for next year. If you have ideas for a field meeting, whether to show a nice local site to a wider group of BSBI members, to coach beginners in wildflower identification, to teach the finer points of a specific group, or to make records for Atlas 2020 or your own Flora, do let me or your country field secretary have the provisional details as soon as possible. Ideally I'll need dates and locations for your meeting by mid-November so that a list is available at the AEM at Wallingford on 26th November and then on the website, with full details by early December to go in the Yearbook. For information, the 2017 ASM is provisionally being planned for early June at a venue in Flintshire. There are helpful suggestions for field meetings' leaders on the [Field Meetings page](#). This page also has a diary (summary) of meetings, which I update as information is sent to me. Enjoy your autumn excursions!

[Jonathan Shanklin](#), BSBI Hon. Field Secretary

Arable Weeds

Arable weeds are fascinating! Many of them have become quite rare as a result of modern farming practice and are now Red Data Listed. However I wonder if they are under recorded as some are infrequently encountered and easy to overlook – particularly in Ireland and peripheral areas of the UK? It helps to know where and when to look. Late summer is quite a good time. I used to recommend folk look for swede (aka turnip in Scotland) fields but these are getting pretty rare. So instead look in corners of potato fields that are too awkward for farmers to get big machines into, or along end-rigs and gaps in fields where the crops are being grown under plastic netting. Where such fields don't exist or there is little tillage, you will have to be very opportunistic. Stop and record whenever you see disturbed weedy ground associated with road or construction works!

Over the past few years I've had fun recording just about every weedy field I've chanced upon in Mid-Perthshire. It has been a revelation! I've recorded species I'd previously rarely seen in my VC, like *Persicaria lapathifolia* (Pale Persicaria), *Stachys arvensis* (Field Woundwort), *Matricaria chamomilla* (Scented Mayweed) and *Erysimum cheiranthoides* (Treacle Mustard). And it's very satisfying that many of the records update ancient dots in the Atlas.

[Jim McIntosh](#), BSBI Scottish Officer

***Anthemis* (Chamomile)**

To tie in with Jim's note about recording arable weeds, I thought I'd share my recent experience attempting to differentiate *Anthemis austriaca* (Austrian Chamomile) and *A. arvensis* (Corn Chamomile) in the field, with the former now often found in sown 'wildflower' arable margins. I had not (knowingly) seen *A. austriaca* until this year, but since mid-July I've found it in seven monads. The differences between the two species are really quite



straightforward when ripe achenes are present - laterally compressed with very faint, hardly discernible ribbing in *A. austriaca*, versus no lateral compression and obvious ribs for *A. arvensis* - but of course plants are often found in flower when this character is not usable. Although it is certainly not advisable to record a species unless you are sure of its identification, the look of both plants is really quite different, with *A. austriaca* having regularly pinnate leaves that look very neat (see photo), compared with the much more irregularly pinnate leaves of *A. arvensis*, which give it a slightly 'messier' appearance. Both plants have leaves with a strong, sweet smell, although this character is rather subjective – one of my daughters thought the smell was lovely and aromatic, the other thought it smelt foetid (I can't repeat here her exact words!). It's advisable to get familiar with both species using the achene character, and now is a good time to do so, especially for *A. austriaca* if your local farmer sows his margins with seed of dubious origin.

[Peter Stroh](#), BSBI Scientific Officer

Rare Arable Flowers

The [Centre for Ecology & Hydrology](#) (CEH) has just launched a new Smartphone app called "[Rare Arable Flowers](#)" for identifying arable weed species. It is aimed primarily at farmers and landowners with no botanical skills, but who would like to be able to identify arable weeds growing on their land, especially if they are in stewardship schemes. CEH has asked if any BSBI botanists would like to test the app and report back to them. More details on BSBI News & Views [here](#).

[Louise Marsh](#), BSBI Communications Officer

Smartphone App for making emergency records

If you are caught short in the field without notepad, pen and GPS, there is a very handy app which allows you to make a record, complete with date and grid ref: "GB Grid Ref Compass" or "Irish Grid Ref Compass". Simply type in the species name, wait a few seconds until the accuracy increases to \pm 5 metres then text, email or tweet the record. I send them to myself. No phone signal is required to make the record; if there is no signal the message will be sent when you next get reception. You may wish to switch your phone's auto-correction off as it tends to mangle scientific species names!

[Jim McIntosh](#), BSBI Scottish Officer

The detectability of plants

At this time of year I'm always struck by the number of species I've missed on previous visits to a site, even in places that I visit regularly near to home. One of the main reasons for these omissions is detectability. When we produce maps or carry out analyses of change we make the assumption that all species are equally detectable. But they are not, and for a whole host of reasons. Probably the most important is phenology – in our temperate climate, species become more or less obvious with time. But there are other traits which have a bearing on detectability, including the size and colour of the inflorescence, plant height, life history, typical abundance (gregariousness), taxonomic complexity (ease of identification) and whether the habitat is accessible or not. These traits combine what has often been termed 'visual apparency'. Some of these characters have been calculated for British butterflies to help interpret trends over time, but to the best of our knowledge nothing has been attempted for plants, certainly not in the UK and possibly not Europe. Clearly, having an understanding of the detectability of plants will help enormously with interpretation of trends for the next atlas (2020), and so Pete Stroh and I are working on a simple method for scoring all British and Irish species. We hope to enlist your help in developing this scheme in due course but in the meantime please get in touch if it is something you are interested in being involved with or simply wish to relay views you would like us to consider.

[Kevin Walker](#), BSBI Head of Science

Instant MapMate to DDb synchronisation

MapMate synch files sent to BSBI's hub are now added to the BSBI Database within 20 minutes. As a one-off this is a good opportunity to make sure that the BSBI's copy of your records is absolutely up-to-date and that none has gone missing. Unless you have already sent us a full refresh within the past month (in which case thank you!), **please could all recorders who use MapMate reset your synch with the BSBI hub?** This is [quick and simple to do](#), but if you need help then let us know.

After that, continue to send synch files to the hub as usual, using the normal MapMate file transfer process. Please send updates regularly and frequently, ideally every time that you enter a new batch of records.

The new synch process appears to be working well and should make the process more robust and convenient, with clearer feedback that your data has arrived. I'm grateful for Bob Ellis' help in making the transition to the new system so seamless and thanks are also due to Mark Yates at MapMate for allowing us to change the way that we receive files from MapMate.

[Tom Humphrey](#), BSBI Database Officer

Making best use of the DDb's My County survey coverage reports

Most VCRs are probably already familiar with the [DDb's 'My County' summary pages](#). If not, then please have a look as there's lots of useful information there.

The report pages have three tabs. The third tab 'Atlas 2020 Survey Coverage' includes maps of recording coverage and a table that summarises how completely each grid-square in your county has been re-surveyed since the last atlas. We hope that the tool will be useful for planning your recording. To make the report more relevant to local conditions it's usually worth modifying the

recording thresholds (number of target species and re-find rate) using the form above the table. It may be useful to tick the box marked "Include count of post-2000 species finds when assessing survey coverage". This adds-on any newly found species not recorded before 2000 to the totals – which will boost the reported survey coverage and should better reflect your recording effort.

Also useful and sometimes overlooked are the links from the table to species lists for each grid-square. In common with other DDb search result pages, linked items in the table (shown as blue, underlined text) can be clicked to expose the associated details.

[Tom Humphrey](#), BSBI Database Officer

The Hybrid Flora of the British Isles

The Hybrid Flora of the British Isles has just been short-listed for this year's Marsh Book Award. More info [here](#) and congratulations to co-authors Clive Stace, Chris Preston and David Pearman!

[Louise Marsh](#), BSBI Communications Officer

BSBI News & Views

County Recorders and Referees were featured on [BSBI News & Views](#) last month, with reports from VCRs in [Devon](#) and [West Cork](#); coverage of residential recording meetings on [Shetland](#) and in the [Outer Hebrides](#), including [Tim Rich's visit](#) to collect Hawkweed seeds for the Millenium Seed Bank; and a post about [consulting a referee](#), which aims to promote our amazing network of 186 plant referees without revealing any names or contact details, as access to referees is one of *the* main perks of BSBI membership!

[Louise Marsh](#), BSBI Communications Officer

BSBI eNews

The current and recent back issues of BSBI *eNews* are now available on the [Publications](#) page of the BSBI website – and there is even a piece about that in BSBI News & Views [here](#). An email with a link to BSBI *eNews* is circulated to BSBI Recorders, Referees, Staff and Committee members. Please feel free to forward it to anyone who you think would be interested. I'd welcome short contributions from anyone on topics of interest and relevance to fellow readers. It is generally published on the 1st of each month so contributions should ideally arrive around the 21st of the preceding month. Please send them to me. I'd also be pleased to have any comments or corrections to BSBI *eNews*.

Let me know if you'd prefer not to receive the BSBI *eNews* email, or would like me to use another email address.

[Jim McIntosh](#), BSBI Scottish Officer