



BSBI New Year Plant Hunt 2017: more participants but fewer wildflowers found in bloom.

The results are in for BSBI's sixth New Year Plant Hunt, when plant-lovers across Britain and Ireland head out to see what is flowering in their local patch. More people took part this year than ever before, hunting for up to three hours between 1st and 4th January, but fewer wild or naturalised plants were recorded in bloom¹ compared to last year:

- A total of 7,123 records of plants in bloom across Britain and Ireland.
- 492 different species were recorded, compared to 611 last year and 366 in 2015.
- More than 400 lists compiled by individuals, families and botanical recording groups.
- Plant hunters joined in from the Channel Isles to Orkney, from Donegal to Norfolk, and across Ireland.

As expected, the milder south and west of Britain and Ireland had the highest numbers of species in flower - 106 in West Cornwall – but nowhere near last year's top total of 162 recorded in Berkshire.

BSBI's Head of Science Dr Kevin Walker² has analysed this year's results³ and compared them with those from previous years. He said "People found significantly fewer species in bloom this year, an average of 15.5, compared to at least 20 in previous years. This seems to be the result of lower temperatures in the last few months of 2016 but interestingly, this difference was much less marked for non-native species".

The main findings were:

- 58% of species were 'Autumn Stragglers' like Yarrow, Ragwort and Hogweed that had carried on flowering.
- Only 15% were 'Springtime Specialists' like Primrose and Lesser Celandine, so there is no indication of an early spring. This proportion is similar to previous years.
- The top five species were Daisy, Groundsel, Dandelion, Annual Meadow-grass, and Gorse – almost identical to previous years and all (native) plants we would expect to be flowering at this time of year.

46% of species were non-natives. This includes plants from warmer climates that have escaped from gardens or cultivation and become naturalised in the wild. Some are able to extend their flowering into the winter months while others - such as Winter Heliotrope, recorded in a quarter of this year's New Year Plant Hunt lists - can be expected to bloom at this time of year.

As in previous years, urban areas tended to have more non-native species in flower than rural areas, as there are more sheltered and disturbed places with warm microclimates where alien plants can thrive.

Kevin said "Further work is required before we can be certain about the causes of these unseasonal events but the New Year Plant Hunt results are already helping us build up a clearer, up-to-date picture of what's going on".

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The Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland (BSBI) is the leading society promoting the study, understanding and enjoyment of wild plants in Britain and Ireland. Founded in 1836, we are now one of the world's largest contributors of biological records, many collected by our members, both amateur and professional botanists, who benefit from our research, training and outreach programmes.

Notes:

1. The New Year Plant Hunt website has an interactive map showing where plants were recorded; click to view individual lists: <https://nyph.bsbi.org/>

2. Dr Kevin Walker is BSBI's Head of Science and conducted the New Year Plant Hunt analysis. Kevin is available for interview on 23rd or 24th January:

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3. To download Kevin's analysis, and for New Year Plant Hunt 2017 blogposts, images and social media, please visit: <http://bsbi.org/new-year-plant-hunt>

Please contact Louise Marsh to request images at higher resolution.