



BSBI New Year Plant Hunt 2015: results

The results are in for BSBI's fourth New Year Plant Hunt, when wildflower enthusiasts across Britain and Ireland head out over the holidays to see what is in bloom in their local patch. We combine this traditional winter activity with 21st century technology and use Twitter, Facebook and email to share photographs and observations, and we encourage people to get in touch if they need help in identifying a plant.

Dr Tim Rich¹, Plant Hunt co-founder, said "With 2014 being the warmest year on record, we were expecting lots of wild flowers still to be in bloom over New Year. What took us all by surprise was quite how many people were happy to go out and look for them!" Plant lovers spent up to three hours between 1st and 4th January hunting for wild plants in flower and we'd like to say a huge thank you to all of them for contributing to these amazing results:

- A total of 2,908 records of plants in flower from across Britain and Ireland.
- We received 143 lists - around half of them contained 20 or more plants in flower.
- A stunning 368 different species were recorded in flower.

Tim said "368 species in flower is an unprecedented 15% of the flowering plants in Britain and Ireland: the books suggest there should only be 20-30 species in flower. The most commonly recorded plants were Daisy and Dandelion, each of which was recorded in 115 lists (75%). However, only 12 (3%) species were recorded in more than half of the lists, and most were only rarely found in flower: 160 (43%) species were only recorded in flower once, and 60 (16%) were only recorded twice. It was quite varied from site to site."

"As expected, the mild south and west of Britain had the highest numbers of species still in flower, but we also had lists of over 50 species from the east and north of England, and an amazing 39 flowering in Edinburgh. We thought that the snow and hard frosts before Christmas would have finished most flowering in the north but it seems not to be the case (tough lot, those northerners!). In terms of absolute numbers, Cardiff won (it was joint winner last year) with 71 species in flower and Cornwall came second with 70 species in flower".

Ryan Clark², who co-ordinated the New Year Plant Hunt this year, said "It was astonishing to see so many records flooding in, from Guernsey to the Moray Firth and Norfolk to Donegal. 21 of the lists were from Ireland, and these had consistently high numbers of plants in flower too, with the average of about 20 – this was almost exactly on a par with Britain. The highest count in Ireland was 40

species flowering on Bull Island, in Dublin Bay, by BSBI's Irish Officer Maria Long and fellow botanists. The west of Ireland also fared well, with Strawberry Tree in flower near Killarney, Co. Kerry".

Ryan analysed the records to see which plants were growing where. He said "As in previous years, it was clear that urban areas tended to have more species in flower than rural areas. This is to be expected: there are more sheltered corners and disturbed ground with wild flowers with a short life cycle and high seed production (you won't catch us calling them weeds!) and plants spreading out from gardens. "

"Around one third of the plants in flower proved to be species not native to Britain and Ireland, which may have escaped from gardens or cultivation. Plants from warmer climates may be continuing to flower in the mild autumn weather before winter frosts knock them back."

Do the numbers of plants in flower this New Year indicate an early spring? Tim and Ryan concluded "Sadly, there does not seem to be any real indication of an early spring, although a few spring-flowering species like Lesser Celandine were quite widely recorded. Only 5 % of the species recorded were spring-flowering native specialists, such as Dog's Mercury, and half of the records of spring flowering plants were from just three species: Hazel, Lesser Celandine and Primrose."

Dr Sarah Whild³, who co-founded the Plant Hunt with Tim in 2012, said "The total of 368 wild plants in flower this year is much higher than the 222 recorded over the 2014 New Year, mainly due to the increase in the number of botanists looking for them! I'm delighted to see the Plant Hunt blossoming and even inspiring other countries to follow suit, with The Netherlands launching their own Plant Hunt⁴ this year!"

ENDS

Contact Louise Marsh, BSBI Publicity & Outreach Officer, for further information.

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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. Dr Tim Rich is a consultant ecologist, author of many handbooks and botanical papers and co-founder of the New Year Plant Hunt. Tim is available for interview on:

Email: tim_rich@sky.com

Mobile: 077 9962 0035

2. Ryan Clark is a BSBI member/Garden Bioblitz co-founder who volunteered to co-ordinate this New Year Plant Hunt.

3. Dr Sarah Whild is Chair of BSBI Training & Education Committee, Senior Lecturer in Plant Ecology at Manchester Metropolitan University and co-founder of the New Year Plant Hunt.

4. More information about Plantenjacht, the Netherlands version of the New Year Plant Hunt, here: <http://www.floron.nl/Plantenjacht>

We also received enquiries from botanists in Germany and USA keen to see similar events in their own countries.

5. A sample of our Plant Hunt images can be seen here: <https://twitter.com/search?q=%23newyearplanthunt&src=typd>

Please contact Louise Marsh to request images at higher resolution.

6. Plant Hunt records and images posted to the BSBI Facebook page are here: <https://www.facebook.com/BSBI2011>

7. Daily reports on the Plant Hunt are here on the BSBI News & Views blog: <http://bsbipublicity.blogspot.co.uk/>