



Botanical Society of the British Isles  
Scottish Officer Project  
2009/10 Annual Report

Jim McIntosh, November 2010



**SCOTTISH  
NATURAL  
HERITAGE**



## Introduction

I can hardly believe I've been BSBI Scottish Officer for 6 years! It has been great fun - but hard work. It is very satisfying to see major projects coming to fruition – like the Computerisation Project and the current cycle of Site Condition Monitoring. We organised one of the most ambitious field meeting programs ever in 2010 and it was very rewarding to see it so well subscribed. After recent recruitment work, it is also pleasing that there are no vacancies in the Scottish Recorder network at present, although I'm sure that is only a temporary state of affairs!

Of course none of this could have been achieved without the help of all the BSBI committee and ordinary members, volunteers and contractors involved. Thanks are due to them and to our partners and especially to Scottish Natural Heritage and the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh.



As the project goes into its final year of the current three year funding term, the report refers to the recently published BSBI recording strategy and finishes off with a look to the future.

Jim McIntosh, BSBI Scottish Officer.

Site Condition Monitoring on Beinn a' Chuallach, Kinloch Rannoch, Jim McIntosh, 2010



## Rare Plant Site Condition Monitoring

The support the BSBI receives from SNH for the Scottish Project is largely (but not exclusively) based on our help with vascular plant Site Condition Monitoring (SCM). Which we are well placed and pleased to do – with our unrivalled wealth of botanical expertise and knowledge of sites, species and populations. It provides us with a great opportunity to use that expertise to influence the conservation of rare plant populations. It also yields very valuable data which is fed back to Vice-county Recorders (VCRs) that is useful for Rare Plant Registers and Floras.

SCM is a systematic assessment of the condition of SSSIs. It involves refinding populations of nationally rare and scarce plant species and reporting their location, size, extent and noting evidence of regeneration or damage, using GPS, photographs, sketch maps, etc. The information collected is used by SNH to improve the management of the sites.

During 2009 we surveyed Carn Gorm & Meall Garbh, Glen Strathfarrar, St Cyrus, Upper Solway and Tulach Hill SSSIs. SCM Reports have been prepared and are being checked and forwarded to SNH. In 2010 we undertook survey work at Balnagrantach, Beinn a' Chuallaich, Easthaven, Kentra, Kyle of Sutherland, Raasay and Strathy Coast and Sunart. Thanks are due to Ian Green, Barbara Hogarth, Brian & Barbara Ballinger, Richard Pankhurst, Stephen Bungard, Eric Meek, Ian Green and Ian Bonner.

I was personally involved with Beinn a' Chuallaich, in Mid-Perthshire, where I am joint recorder. It is a particularly interesting site as it is one of a very few in Scotland for *Noccaea (Thlaspi) caerulescens* (Alpine Penny-cress) and also has a strong population of *Kobresia simpliciuscula* (False Sedge) – both of which were found in favourable condition. All 2010 reports are in draft and are being finalised.





## The BSBI Threatened Plant Project 2010

This project, now in its third year, involves detailed surveys of species of conservation concern using a similar method to SCM. It utilises BSBI expertise and voluntary effort to improve our understanding of the species. Recorders are asked to refind and monitor a random sample of populations with the help of local members.

Populations of only four of this year's ten Threatened Plant Project (TPP) species were selected in Scotland. Despite this, the Threatened Plant Project did present a challenge to many recorders in 2010 as two of the species were montane - *Sibbaldia procumbens* and *Polystichum lonchitis* (Holly Fern) – and a third, *Glebionis segetum* (Corn Marigold) was an arable weed. The *random* selection of populations seemed to work particularly well in my own vice-county, and the survey necessitated climbing six Munros and several Corbetts – all far flung and impossible to combine in a single day! The effort was repaid however with a 100% refind rate for the montane species in Mid-Perthshire.

We also undertook TPP fieldwork during our visit to Mar Lodge (see later) and much work was carried out again by Eric Meek, on the second part of his sabbatical.

By providing new information this project is helping us to better understand the ecology of these threatened species, their management needs and reasons for recent declines. In short the project will help to ensure their long term conservation. Detailed results and analysis will be published once the five year project completes.

## The BSBI Records Scottish Computerisation Project

This has been one of the most demanding years in the 5 year project to digitise VCRs' paper records to make them more useful to the BSBI, its VCRs and to conservation and research. We have computerised just over 770,000 records - comfortably exceeding our initial target of 700,000. This is an extraordinary achievement and no small thanks are due to the main funder, SNH, and the many contractors and VCRs involved.

Currently we have a team of ten contractors working in parallel - all rushing to finish work before the project deadline at the end of March 2011. Between them, they need to digitise a further 100,000 records relating to Argyll, Dunbarton, Dumfries, East Lothian, Kirkcudbright, Mid-Perth, Moray and Westernness in order to complete their contracts.

Another reason it was particularly busy this year was that I participated in the project as a VCR - as well as project manager. The VCR's voluntary contribution entails selecting and preparing record cards for the contractor and checking the records once digitised.

The data is made publically available via National Biodiversity Network (NBN) Gateway ([data.nbn.org.uk](http://data.nbn.org.uk)) and the BSBI Maps Scheme webpages ([www.bsbi.org.uk](http://www.bsbi.org.uk)) which update the maps in the *New Atlas*. During the year a further large tranche of computerisation project data was uploaded to the NBN along with several other major datasets. Current state:

<b>Dataset</b>	<b>No. Records</b>
Vascular Plant Records for Scottish Vice-counties	356,000
Plant Life of Edinburgh & the Lothians	77,000
Vascular Plant Records for Perthshire & Angus	226,000
SNH SCM - Vascular plants (2000-2006)	23,000
The Rum Flora: vascular plant data	15,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>697,000</b>

However, much work remains to get all the computerised data on the NBN - with over 400,000 records 'in the pipeline'. We also need to ensure that VCRs have all the data for their vice-counties.





## **Supporting the Scottish Recorder network**

The Scottish Officer continued to work with the Scottish and Records Committees to appoint new VCRs to fill vacancies. Additional support was then provided for the newly appointed VCRs. Much of this work done during the year related to four counties; Midlothian, Fife & Kinross, South Aberdeenshire and East Sutherland. The programme of one-to-one home support visits also continued with visits to the recorders for Mid-Ebudes and Berwickshire. Other support initiatives included:

### **MapMate Support**

With the end of the Computerisation project now in sight, we have begun to think about how we can help VCRs after it finishes. The Computerisation Project is, for example, funding home support visits for VCRs by the leading MapMate trainer in Britain, Martin Harvey. He has made sixteen visits to date and further visits to remaining VCRs are planned. It is hoped that this will improve proficiency with MapMate and will lead to more records being more easily digitised and ultimately made available on the NBN Gateway. We are also planning how we continue to make our records accessible to conservation and research.





However, we realise that computerising records is not everyone's cup of tea, so we are thinking about ways to help. A number of volunteers have been appointed to help VCRs with data entry, for example, and we plan to speak to Local Record Centres to see how they might help.

### **Maps for Scottish BSBI Recorders**

As a VCR I've found it really useful to be able to print off 1:25,000 OS maps, and see VC boundaries and GPS tracks against these maps. For example, I print off a map of the precise route taken whilst recording and attach it to the recording card. So we devised initiatives to make this technology available to fellow Scottish VCRs - 26 of whom took up the offer of digital maps of their vice-counties and 12 took delivery of leads to connect GPSs to PCs. More recently VC boundary overlays, have been distributed thanks to Malcolm Fraser, the BSBI's mapping volunteer. He is currently preparing overlays of SSSI boundaries for each VC.

Above, *Galeopsis speciosa* (Large Hemp-nettle) one of a number of rare arable weeds recorded in a survey of weedy fields in Mid-Perths in 2010

Left, *Helianthemum nummularium* (Common Rock-rose) on Beinn a' Chuallaich SSSI, 2010

## Field Meetings and Workshops

During the year we mounted the biggest programme of educational field meetings and workshops ever held in Scotland. The events included:

- Two one-day events at Murthly and Reelig to promote better Conifer identification and recording, lead by Cameron Crook.
- A weekend *Alchemilla* workshop based in Blairgowrie lead by Margaret Bradshaw with help from Barbara Hogarth.
- An Introduction to Sedges day at Whitlaw Mosses, lead by Mike Porter, Rod Corner, and Phil Lusby.
- Two meetings for beginners or botanists who had never been on a BSBI field meeting before – to Arthur's Seat and to Lady Mary's walk, Crieff lead with the help of local VCRs.
- A week long survey of Mar Lodge estate to help NTS with their conservation management. Some 24 botanists, including many VCRs, participated over the course of the week.

In total 118 BSBI, BSS and Plantlife members and other botanists variously attended these events. And this in addition to a particularly diverse field meeting programme organised by the Scottish Committee. Thanks are due to Jane Jones (who kindly took bookings) and the many VCRs and members who helped.

The BSBI field meeting on Arthur's Seat, June 2010







The BSBI team at NTS Mar Lodge, July 2010

## Rare Plant Registers

During the year a further two RPRs were published by VCRs. These are for Banff, by Andy Amphlett, and for the Isle of Bute, by Angus Hannah. With those recently published for Angus, East Ross and the Outer Hebrides, this brings the total of Scottish RPRs to five that can be accessed on-line at [www.bsbi.org.uk/rare\\_plants.html](http://www.bsbi.org.uk/rare_plants.html). A further two (for Berwickshire and Shetland) are available on paper only.

Rare Plant Registers are local red lists containing details of populations of all nationally and locally, rare and scarce vascular plant species in each vice-county. They are of great interest to local and visiting botanists, and are particularly useful to SNH, local authorities, conservationists and anyone working in planning, land-management and conservation.

The BSBI's aim is for every vice-county to have at least a draft RPR by 2019 (see over). The Scottish Committee is appointing a steering group to support and encourage the publication of RPRs in Scotland.

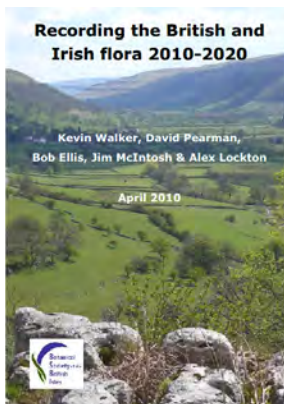
## BSBI website

New checklists were published for East Ross by Brian & Barbara Ballinger and for Banff by Andy Amphlett in 2010. Stephen Bungard continues to update his on-line Flora of Raasay and publish his fascinating blog. Take a look at the new websites for East Ross, Moray and North Ebeudes which can be accessed from the BSBI website at [www.bsbi.org.uk/recorders.html](http://www.bsbi.org.uk/recorders.html)

Meanwhile we continue to update regularly the Scottish pages of the BSBI website. They are designed for Scottish botanists and members and feature pages of news, information about BSBI projects and details of our meetings. There is even an entire page about the BSBI Scottish Officer - where you'll find further information about the Project. See [www.bsbiscotland.org.uk](http://www.bsbiscotland.org.uk)

## The BSBI's Recording Strategy

During the year the Scottish Officer helped with the publication of the BSBI recording strategy, entitled *Recording the British and Irish flora 2010-2020* in consultation with VCRs and committee members. This is a very exciting initiative as it clearly sets out the BSBI's long term aspirations. But it is very ambitious and VCRs will need all the support they can get from the BSBI, BSBI local members and the BSBI Scottish Officer.



The key points are:

- A comprehensive update of hectads, in preparation for a third Atlas in around 2024 with all VCs now moving to tetrad or monad recording, at least on a sample basis
- All VCs to have produced at least a draft Rare Plant Register by 2019
- All VCs to have produced a list of notable species by 2019
- Targeted monitoring of threatened plants (TPP) to run until 2012 inc.
- A repeat the Monitoring Scheme in 2019-20
- An update of the VC Census Catalogue by each VC.

See [www.bsbi.org.uk/RecordingStrategy.pdf](http://www.bsbi.org.uk/RecordingStrategy.pdf)

## The BSBI Scottish Project

Jim McIntosh is the full-time project officer employed by the BSBI, the BSBI Scottish Officer. The project is currently 50% funded by Scottish Natural Heritage. The BSBI is the other main contributor, whilst the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh very kindly provides office facilities. A Steering Group comprises Robin Payne and Claire Seymour (both SNH) and Chris Miles (chair), Kevin Walker, Michael Braithwaite (all BSBI).

The project is just going into the final year of the current three year term. An urgent task in the forthcoming year will therefore be to secure funding so that the project can continue, and this is not likely to be easy in the current economic climate.

## The BSBI

The BSBI is the leading charitable voluntary organisation promoting the study and enjoyment of British and Irish wild plants. It can trace its roots back to 1836, and it aims to improve the understanding of British and Irish plants to help in their conservation.

We have about 3,000 members across Britain and Ireland with some 330 in Scotland. The network of 152 Vice-county Recorders - 41 in Scotland - are supported in their botanical record collecting, checking and curation work by a network of experts in particular difficult plant species groups and four staff. The staff comprises Kevin Walker, BSBI Head of Research & Development, Bob Ellis, BSBI Volunteers Officer, Alex Lockton, BSBI Co-ordinator, Jim McIntosh, the BSBI Scottish Officer.



Vice-counties of Scotland



## The BSBI

In addition to the BSBI's main role of collecting, checking and curating plant records, we

- Maintain distributional, taxonomic and ecological databases
- Carry out monitoring and surveillance projects
- Publish botanical data such as Rare Plant Registers in books and online
- Publish journals and newsletters
- Promote the publication of Local Floras such as *The Flora of Rum*<sup>1</sup>
- Publish expert identification guides<sup>1</sup>
- Hold field meetings, workshops and conferences
- Promote research, education and training and
- Provide expert advice on botanical issues.

For more information, including membership application forms, please check out the BSBI web site at [www.bsbi.org.uk](http://www.bsbi.org.uk)



<sup>1</sup>*The Flora of Rum* (2008), *The Vegetative Key to the British Flora* (2009), *Grasses of the British Isles* (2010), *Sedges of the British Isles* (2007) and all other BSBI handbooks are available through our official suppliers Summerfield Books [www.summerfieldbooks.com](http://www.summerfieldbooks.com)

## Feedback and comments

We would be really pleased to have your feedback or comments on this report or any aspect of our work. Please send them to me, Jim McIntosh, BSBI Scottish Officer at:

Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, 20A Inverleith Row, Edinburgh EH3 5LR  
E-mail: [j.mcintosh@rbge.ac.uk](mailto:j.mcintosh@rbge.ac.uk) Tel: 0131 2482894 or 0791 7152580

The Botanical Society of the British Isles (BSBI)  
is a registered charity in England and Wales (212560) and in Scotland (SC038675).