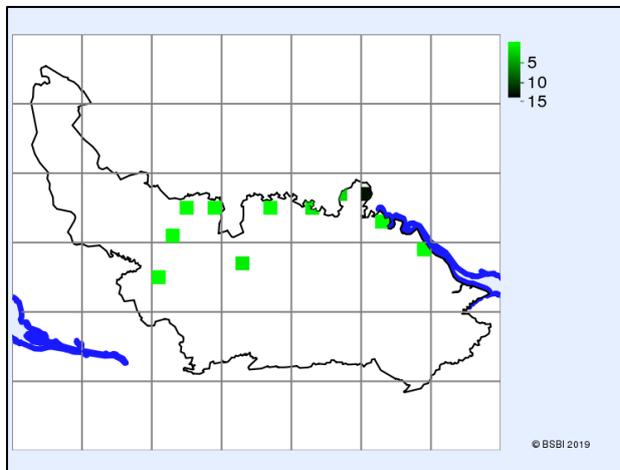


The perils of botanical hibernation!

This time of year finds many a botanist in the grip of hibernation, waiting patiently for the days to lengthen and the warmth of spring to coax them out again into the field. Nothing wrong with that whatsoever.

But perhaps we wait a bit too long. Many charismatic, easy-to-identify spring flowers seem to creep under the radar, their best days behind them by the time we emerge blinking into the sunshine. A search of the BSBI database reveals that widespread, common early-flowering species are remarkably under-recorded in our area of central Scotland.

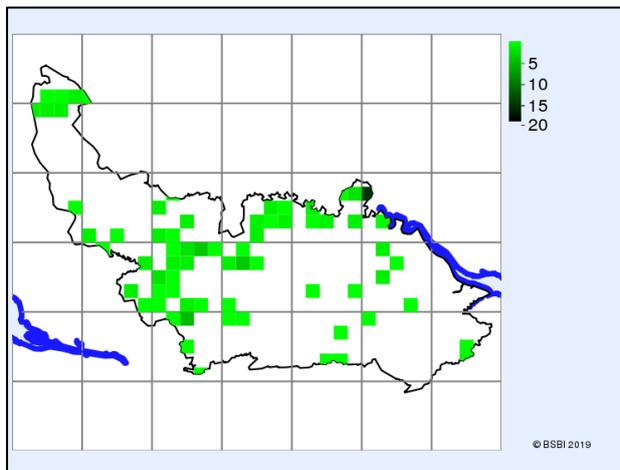
Snowdrop (*Galanthus nivalis*) has only been recorded from a measly 11 tetrads (2x2km² units) in Stirlingshire (Vice-county 86) from 2000 onwards. And only from 17 tetrads...ever!



Snowdrop (*Galanthus nivalis*) records in VC 86, post-2000, grouped by tetrad



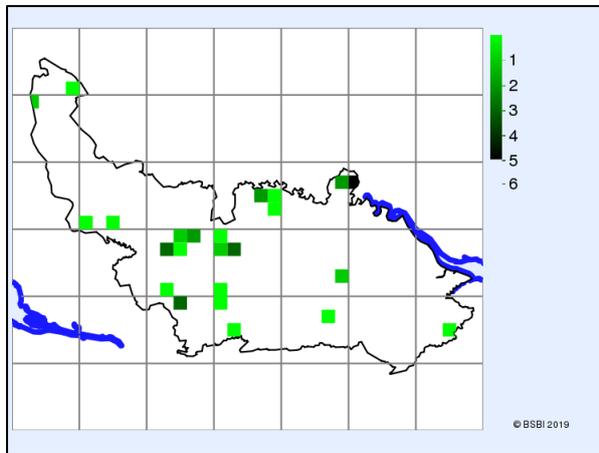
Lesser Celandine (*Ficaria verna*) is one of those delightful woodland flowers that also appears along hedgerows, road verges and even upland rush-pastures – pretty much everywhere. And yet in Stirlingshire we have great big gaps in its distribution, probably due in part to its relatively early flowering. Keep an eye out for the distinctive heart-shaped leaves, which last much longer into the season.



Lesser Celandine (*Ficaria verna*) records in VC 86, post-2000, grouped by tetrad



Another well-known, charismatic spring woodland flower is Ramsons, or Wild Garlic (*Allium ursinum*). This pleasantly smelly species is an ancient woodland indicator, but also turns up in modified woodlands and wooded river valleys. Surprisingly, this easy-to-identify plant has only been recorded in 24 tetrads in Stirlingshire since 2000.



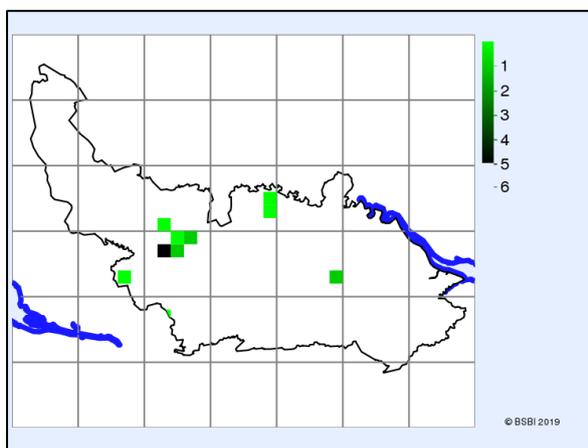
Ramsons (*Allium ursinum*) records in VC 86, post-2000, grouped by tetrad



Two other naturalised garlics have been found in Stirlingshire recently, and it is well worth keeping your eyes open for them in spring along road verges and river valleys – Few-flowered Garlic (*Allium paradoxum* – below left), and Three-cornered Garlic (*Allium triquetrum* – below right).



Much less widespread, but all the more exciting for it, is the intriguingly named Moschatel, or Town-hall-clock (*Adoxa moschatellina*). This delicate little flower lurks in dampish woodlands and along shaded river banks, and is the highlight of a day's botanising. In Stirlingshire it has only been recorded in 18 tetrads, and just 10 post-2000, and although it is genuinely scarce in Stirlingshire, no doubt other unobtrusive colonies of this discreet plant are waiting to be discovered.



Moschatel (*Adoxa moschatellina*) records in VC 86, post-2000, grouped by tetrad

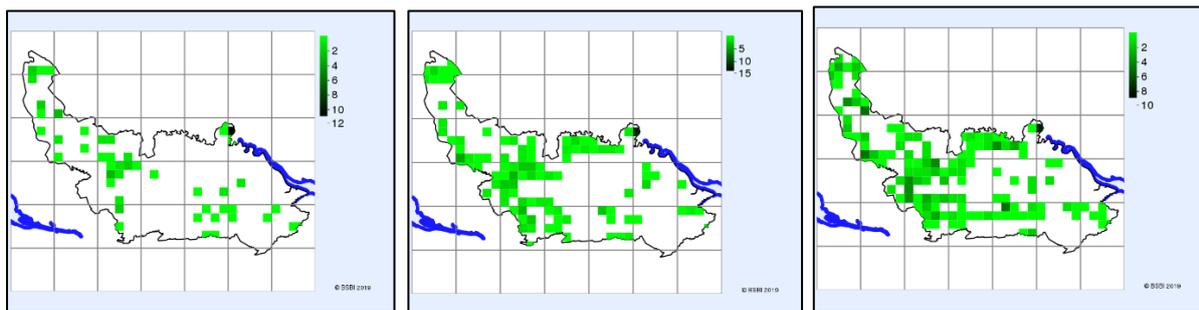


Moschatel can grow with another overlooked spring flower, Alternate-leaved Golden-saxifrage (*Chrysosplenium alternifolium* – below left), which has only been recorded in ten tetrads in Stirlingshire post-2000. As the name suggests, this species can be distinguished from its more common relative Opposite-leaved Golden-saxifrage (*C. oppositifolium* – below right, with *C. alternifolium* leaves also in the top of the photo) by its leaves being alternate up the stem, rather than opposite to each other, and its larger flowers. Look out for both golden-saxifrages in damp or wet places, such as the side of shady streams, wet woodlands and on mountain crags and springs.

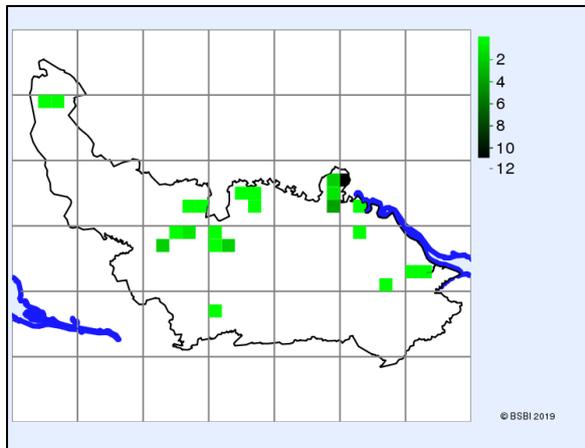


Several more familiar spring woodland flowers are also well worth noting down when you encounter them. Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*), Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) and Wood-sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*) all have significant gaps in coverage in Stirlingshire. One word of warning – if you are looking at Bluebells in a semi-urban setting, be on guard for the garden hybrid (*Hyacinthoides x massartiana*) which regularly makes a bid for freedom...

Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa* – left), Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta* – centre) and Wood-sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella* – right) records in VC 86 post-2000, grouped by tetrad



Far more often planted than naturally occurring are the Daffodils (*Narcissus* agg.). They're on practically every roundabout and road verge, in every park and churchyard, but this is certainly not reflected on the Stirlingshire distribution map.



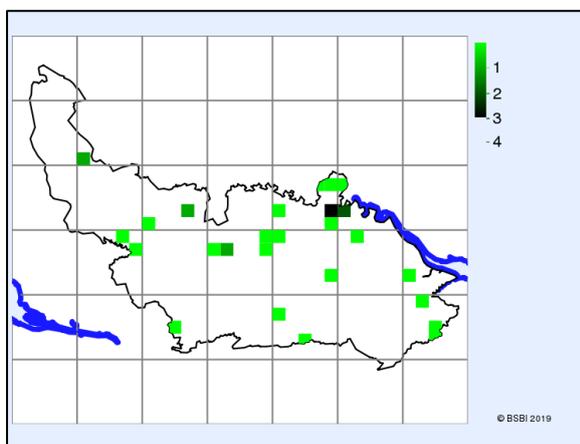
Daffodil (*Narcissus* agg.) records in VC 86, post-2000, grouped by tetrad



When recording Daffodils, try and assess whether they have been planted (likely if they're on landscaped ground or in obvious rows), are 'established' in the wild (usually as sizable populations in hedgerows or woodland, away from houses and not obviously planted), or are 'casual' or escapes, for instance single plants where garden waste has been dumped.

Adding this information on the status of the plants, even if a best guess, will tell us a lot more about the occurrence of Daffodils in Stirlingshire. If you want to delve deeper into the world of Daffodils, <http://daffkey.co.uk/index.htm> is a window into a vast array of cultivars.

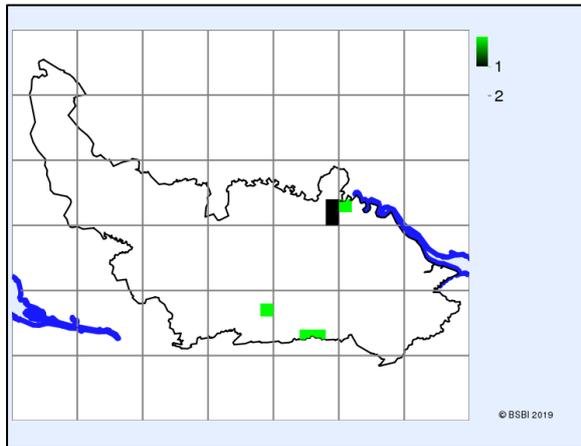
There are several other less well-known species that flower bright and early, but then vanish before pencil touches recording card. Common Whitlowgrass (*Erophila verna*) – confusingly not a grass at all but a member of the crucifer or brassica family – lurks underfoot on many a pavement in your local town centre, or gravel track on your local walk, but only appears for a few months and is invariably overlooked. Rarely growing more than 10 cm high, its basal rosette of leaves nestled between the cracks, with a few small white flowers above, are easy to miss. Two rarer, but very similar species of Whitlowgrass exist, bringing a furrow to the brow of even the most experienced botanist. If in doubt, record your plants as *Erophila verna sensu lato* – literally Common Whitlowgrass 'in the broad sense'! All records are valuable.



All Whitlowgrass (*Erophila*) records in VC 86, post-2000, grouped by tetrad



Another urban and roadside winter/spring annual to keep an eye out for is Danish Scurvygrass (*Cochlearia danica*) – neither a grass nor a Danish invader, but another white crucifer originally native to our cliff tops, sand dunes and sea walls. With the advent of road salting in the winter, it has spread inland along the road network, and in the last couple of years has been found in Stirlingshire. Although only currently recorded from six tetrads, it is likely to be more widespread – seek and ye shall find!



All Danish Scurvygrass (*Cochlearia danica*) records in VC 86, grouped by tetrad



So what now? Hopefully this has demonstrated just how much we still don't know about the distribution of plants in Stirlingshire, and the benefits of emerging from cosy botanical hibernation a little earlier than might be expected!

It should also be clear that you don't need to be a botanical expert to make a real contribution to our understanding of the local flora – some enthusiasm and a notebook will do just fine.

When recording plants, the key information to get down is species and location, as well as the date. Note the kilometre square you are in, and then record what you see. You can send this information to us in whatever form suits you, be it a simple list of common names, or if you are more familiar with scientific names a BSBI recording card (http://bsbi.org/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/VC86.pdf) or a recording spreadsheet (supplied on request). It can also be helpful to know which vice-county you are in when you are recording – you can view the boundaries and check grid references at <https://www.cucaera.co.uk/grp/>.

If you find something you don't recognise, take a photo and send it in, and we'll do our best!

Happy botanising,

Matt Harding

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Feb 2019