
December 2015 – for Vice-County Recorders

Happy Christmas everyone! It will be a very busy and happy Christmas for us with the little boys this year. I have really enjoyed being back in touch with you all since August, though I'm ready for a little break before getting back to it in the New Year. I hope I've been in touch enough and not too much – please let me know if I contact you but you'd rather I waited a few months, or if I don't contact you and you want help, advice or just a chat! I'm usually available Wednesday-Friday about 8.30-4.30 but I do try to fit in the odd hours in the evenings or weekends if that suits you better.

VCR News

Kate Thorne has welcomed Gill Foulkes as joint VCR in Montgomeryshire. This will be very helpful as Gill lives near Machynlleth in the West (while Kate is actually just outside Montgomeryshire, on the East side).

Ian Bonner has moved from Anglesey to Cinderford, in the Forest of Dean, although he will continue as VCR for Anglesey. However, he is now joined by Dr Hugh Knott as joint VCR.

Both Hugh and Gill have made a great start to recording, getting to grips with MapMate and submitting a great set of records for the year.

Recorder of the Year (Wales)

I had a suggestion for a "Recorder of the Year" for Wales award (no prize, sorry). The suggestion came with one nomination for Martyn Stead, who made over 13,000 records in 2015, mostly in Denbighshire (over 60 tetrads with > 40 records, and >8000 first records for tetrads since 2000; >500 first records for hectads since 2000). What is more, Delyth says that his records are accurate and dependable and he also follows protocols well. Congratulations Martyn! Nominations for next year will be welcome.

Atlas 2020 coverage and dataflow to the DDb

So far over 60,000 2015 records have been added to the BSBI DDb for Wales, and also over 250,000 records from previous years (2000-2014). This is an amazing achievement and we will shortly be passing the mark for 2 million Welsh records on the DDb (38 million for the whole of Britain and Ireland). A lot of counties have managed to send in data in the past few months, including re-setting sync records and problem-solving missing datasets. However, there are still a few counties with significant backlogs of records, and I hope to get these to the DDb by the end of January 2016. I know there are some records waiting for Tom Humphreys to upload them, but if we have not received your records in 2015 I am very keen to get them now.

This January deadline will help us hugely with analysis and making sure there are no unidentified gaps. It is well worth while checking on the DDb that the records you can see tally fairly closely with what you think they should be.

The graph on the next page is updated (from the October version) *where there have been changes*. No change may not mean no recording, and I know that I still need to work with some of you to ensure data from several counties is uploaded.

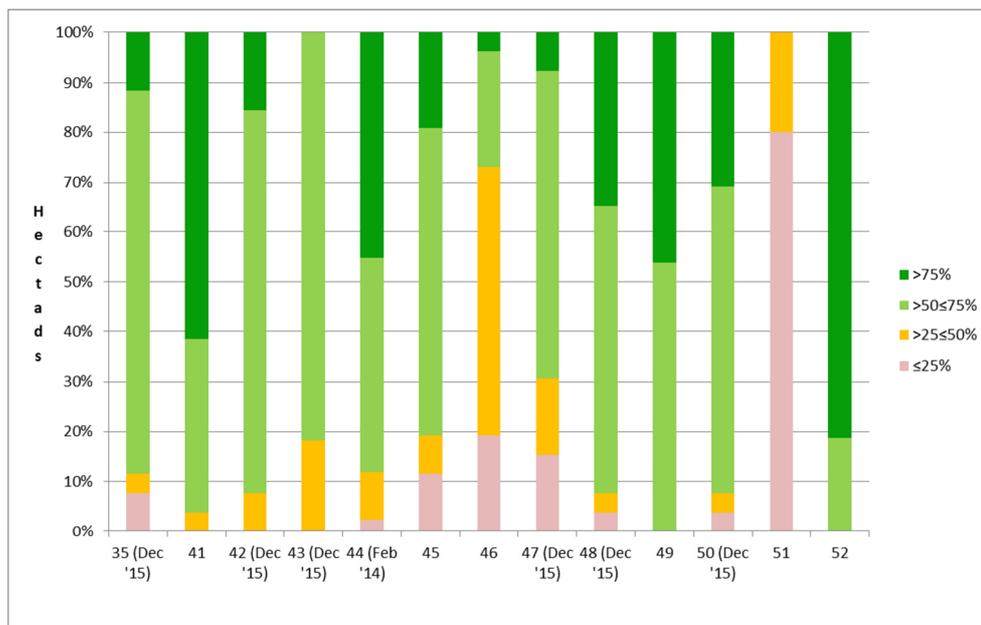


Figure 1. Percentage of hectads in each county with taxa recorded 1950-1999 and % re-found since 2000 (this does not take account of hectads which are only partly in the county and may be mainly in another). First downloaded from DDB Sept 2015 (Updates provided where change since then – little change may be seen in some of the counties with best coverage – it’s hard to improve on excellent. Perhaps we should modify the colour scheme to show hectads with 80% or 90%). I believe significant amounts of records are pending to the DDb from VCs 44, 45(received by me), 46 and 51.

I thought I’d find some seasonal maps for you – mistletoe and Christmas trees – both looking generally satisfactory, but with room for improvement. I might try to get out on a few winter walks, record a few conifers and look out for mistletoe.

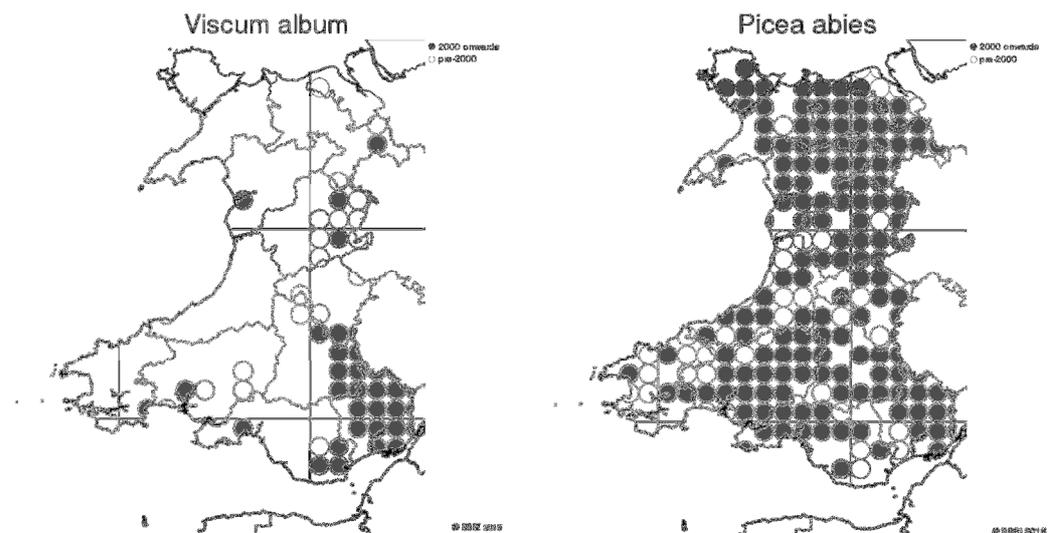


Figure 2. Maps showing *Viscum album* and *Picea abies*. Open circles are 10km squares recorded between 1987-1999 but not since 2000; filled circles have been recorded since 2000. Data extracted from the DDb December 2015.

The top hectads in Wales for number of taxa are SS59 (VC41/44-Gower) with 1203 taxa, followed by SS69 (VC41 Swansea) and SN40 (VC44) tied with 1052 taxa, and SH57 (VC49/52 Menai

Bridge/ Bangor) with 1034 taxa. I'm not going to mention the county summaries – there are so many reasons why some counties have different numbers of records.

Atlas 2020 – Using the BSBI Distribution DataBase (DDb)

Almost all the Welsh recorders are using the DDb. It is a fantastic tool and everyone should register, logon and explore it. I can remind you what your username if need be and help if you need advice finding what you need. All the maps, graphs and statistics I have quoted are direct from the DDb.

The DDb feature called “my county” helps identify gaps in Atlas 2020 coverage - assuming all your data is in the DDb! This menu option should appear to the left of “message board” when Recorders login, along with “my mapmate records” – if you are a MapMate user. The “my county” option has three tabs: Summary which includes a year-by-year breakdown of recording since 2000, Data validation and Atlas 2020 survey coverage. This last tab displays colour-density maps of your VC showing the Number of intensive tetrad surveys and another showing Taxa not refound since 2000 (at hectad scale).

Atlas 2020 – Changes to the BSBI Distribution DataBase (DDb)

Tom Humphrey, our Database Officer has made some changes to the features in Atlas 2020 survey coverage. Some are minor like the new map colour schemes. These maps are a useful and simple way to assess coverage for Atlas 2020. Generally, the more intensive tetrad surveys per hectad the better. Any full hectads with fewer than five tetrad surveys probably need a closer look. And generally the darker the hectads shown in Taxa not refound since 2000 the more attention needs to be paid to them.

However both maps need careful interpretation and thought. For example, if the hectad was poorly or very well recorded pre 2000 then the shading on the Taxa not refound since 2000 map will be misleading. If full dates have not been recorded for surveys and depending on the pattern of recording, the Number of intensive tetrad surveys may understate true recording effort. By the way, the underlying data can be seen by clicking “view data” links at the bottom left hand corner of the maps.

Atlas 2020 – Analyses of Hectad & Tetrad Coverage for your VC

There is one major change. If you scroll down below the maps, you can see analyses of hectad and (below that) tetrad recording coverage in your vice-county. These are summaries of recording-coverage based on pre/post-2000 re-recording rate and the number of visits to a tetrad. It is based on the spreadsheets that Andy Amphlett developed but appears completely automatically. Brilliant!

There are a couple things to bear in mind. A “well-recorded” tetrad is defined as “Any tetrad where 100 or more species have been recorded all time AND 75% or more of them have been recorded post 2000.” Also the number of tetrads to survey for a “well-recorded” hectad is defined as 5 per full hectad. These are all default values of criteria that can be set by users in Andy’s spreadsheet. The ability to set these criteria by online users has yet to be enabled.

Atlas 2020 - Guidance for Vice-County Recorders

Much new Atlas 2020 guidance has been published this summer and is now available on the Atlas 2020 page of the BSBI website. The most important is the Atlas 2020 Guidance for Vice-county Recorders – a collation of all the information and advice specifically for Recorders that has already appeared in various editions of BSBI News, so little is new, but it is really useful to have it all set out in one place in logical order. Another essential read is guidance on Where and what do we record?

Many of you will remember the series of green Atlas 2000 guidance booklets which were distributed during the Atlas 2000 project. These guidance booklets have been comprehensively updated and revised and are now available online. I recommend that all Atlas 2020 recorders read “Notes on identification works and difficult and under-recorded taxa”, which was distributed with September’s BSBI News, very carefully. The other booklets in the series include “Collecting and Pressing Specimens”, “Atlas 2020 Instruction Booklet” and “A Beginner’s Guide to Recording”. The holiday period is a good chance to review all this guidance. Please get back to me if you have any queries.

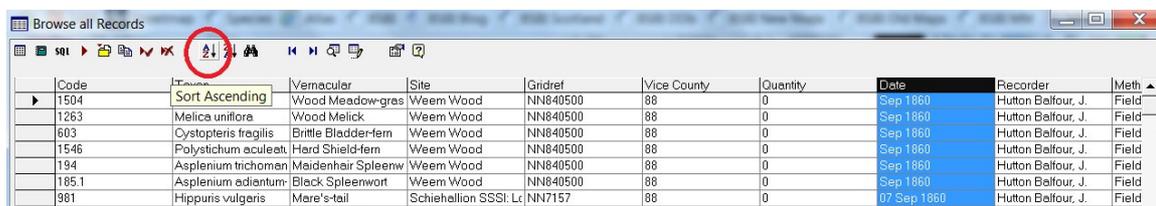
Atlas 2020 – Validating your data

We hope that by 2020, or shortly afterwards, everyone will have validated their own VC dataset using the BSBI DDb. However, very few Recorders have attempted it yet. Andy Amphlett gave a presentation on this at the Recorders’ Workshop last March, which is a great introduction with many useful examples. Andy’s PowerPoint is still available at http://bsbi.org.uk/Validating_records_using_the_DDb.pdf.

To help you begin this task, Tom hopes to send out customised validation reports in the New Year.

A simple Validation check in MapMate

A useful validation check can be done very simply in MapMate. List all records for your vice-county (Analysis > Browse Records > Browse All Records), then highlight the Date column by clicking in the same box as the Date heading, then click the A to Z button on the toolbar to sort in ascending order. Then check carefully for ancient records by recorders who weren’t active (or even born) at the time! If you sort Z to A in descending order, you can check for records that are in the future (an easy mistake to make in MapMate). Check and correct any incorrect dates and synch data to the hub.



| Code | Vernacular | Site | Gridref | Vice County | Quantity | Date | Recorder | Meth | |
|-------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-------------|----------|-------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------|
| 1504 | Wood Meadow-grass | Weem Wood | NN840500 | 88 | 0 | Sep 1860 | Hutton Balfour, J. | Field | |
| 1263 | Melica uniflora | Wood Melick | NN840500 | 88 | 0 | Sep 1860 | Hutton Balfour, J. | Field | |
| 603 | Cystopteris fragilis | Brittle Bladder-fern | Weem Wood | NN840500 | 88 | 0 | Sep 1860 | Hutton Balfour, J. | Field |
| 1546 | Polystichum aculeat. | Hard Shield-fern | Weem Wood | NN840500 | 88 | 0 | Sep 1860 | Hutton Balfour, J. | Field |
| 194 | Asplenium trichoman | Maidenhair Spleenw | Weem Wood | NN840500 | 88 | 0 | Sep 1860 | Hutton Balfour, J. | Field |
| 185.1 | Asplenium adiantum | Black Spleenwort | Weem Wood | NN840500 | 88 | 0 | Sep 1860 | Hutton Balfour, J. | Field |
| 981 | Hippuris vulgaris | Mare's-tail | Schiehallion SSSI: L | NN7157 | 88 | 07 Sep 1860 | Hutton Balfour, J. | Field | |

A refinement is to list all records for particular recorders and check that they occur during that recorder’s active recording period.

Recorders’ workshops/ training

We had a MapMate workshop in November for the South-east corner of Wales in Llandrindod Wells. It was quite hectic but I think it was useful. I’m planning a similar day around Dolgellau also to cover MapMate.

There will be another Recorders’ Conference in September in Shrewsbury, which I’m sure will be a very valuable weekend.

I wonder if there is any demand, for workshops at the Welsh AGM in Brecon? For example, we could run a workshop on the DDb, and on validating records.

Chris Metherell is coming to Treborth (Bangor) in March to lead a pair of workshops on *Euphrasia* for beginners and improvers.

Rare Plant Registers etc

I am really pleased with progress on Rare Plant Registers; I am aware of several counties where there is active work on updates. We are going to be doing some analysis of Rare Plant Register data across Wales over the next few months, and so if you feel able to work on an update please contact me – I want to make this as straightforward for everyone as possible. I hope shortly to upload a complete set of Rare Plant Register checklists to the DDb – these will clearly need updating regularly, but should help to check for new records.

News flashes

Andy Amphlett has produced some new material on the identification of Balsam poplars. It can be accessed at [http://bsbi.org.uk/Balsam Poplars Andy Amphlett.pdf](http://bsbi.org.uk/Balsam_Poplars_Andy_Amphlett.pdf).

Louise Marsh's "News and Views" blog is well worth a visit at http://www.bsbi.org.uk/news_views.html. She has recently interviewed our new President, John Faulker, who was voted in at the Annual General Meeting in November. Elsa Wood was representing us in Wales, and I know Sarah Stille was there as well. We prepared some posters to try to encourage general members to visit Wales especially for the Welsh AGM in Brecon next year.

I'm thinking of trying my hand at the New Year Plant Hunt – perhaps in Wrexham? Let me know if you're (relatively) local and want to join me – otherwise the challenge is on for the best flowering plants list in Wales (it must be for no more than 3 hours, between 1st-4th January, and plants must be fully flowering).

Paul Green is currently in Texas, it sounds like he is seeing some interesting and different plants.

Finally, I do hope you enjoy your recording as much as I do. Thanks to Jim McIntosh for letting me copy chunks of the Scottish VCR Newsletter!