



**Botanical Society of the
British Isles (BSBI)
Scottish Officer
2005/6 Annual Report**

Jim McIntosh
November 2006



Background

I was appointed as the BSBI Scottish Officer in November 2004. The full-time post is for four years and is currently mid-term. It is jointly funded by the Botanical Society of the British Isles (BSBI) and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH).

The project aims to:

- Promote interest and co-operation in botany in Scotland,
- Support and grow the BSBI Scottish membership and...
- Help deliver major conservation initiatives, including
 - BSBI-led projects such as Rare Plant Registers
 - SNH-led projects such as Site Condition Monitoring



Jim McIntosh, BSBI Scottish Officer

Introduction

The Scottish Officer Project is based at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) and is managed by a Steering Group chaired by Richard Pankhurst. There have been a few changes to the group during the year and it now comprises of Chris Sydes, Ro Scott and Claire Seymour (SNH), and David Pearman, Michael Braithwaite and me (BSBI). I am line-managed by David Pearman and helped on financial matters by Michael Braithwaite.

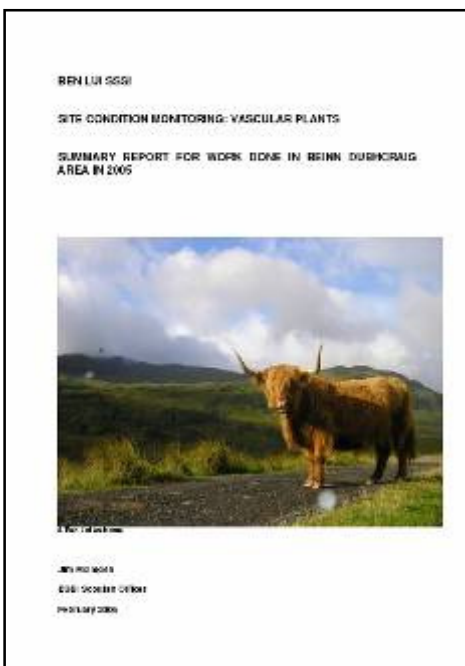
This report reviews the major projects and initiatives I have been involved with over the past year from November 2005 to October 2006. These include Site Condition Monitoring, supporting Vice-county Recorders (VCRs) and educational work.

Site Condition Monitoring by the BSBI

This has continued to be a big part of my work in the second year. It is particularly enjoyable as it gives me the perfect excuse (if I needed any) to get out in the field! SSSI Site Condition Monitoring (SCM) is a systematic examination of the special features of a site which has led to its designation. Out of the 1500 or so SSSIs in Scotland, some 150 have been designated because of their Nationally Rare or Scarce vascular plants.



Alpine Cinquefoil, *Potentilla crantzii*, SCM species Cairnwell, © J. McIntosh, 2005



2005 SCM Work

In 2005 the BSBI undertook an ambitious programme of Site Condition Monitoring survey work at 20 of these sites. The work involves relocating Nationally Rare and Scarce plant populations and assessing their size and condition. Lead volunteers organised the field and desk work for 15 sites while I took on the remaining five myself.

A subsidiary aim of the project was to get as many interested botanists involved with the fieldwork as possible. We had a wide variety of people in the field - including SNH staff, reserve management staff, local VCRs and members. A total of 231 surveyor-days was spent on the project.

One of my first tasks in the year was to complete - or help complete - 2005 SCM reports and then forward them to SNH. Report writing took at least as long as fieldwork. To encourage volunteers SNH grant-aid was obtained to cover the cost of their report-writing time and travel.

BSBI SCM Results

A brief analysis of the 2005 BSBI SCM reports showed that:

- BSBI expertise and local knowledge were invaluable to weed out dodgy records, or records outside the SSSI
- Our success rate of finding target species was good (not always in the same location as original records!)
- However, fewer populations could be classed as 'favourable' using SNH's strict criteria and disappointingly few sites could be classed as favourable overall for vascular plants i.e. for ALL target species.
- Such surveys are only ever snapshots in time. Caution is required before conclusions are reached.

SCM in 2006

2006 marked the end of the first 6 year cycle of monitoring and the beginning of the next cycle. Consequently there was a pause while SNH reflected and regrouped. We debated whether the BSBI should get involved in SCM work whilst this was going on. However, in the end we agreed a small programme of five sites to maintain momentum.

The sites were Ben Chonzie, Dalcroy Promontory, Glen Tanar, Keltneyburn and Rescobie & Balgavies Lochs. These reports will be written up shortly and forwarded to SNH.

I would like to thank all the BSBI volunteers, SNH staff and others who have worked hard to make this project a success.



Purple Milk-vetch, *Oxytropis halleri*, Ben Chonzie, © J. McIntosh, 2006

Curved Sedge Project

Curved Sedge, *Carex maritima*, is classed as Endangered in the new *Vascular Plant Red Data List for Great Britain* (Cheffings & Farrell, Eds. 2005), and is on the *Scottish Biodiversity List*. In 2006 we continued the work begun last year with Vice-county Recorders to try to understand the reasons for its apparent decline.

Whilst there was confirmation of a major loss, there were also some significant refinds and a clearer overall picture is now beginning to emerge. A report will be made to the 2006 BSBI Scottish Annual Meeting.



Carex maritima © E. Everiss, 2005

Lesser Butterfly-orchid Project

The *New Atlas of the British & Irish Flora* (Preston, Pearman & Dines, 2002) showed that Lesser Butterfly-orchid, *Platanthera bifolia*, had suffered a major decline since the previous Atlas. It is now listed in the *Red Data List* as Vulnerable. With our partners, SNH and Plantlife we promoted a project to encourage people to submit Lesser Butterfly-orchid records in order to get a better understanding of this apparent decline. In many cases VCRs got useful records (even if they were for Greater Butterfly-orchid!) and made contact with new local botanists.

Over 300 records were submitted on the SNH website. Lynne Farrell of SNH plans to undertake a detailed analysis of these over the winter.



Lesser Butterfly-orchid, *Platanthera bifolia*

Supporting Vice-county Recorders

VCR Scottish Workshop

VCRs are key to the BSBI's success. Supporting them is a really important part of my work. But with 40 scattered the length and breadth of Scotland that's no mean task! I was pleased that twenty five Scottish VCRs came and participated so enthusiastically in a two day residential workshop I organised at Kindrogan Field Studies Centre in April. Whilst such group events are perhaps less satisfactory than meeting VCRs individually, they are a great opportunity to debate issues and exchange information and ideas. And it's always good to meet old friends.

There were full sessions on Site Condition Monitoring, Local Change, Rare Plant Registers, the Computerisation and Hybrids Projects, on *Taraxaca* and on contributing Records to *Watsonia*. The second day was largely devoted to MapMate and three workshops were arranged - for beginners, intermediates and more advanced MapMate users. Feedback sessions were held for those directly involved in the SCM and Computerisation projects.



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Scottish Vice-County Recorder
Workshop Report
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VCR Scottish Workshop Report & Information CD

To re-inforce the main points from the workshops, and make them more widely available to all Scottish VCRs, speakers provided short summaries of their sessions. These were compiled into an illustrated VCR Workshop Report, which was distributed to Scottish VCRs, BSBI colleagues and partners.

In the same mailing to VCRs an Information CD was included containing much useful guidance, reports and datasets. For example, it included contact details for BSBI VCRs and Scottish members and SNH staff. It also included valuable datasets such as SNH's Nationally Rare and Nationally Scarce Species databases and all the Site Condition Monitoring Vascular Plant Records from the first 6 years.

As promised, it also included copies of all 27 SCM reports contributed by BSBI volunteers over the past two years. I understand that all remaining SCM reports will be posted on the SNH website shortly.

Meeting VCRs

In 2005, a programme of meeting Scottish VCRs was begun to find out what their plans are for their 'patches' and what help they needed. So far we have had four in-depth meetings in 2005 and a further four in 2006. I am also working closely with several other VCRs on major projects such as transferring their records from other recording systems into MapMate. As part of this general exercise I would like to introduce VCRs to their local SNH Area Officers, where that traditional link has been lost. I'm sure that closer working at local level and the exchange of local botanical advice and information will benefit everyone.

Vice-County Recorders at Scottish VCR Workshop, Kindrogan © J.McIntosh, 2006





James Fenton, VCR (top left) leading members on the Gairloch Field Meeting (top right), amidst the beautiful scenery of W. Ross (middle).

Marsh Clubmoss, *Lycopodiella inundata*, on the banks of Loch Maree. (Far right)

Damselflies caught in the act by a Round-leaved Sundew *Drosera rotundifolia*. (Right)

Photos © J. McIntosh, 2006



Rare Plant Registers

Rare Plant Registers (RPRs) are local red lists: they contain details of populations of all Nationally Rare and Scarce and locally rare and scarce vascular plant species in a Vice-county. They are of great interest to both local and visiting botanists, and are particularly useful to SNH, Local Authority and other agency staff in their development control, forward planning and general land management decisions. The BSBI hopes that one day every Vice-county will have an RPR and it will be used to safeguard populations of significant species. However this is an ambitious project - particularly in Scotland where there are few botanists. So far only two have been published, but twelve are in draft.



Rather less work was done on this important initiative, than was planned, because I now realise that computerising VCR vascular plant paper records is a first essential step before work can begin on Rare Plant Registers, or indeed floras or checklists.

Computerisation Projects

Many VCRs have large numbers of vascular plant records on paper. Computerising these records is arguably one of the best ways to help VCRs. With computerised data, it is easier to analyze, search, map, manipulate and generally use the data. And it's a really important first step towards a Rare Plant Register or Flora. It will allow VCRs to spend less time in front of computers and more time in the field where their botanical skills are much better used! So I've worked hard to obtain funding for computerisation projects and to manage a pilot project.

2005/2006 Project

The pilot project to computerise 108,000 records from four Scottish VCs - Roxburgh, West Lothian, Skye & Mull - is now reaching a successful conclusion. Datasets computerised by contractors have been carefully checked by VCRs, corrected and handed back to them. The computerised records are being made available, via the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) Gateway to SNH to use in their day-to-day conservation work. Which is *exactly* what we want - we don't want valuable records gathering dust in VCRs' attics whilst rare plant populations are lost. You can access the data too - it has been used to update the Distribution Maps on the BSBI website, and there will be public access at 10km square accuracy on the NBN Gateway - only fair since £15,000 of public (SNH) funds were used. Check out www.searchnbn.net and www.bsbi.org.uk

2006/2007 Project

The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation has just offered the BSBI £17,500 of funding to computerise a further 135,000 Scottish VCR records. The project will be similar to the pilot and will complete the computerisation of data from Skye, and computerise new datasets from Moray, East Ross, East and West Inverness-shires. Work will begin this autumn and should be complete before summer 2007. Like the first project, a secondary aim is to build capacity in the BSBI to computerise records, and so contractors drawn from BSBI ranks are being used again, and in some cases the local VCRs themselves. Using BSBI contractors has a number of advantages; they have the taxonomic knowledge and MapMate expertise. Using VCR contractors has even greater advantages; as they also have detailed local knowledge about the records. Besides no-one has more of vested interest than them - and if they can't read their own handwriting - who can?

2007/2010 Project

Meanwhile I have just applied for £82,000 of SNH grant-aid for a much bigger, 3 year, project to computerise 450,000 Scottish plant records beginning next year. Generally it aims to complete the computerisation of the main, or most valuable, dataset in each vice-county, where the VCR has requested help. A decision from SNH is expected by the end of October 2006.

Many thanks to the project funders, SNH and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, and to all the contractors and VCRs who have worked so hard to make the pilot project a success.



Esmée
Fairbairn
FOUNDATION



Educational Work

During the year I worked on a number of educational initiatives, including:

- Biological Recording In Scotland's four *Wildlife Counts* Wildflower Identification day courses, organised by Claire McSorley, of BRISC and with help from local VCRs, Edna Stewart & Richard Pankhurst. A total of 65 beginners attended these courses.
- A two day wildflower identification course for National Trust of Scotland rangers with Lindsay Mackinlay, NTS.
- Educational field meetings for BSBI members - at Gairloch, Birks o' Aberfeldy and Keltneyburn with the help of James Fenton, Ian Green and Dot Dahl, BSBI.
- A weekend of educational field meetings with the informal Kintyre botany group.

Communication

Communication is an important part of the job, particularly with such a thinly spread membership, and a wide range of partners. During the year I gave talks about the BSBI, contributed Scottish Plant Reports to *British Wildlife*, wrote articles for BSBI newsletters, and produced and distributed the Scottish VCR Workshop Report, and of course, this Annual Report.

In January 2006, with the help of a volunteer, Jane Squirrell, we launched the Scottish pages of the BSBI website. It is designed for Scottish botanists and members and features pages with news, information about BSBI projects and details of field and indoor meetings. It even contains an entire page about me - the BSBI Scottish Officer! - where you'll find further information about the Scottish Officer Project. Check them out - look for the link from the BSBI home page at www.bsbi.org.uk or type *BSBI Scotland* into a search engine!



Working with partners

During 2006 I met and continued to forge links with partners, such as SNH, Plantlife Scotland, BRISC, several Local Recording Centres, RBGE and NTS. I very much look forward to building on this and working with others involved in plant recording and conservation in Scotland in 2007. I would like to say a sincere "thank you" to all those BSBI VCRs, members and colleagues, and partners in these organisations who have helped me over the past year.

I would particularly like to thank Jane Squirrel for help with the Webpages, Jane Jones for help with administration and Dot Dahl for help with organising the educational field meetings.

Irish Lady's-tresses, *Spiranthes romanzoffiana*

© C. Ferguson-Smythe, 2006

Found on Kintyre for first time ever by
Kintyre botany Group in 2006

Thyme broomrape, *Orobanchae alba*,
Harris © J. McIntosh, 2006

Early Marsh-orchid, *Dactylorhiza incarnata* spp.
pulchella, Harris © J. McIntosh, 2006



The BSBI

The BSBI is the leading charitable voluntary organisation promoting the study and enjoyment of British and Irish wild plants. It was founded in 1836, and aims to improve the understanding of British and Irish plants to help in their conservation.

It has over 3,000 members across Britain and Ireland with some 300 in Scotland. The network of 152 Vice-county Recorders - 40 in Scotland - are supported in their botanical record collecting, checking and curation work by a network of experts in particular difficult plants - referees - and 2.5 staff.

The staff comprise of Bob Ellis, BSBI Volunteers' Officer, Alex Lockton, BSBI Co-ordinator, Alan Forrest BSBI Hybrids Project Co-ordinator and me, Jim McIntosh, BSBI Scottish Officer!

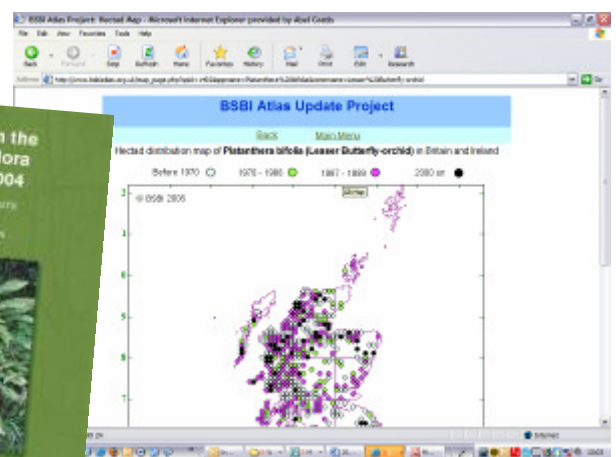
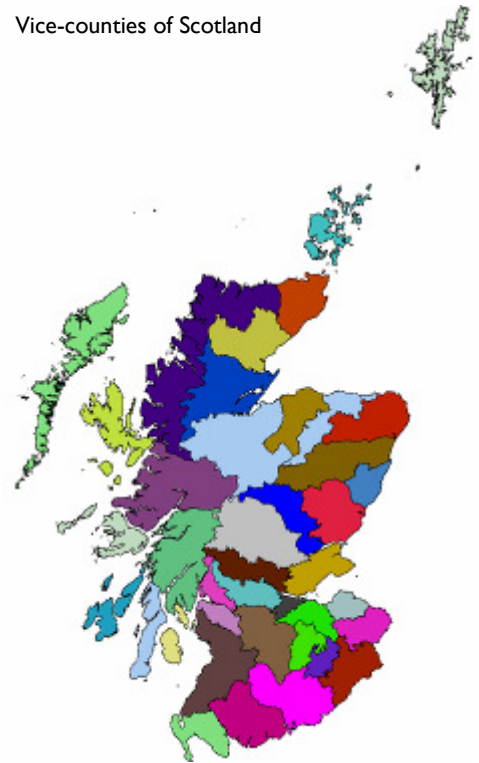
In addition to our main role of collecting, checking and curating plant records, we

- Maintain plant databases
- Carry out national surveys
- Publish data in books and on the web
- Publish journals and newsletters
- Promote the publication of Local Floras and Rare Plant Registers
- Publish expert identification guides;
- Hold field meetings, workshops and conferences;
- Promote research, education and training
- 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



Vice-counties of Scotland



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