



Botanical Society of the British Isles
Scottish Officer Project
2007/8 Annual Report

Jim McIntosh

November 2008



Background

The four year Scottish Officer Project started in November 2004. It aims to:

- Promote interest and co-operation in botany in Scotland,
- Support and develop the BSBI Scottish membership and...
- Help deliver rare and scarce plant monitoring initiatives, including
 - BSBI-led ones such as the Threatened Plant Project
 - SNH-led ones such as Site Condition Monitoring

A full-time project officer is employed - the BSBI Scottish Officer, Jim McIntosh, who is based at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. The project is jointly funded by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and the Botanical Society of the British Isles (BSBI). There is a Steering Group which comprises Robin Payne, Ro Scott and Claire Seymour (all SNH), and Chris Miles (chair), Kevin Walker, Michael Braithwaite (all BSBI) and the BSBI Scottish Officer.



The Scottish Project Continues!

This is the final report for the four year Scottish Officer project. However, during the year a bid for a new three year project was prepared and submitted to SNH. I'm pleased to report that it has been approved and the project will continue seamlessly on! SNH will support 50% of the costs – largely based on our continuing involvement with rare and scarce plant monitoring work. The BSBI is the other main contributor, and RBGE has very kindly agreed to make a significant contribution by providing free office facilities.



Rare and Scarce Plant Monitoring in Scotland

The BSBI has an unrivalled wealth of botanical expertise and knowledge of sites, species and populations amongst its membership. SSSI Site Condition Monitoring (SCM) is a great opportunity for BSBI volunteers to use that expertise to influence the conservation of rare plant populations. In addition, it provides very valuable data which is fed back to Vice-county Recorders (VCRs) and is useful for Rare Plant Registers and Floras. Our involvement makes a very valuable contribution to SNH's monitoring and conservation work. Last year we agreed to undertake 33 sites over five years, or about a third of SNH's entire vascular plant monitoring program.

SCM Work in 2007

In 2007 we surveyed five sites – Ben Lui, Craigengar, Cove, Dalcroy and Glen Tanar SSSIs, thanks to the help of volunteers. One of my first tasks for the year was to check and complete reports for these sites.

SCM Workshop in 2008

In April we held a workshop for BSBI SCM volunteers at SNH Battleby. I'm grateful to Robin Payne and Brian Eardley of SNH who helped organise the event and to the volunteers who participated so enthusiastically. Feedback from the event was used to revise and update the general SCM guidance for volunteers.



SCM Work in 2008



During 2008 we undertook fieldwork at Ardmeanach, Ben Lui, Bennane Head Grasslands, Eigg – Cleadale, Glenstrathfarrar, Hill of Towanreef, Tulach Hill and Whitlaw Mosses SSSIs. A subsidiary aim of the project is to involve as many botanists with the fieldwork as possible. Again we engaged a wide variety of people - including SNH staff, reserve management staff, local recorders and members.

Bartsia alpina (Bartsia) on Ben Lui, 2008

The BSBI Threatened Plant Project 2008

Another project to utilise that great wealth of BSBI expertise was launched by Kevin Walker, BSBI's Head of Research & Development in May. The BSBI Threatened Plant Project involves detailed surveys of a number of threatened species. These were:

- Purple milk-vetch (*Astragalus danicus*) - picture below, far left
- Field Gentian (*Gentianella campestris*) - picture below, far right
- Annual Knawel (*Scleranthus annus*) - picture below, centre right
- Marsh Stitchwort (*Stellaria palustris*)
- Northern Hawk's-beard (*Crepis mollis*)
- Yellow Bird's-nest (*Monotropa hypopitys*) and
- Flat-sedge (*Blysmus compressus*) all UKBAP species that occur in Scotland
- Intermediate Wintergreen (*Pyrola media*) - a Scottish Action Plan species

VCRs were asked to attempt to refind and monitor a random sample of populations across Scotland. They recorded population size, extent, habitat, associated species, signs of regeneration, management and perceived threats for each population. Where populations were found to be absent recorders returned a null record with an indication of the reason for loss where known. Much fieldwork was carried out for this project in 2008 by the Scottish Officer and VCRs. To date over one hundred populations have been surveyed. The Threatened Plant Project will continue in 2009 with a different set of threatened species.

The project is helping to improve our understanding of the ecology of these threatened species, their management needs and reasons for recent declines. We hope that the project will help ensure their long term conservation. Many thanks to all those who contributed to these projects.



Supporting Vice-county Recorders, our key volunteers...

Computerising Vice-county Recorders' paper records

Computerising VCRs' records vastly increases their usefulness. It is an important first step in projects such as the production of Checklists, Rare Plant Registers and Floras, and it allows VCRs to map and analyze their data and respond to queries more effectively. The records also contribute to the BSBI Maps Scheme webpages (www.bsbi.org.uk) which update the maps in the *New Atlas*.

Even more importantly, mobilising these records benefits conservation. They will be available to SNH and other conservationists via the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) Gateway and the BSBI website who will be able to use them in their day to day work to conserve rare plant populations. Which is *exactly* what we want - we don't want valuable records gathering dust in attics whilst rare plant populations continue to be lost! Consequently, much effort has gone into a major computerisation project to capture 700,000 BSBI paper records over 5 years.

Last year SNH kindly offered £82,000 to continue this work over the following three years. We hope this will clear the backlog and complete the computerisation of all significant records held on paper by VCRs in Scotland and that VCRs will then manage to computerise all new records - with our continuing support of course.

That project got underway in 2008 with seven contracts to computerise 120,000 paper records belonging to BSBI Recorders. A secondary aim is to build capacity in the BSBI to computerise its own records, and so contractors drawn from BSBI ranks were used again, and in some cases the local VCRs themselves.

Most of the work is now complete. The data is at the BSBI hub and has been used to update the distribution maps on the BSBI website. So far 110,000 have been digitised. Once completed the data will be forwarded for uploading onto the BRC Vascular Plant Database¹ and onto the NBN Gateway. See www.searchnbn.net

¹The Vascular Plant DataBase is the BSBI's main database and is managed by the Biological Records Centre (BRC), Oxfordshire.



***Plant Life of Edinburgh & the Lothians* records computerised**

During the year Lothian Wildlife Information Centre was contracted by the BSBI computerisation project to complete the computerisation of the records gathered for the ***Plant Life of Edinburgh & the Lothians***. This involved adding details of recorders, dates, sites and other information missing from the electronic record but available on the raw data sheets. The dataset comprising 78,000 records. It is currently being checked by BSBI VCRs, and once completed will be distributed to the BRC Vascular Plant DataBase, the NBN Gateway and of course to VCRs themselves.

Associated Species Records captured from SNH SCM Reports

A contract was set to complete a spreadsheet of SCM vascular plant records and to extract and digitise some 20,000 associated species records. The contractor has almost completed the work, which will again be distributed to the BRC Vascular Plant DataBase, the NBN Gateway and to VCRs.

Surveying the coast of Eigg (below) and Valtos, Lewis, with VCRs (opposite), 2008





Other initiatives to support Vice-county Recorders...

- A programme of meeting Scottish VCRs to agree objectives and how the BSBI could help. I met a further 12 - bringing total to 31 out of 39.
- A programme of helping VCRs with fieldwork - in the Outer Hebrides, North Ebrides, Easter Ross, West Perthshire, Ayrshire & East Lothian.
- A six day field meeting for VCRs at Glenmore Lodge, Aviemore in August. Seventeen VCRs attended over the course of the week. The aim was to help the new recorders in Easternness get to grips with their patch. More importantly, however, it provided opportunity for VCRs to meet, socialise and learn from each other.
- Worked with BSBI Committees to help appoint new VCRs.
- A weekend BSBI Conference was organised by BSBI colleagues and held in Shrewsbury in September. Eight Scottish VCRs participated.
- BSBI colleague, Alex Lockton produced and distributed an excellent support newsletter for VCRs - *BSBI Recorder*.

Rare Plant Registers

Rare Plant Registers (RPRs) are local red lists: they contain 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 Authority and other conservationists in their development control, forward planning, land-management and conservation 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 with its difficult and extensive terrain and where there are so few botanists!

During 2007 a further two RPRs were completed and published on the BSBI website – one for vc110, Outer Hebrides, and one for vc106, Easter Ross, bringing the total number of published RPRs up to four. A further ten are in various draft stages.

BSBI surveying team being picked up from Little Berneraigh, Lewis, 2008



Communicating and Stimulating interest...

Communication is really important, particularly with such a thinly spread membership and a wide range of partners. During the year I gave five talks about the BSBI to various Natural History Societies around the country, contributed two Scottish Plant Reports to *British Wildlife* with the help of Ian Strachan, and wrote numerous articles for BSBI newsletters and, of course, produced and distributed this Annual Report!

The Scottish Committee organised another very enjoyable BSBI/BSS Scottish Annual Meeting, which attracted some 120 botanists from across Scotland and beyond.

The BSBI organised a well attended programme of field meetings across Scotland during the year – including three one day educational meetings at Arthur's Seat, Pass of Killiecrankie & Loch Lomond and two separate training days on vegetative grass identification on Arthur's Seat and Kittochside. Over 100 people variously from BSBI, BSS and Plantlife attended these educational meetings.

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, and 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. Check them out – follow the link from the BSBI home page at www.bsbi.org.uk or type www.bsbiscotland.org.uk

Below left, Some of the VCRs who attended the field meeting at Glenmore Lodge, 2008
Below right, Admiring glances - the educational field meeting at Loch Lomond, 2008

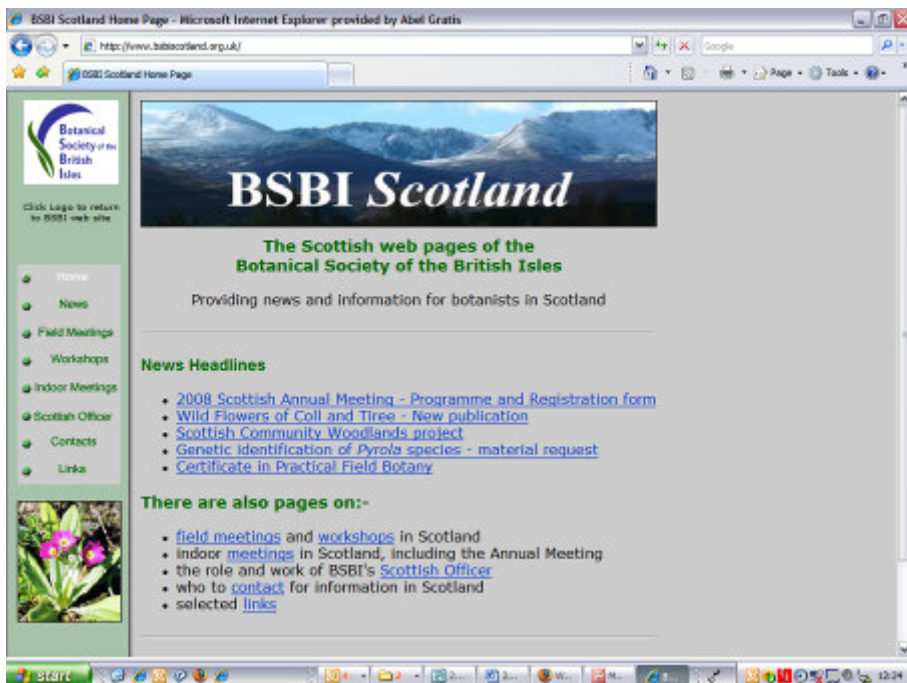


Working with partners

During 2008 I met and continued to forge links with partners, such as Botanical Society of Scotland, Lothian Wildlife and Information Centre, Plantlife Scotland, Plantlife Link Scotland, RBGE and SNH.

I would like to say a sincere *thank you* to all those BSBI VCRs, members committee members, colleagues, contractors and partners in these organisations who have contributed to the work of the BSBI in Scotland over the past year. We look forward to building on these contacts and working with others involved in plant recording and conservation in 2009.

Special thanks to Alistair Godfrey who very kindly volunteered to help National Trust for Scotland with this year's two day wildflower identification course for 25 of their rangers at Ben Lawers. Also special thanks to Jane Squirrel for help with the Webpages, Jane Jones for help with administration, Dot Dahl for help with field meetings and to the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh for kindly providing office support and facilities (and workmates!)



The screenshot shows the BSBI Scotland Home Page in a Microsoft Internet Explorer browser window. The browser title is "BSBI Scotland Home Page - Microsoft Internet Explorer provided by Abel Gratts". The address bar shows "http://www.bsbiScotland.org.uk/". The page features a large banner image of a mountain range with the text "BSBI Scotland" in a large, white, serif font. Below the banner, it reads "The Scottish web pages of the Botanical Society of the British Isles" and "Providing news and information for botanists in Scotland". On the left side, there is a navigation menu with links to Home, News, Field Meetings, Workshops, Indoor Meetings, Scottish Officer, Contacts, and Links. Below the menu is a small image of a plant with purple flowers. The main content area has a "News Headlines" section with a list of links: "2008 Scottish Annual Meeting - Programme and Registration form", "Wild Flowers of Coll and Tiree - New publication", "Scottish Community Woodlands project", "Genetic identification of *Pyrola* species - material request", and "Certificate in Practical Field Botany". Below this is a "There are also pages on:-" section with links to "field meetings and workshops in Scotland", "indoor meetings in Scotland, including the Annual Meeting", "the role and work of BSBI's Scottish Officer", "who to contact for information in Scotland", and "selected links". The Windows taskbar at the bottom shows the Start button, several application icons, and the system tray with the time 12:24.

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.

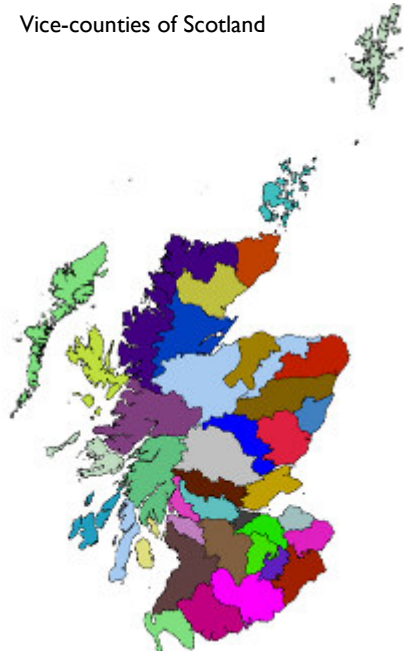
We have about 3,000 members across Britain and Ireland with some 330 in Scotland. The network of 152 Vice-county Recorders - 40 in Scotland - are supported in their botanical record collecting, checking and curation work by a network of experts in particular difficult plant species groups and four staff.

The staff comprises Kevin Walker, BSBI Head of Research & Development, Bob Ellis, BSBI Volunteers Officer, Alex Lockton, BSBI Co-ordinator, and me, Jim McIntosh, the BSBI Scottish Officer!



Angus
Argyllshire
Ayrshire
Banffshire
Berwickshire
Caithness
Clyde Islands
Dumfriesshire
Dunbartonshire
East Inverness-shire
East Lothian
East Perthshire
East Ross
East Sutherland
Fife
Kincardineshire
Kintyre
Kirkcubrightshire
Lanarkshire
Mid Ebudes
Mid Perthshire
Midlothian
Moray
North Aberdeenshire
North Ebudes
Orkney
Outer Hebrides
Peeblesshire
Renfrewshire
Roxburghshire
Selkirkshire
Shetland
South Aberdeenshire
South Ebudes
Stirlingshire
West Inverness-shire
West Lothian
West Perthshire
West Ross
West Sutherland
Wigtownshire

Vice-counties of Scotland



Some Scottish VCRs in their natural habitats, from left, Ken Butler, Stephen Bungard, Lynne Farrell & Jeff Waddell (demonstrating *Hammarbya* for those with X-ray vision), 2008.



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*¹

Publish expert identification guides¹

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



¹*The Flora of Rum (2008)* by Pearman, Preston, Rothero & Walker and all BSBI handbooks are available through our official suppliers Summerfield Books 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:

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Botanical Society of the British Isles (BSBI)

www.bsbi.org.uk

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