

BSBI eNews – September 2011

From Alex Lockton, coordinator@bsbi.org.uk

1st September 2011

This eNewsletter is sent out on my Gmail mailing list. Unlike the old list, you can't change your email address automatically, so if you want a different one used, or want to be deleted altogether, please let me know. Thanks to those who did so already. Previous eNewses will be on the Blog on the web site, www.bsbi.org.uk.

Recorders' Conference

The date is set for April 13th-15th 2012 – the weekend after Easter. Suggestions for topics have included a report on progress with DNA barcoding and more news and training on the Big Database. I have not got prices from the Field Studies Council yet, but assume it will be similar to last time – about £200 if you stay at Preston Montford or £100 if non-residential (there are good B&B's for about £40 a night). I can take reservations if you know you want to come along.

Big Database

Tom Humphrey is now working full-time for the society and is busy developing the incredibly complex software necessary for such a system. Just to recap, the Big Database (correctly called the Distribution Database, or ddb), is as far as we can ascertain, the world's first interactive online recording database, where users can add and edit live data. It has remarkably powerful features to store, process and search huge numbers of records. We envisage that it will eventually replace desktop databases, but that is some time off yet.

David Pearman has written to all county recorders who have not yet uploaded their data asking them if they would be willing to do so, and as far as I am aware everyone has agreed happily. There doesn't seem to be much dispute any more that making records available is what the BSBI is for, and most county recorders want to show off their data because (a) that is why they collect it and (b) they want to be appreciated. So please know that we appreciate you! Access to the ddb is currently limited to v.c. recorders, some people from the conservation agencies, and people who the county recorders have nominated, such as key helpers. Personally, I share access with my local records centre people at the council, because we work very closely together and I know they are both trustworthy and competent to understand biological records. But beware that this is a complex biological recording database, and most people would prefer it if you accessed and interpreted the data for them.

If you have not tried it yet, contact me or your area officer if you live in Scotland or Wales.

Web sites

Now that summer is drawing to a close, please remember to give me updates for your web pages. Several more counties have launched their own pages this year – visit http://www.bsbi.org.uk/isles_of_scilly.html to start browsing. Even if you have your own web site, you can always have a page on the BSBI domain as well, and then you will attract a wider audience. Newsletters, events and news all go down well, and I would encourage people to post visitor information if they are willing to, because most of the people looking at the site will be non-residents.

Other new things on the web site include Philip Oswald's page of obituaries taken from (and expanded to include colour photographs) the BSBI Yearbook. This is intended to complement the wonderful historical biographies being compiled by Chris Liffen and the factual data compiled on Herbaria at Home.

Visit: <http://www.bsbi.org.uk/botanists.html>, <http://www.meiosis.org.uk/> & <http://herbariaunited.org/wiki/Category:Collectors>.

Jim McIntosh has gone to Tristan da Cunha for a year, but before he left he commissioned a web site for Mapmate help, which you can find at <http://mapmate.bsbi.org.uk/>. This was compiled by Martin Harvey, who some will remember came to our last Recorders' Conference to talk about his work on the iSpot web site. Martin has become the main Mapmate trainer in Britain – although it is a simple program, it can do a lot when you get into the details. The new site has YouTube videos – excellent for beginners who want detailed instructions (although you might have to get used to YouTube; but if you haven't used it, it will do you good to try. Trust me.)

In Jim's place we welcome Angus Hannah as Scottish Officer for a year. And in Wales we welcome Polly Spencer-Vellacott:

Angus: butesedge@yahoo.co.uk

Polly: welshofficer@bsbi.org.uk

Rhododendron

Look on the web site and you will find a paper, based partly on the results of our Rhododendron survey, which shows that British plants are a hybrid, now named *Rhododendron x superponticum* Cullen. Of course we should not change the name in the Mapmate checklist yet – it's best to stick to the Stace 3 list for now, but beware of changes like this and feel free to use them as synonyms.

I have created a page on taxonomy, where we hope to develop the British List and provide more resources on the naming of plants, including scanning and digitizing taxonomy books, checklists such as the London Catalogue and other things that might be of use to people studying such things as synonyms. More news on this presently. Offers of help appreciated.

<http://www.bsbi.org.uk/taxonomy.html>

Lizard's-tail

One final oddity. This plant, *Saururus cernuus*, has been found quite naturalised at Albrighton, Shropshire, by Steve O'Donnell. There don't seem to be any other records of it, although I am told that it is quite a common garden plant. If you have got it established in the wild, do let us know and we'll add the records. The purpose of the Maps Scheme is to enable us to make such information available quickly – you don't have to wait until the species is on the Mapmate checklist. There must be other aliens that people know about but haven't reported, so feel free to get your dot on the map first.

http://www.bsbimaps.org.uk/atlas/map_page.php?spid=990316.0