



## Contents

Sharon Pilkington - Ace VC Recorder-----	2
Get to Know Your New VC Recorder - Kat Newbert---	5
New Year Plant Hunt-----	6
A Summer of Learning - the Identiplant Course-----	7
Jennie's Low-cost Microscope-----	9
Notes from our AGM -----	9
John Presland-----	10
BSBI Handbook: Lady's-mantles-----	11
Letters from Donald Grose-----	12
I like plants – should I record them?-----	14
Plant Records 2020-----	18
The Committee-----	19







This is Fran Sinclair's Champion Mistletoe tree at Turleigh. How many Mistletoe plants can you spot?

Front Cover: Dave Green's picture of a Mistletoe plant, with details of the male flowers inset



# Sharon Pilkington - Ace VC Recorder

Jenny Bennett has written an appreciation of Sharon's time as Plant Recorder for VC8 and VC8 and has added contributions from others. Read on ...



Early times

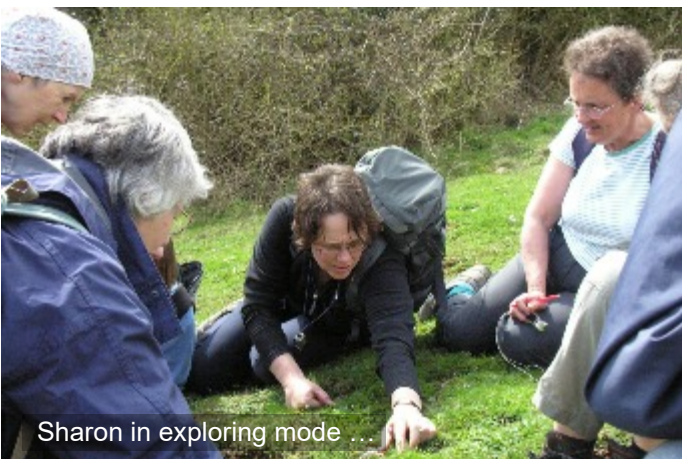
This year Sharon Pilkington has stepped down from a long stint as Vice County Recorder for North Wiltshire and South Wiltshire (VC 7 & 8). She has devoted a huge volume of her time and expertise to this role over a period of nearly 20 years and this tribute has been written in acclamation of her significant contribution to botanical recording in Wiltshire.

*I first met Sharon in 2005 when she had just been appointed VCR. I had recently completed a course in biological recording and species identification and the BSBI put us in touch. At that point in time, there were issues with digitisation of data and data flows in Wiltshire – and I remember the comment from the BSBI coordinator at the time: 'Sharon Pilkington has taken on the recordership for the whole of Wiltshire, v.cc. 7 & 8.*

*This is an enormous task, which she is tackling by creating a network of recorders and working with existing organisations. Fortunately – and I hope Sharon will forgive me for this – she is a brilliant computer nerd as well as an excellent field botanist, and I am confident she will be up to the task.'*

*Sharon has indeed been 'up to the task'. Her tenure, later with Richard Aisbitt's assistance, has been remarkable for revolutionising recording systems in Wiltshire for the digital era and also for the sheer volume of records, covering all hectads in the county. From the outset, she quickly set about making sure all new records were entered into MapMate with regular exchange with the BSBI and the local Biological Records Centre (WSBRC). Not only that, but with Richard's assistance and working with the WSBRC, she worked hard to get all historical records into MapMate and to establish mechanisms for data exchange. In 2015, Sharon wrote: 'The year started on a victorious note when I succeeded in importing more than 260,000 plant records into my copy of MapMate and thence onward and upward to the BSBI Hub. These records represented the culmination of years of dogged hard work on the part of our local BRC to deliver a useable database that could efficiently exchange data with recorders..... Most of the records were detailed site surveys undertaken since the Wiltshire Flora Mapping Project in the 80's by survey teams for the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and the then English Nature.'*

A notable achievement for Sharon early on was production of the excellent Rare Plant Register for Wiltshire, which was published in 2007 ([https://bsbi.org/wp-content/uploads/dlm\\_uploads/WiltsRPR2007.pdf](https://bsbi.org/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/WiltsRPR2007.pdf)) This was one of the first rare plant registers to be compiled and made publicly available. A review by David Pearman at the time (Watsonia, 2008) stated that: 'Yet, to use Wiltshire as an example again, it was an astonishing feat for a new county recorder to produce a statement for her county, from scratch, in only three years, and the value of having such a statement outweighs the significant number of records from the 1980s – at the very least it should encourage botanists to go and look.....and, I think, should serve as a model and a spur to all the other counties that have Rare Plant Registers in progress. It is better to set out a statement, even if not as up-to-date as one would wish, than not to publish at all.'



Sharon in exploring mode ...



... and explaining mode



Sharon was (and no doubt will still be) a prolific recorder – and knew her ‘patch’ intimately. She worked enthusiastically with other recorders and as a member of the Wiltshire Botanical Society committee to focus and organise recording efforts in the county. I remember assisting with a large number of BSBI projects, such as Threatened Plants, Hybrid, Local Change, Atlas Updating – all recording was made easy by her clear and detailed instructions. In later years, she was one of the Wiltshire’s Atlas 2020 recorders who really pulled out the stops to cover parts of the county that had received little attention since 2000. In 2017, Sharon commented that: *‘All this effort generated a staggering 59,234 botanical records in the year – which must be a county record itself. Our local records centre also came up trumps, providing an additional batch of 40,000+ older records received via consultant’s reports, online recording schemes and county wildlife site surveys. At last, the gaps in recording coverage are getting much smaller and coverage of the county has increased greatly’.*

Along the way, Sharon has been unstinting in giving her time and expertise to assist other botanists in the county and help them to build on and improve their field identification skills. And her passion and enthusiasm for plants is contagious – her sheer joy of botanising rubs off on you. Certainly, she has been an inspirational botanist for me.

But that is enough of my waffling. I have collated a handful of quotes from fellow recorders and recording organisations below. These speak for themselves – Sharon will be sorely missed! But luckily she’s not moving away from Wiltshire, so we can look forward to many more happy hours botanising with Sharon!

*‘Sharon and I live close to each other so sometimes we share a car to a meeting. On arrival, as soon as Sharon is getting out of the car someone will come over with a draggled bit of greenery in a plastic bag for identification. If you look round, as I do, you will see that there is in fact a minor crowd all patiently waiting their turn to show Sharon their puzzles. It is a slow-motion version of bees round a honey source with room for only one to land at a time. Sharon is entirely good natured during this procedure even though she has not had time to put her boots on yet. She shows no impatience, never criticises, or scoffs when it turns out to be Shepherd’s Purse. To me this is an especially magical process. How CAN she identify things so quickly when their current habitat is a plastic bag? She has none of the normal essentials of general surroundings, soil type, habit of growth or other near-by plants. She sometimes asks a few supplementary questions and often has her lens out in a trice because in her head she has already narrowed it down to a few possibles and just needs to check a detail of bract or stigma or glume. And when you realise she can also do that with all her little green beauties, the mosses. . . Simply astonishing.’* **Rosemary Duckett**

*‘We wanted to say Sharon was brilliant at encouraging our interest in plants and making us better botanists. We started in WBS with a pretty basic level of knowledge and through group field trips including workshops such as a grasses workshop at Bratton Camp, gained more knowledge gradually taking us up a couple of levels, during our time in Wiltshire. If we saw something that excited us e.g. Thyme-leaved Sandwort or Field Mouse-ear, Sharon would be genuinely really pleased for us and this helped to spur us on to learn more.’*



Sharon ponders over .....

*When we lived in Wiltshire our home was in Warminster and despite gaining red passes for the army ranges we were a little scared to explore on our own, our closest range - Imber ranges. Sharon got us over this by agreeing to meet us one summer evening and drove us around showing us some good sites including a site for Tuberous Thistle and one of its hybrids. After this we had the confidence to visit Imber Ranges frequently and found this very enjoyable.*



Ranunculus sardous

Sharon

*We moved to Dorset in 2014 and have remained WBS members and manage to attend at least one WBS trip each year where it’s always great to meet up with Sharon and other WBS members. What a great bunch you are.’*

**Tom and Jean Smith**

'Sharon has been a good friend and mentor, especially helping me to spot and identify plants on our many trips to Salisbury Plain, and getting me moving with *Sphagnum*s and some other mosses. And, I can only imagine how hard she has worked with all that square-bashing for the atlas, which I sometimes joined her for, and the ensuing data entry. Thank-you.' **Sarah Grinsted**

*'Sharon did an amazing job taking on the County Recorder role with massive amounts of hard work, enthusiasm and confidence, getting MapMate set up (with help from the lovely Richard Aisbitt for the technical bits) and generating huge numbers of verified records which could then be used to better protect and manage these species and their habitats. She helped test out data exchange protocols between the Botanical Society and WSBRC when we implemented our new database and was very patient when we had a few teething problems!*

*Sharon also embraced our use of Living Record for casual records submission, even though it gave her more work to do to. She is always willing to share her knowledge, giving advice and training for new and more experienced botanists and promoting WSBRC and its aims. She's a lovely person and it was an absolute pleasure working with her.'* **Purgie Linham** (previously Manager of the Wiltshire and Swindon Biological Records Centre)

*'In Wiltshire, Sharon Pilkington is stepping down after eighteen years as VCR for North and South Wiltshire. Sharon produced the excellent Wiltshire Rare Plant Register.....and is almost certainly the global expert on the chalk grasslands of Salisbury Plain! A pleasure to be with in the field, and wonderfully helpful for the atlas project, Sharon will be greatly missed as a VCR.'* **Dr Pete Stroh**, Scientific and England Officer, BSBI

*'I just have an impression of her 'niceness' and unending patience with other botanists - and her courtesy and gentleness with others less expert than herself, i.e. all of us! And of course spending an hour on one lichen covered tombstone in Broadchalk Churchyard.'* **David Pickering**

*'Sharon has been a huge support and encouragement to me over the years both when I have been out with her on the plain and on the numerous occasions I have posted her plant specimens. When she first came she sent a list of rare plants on the SPTA and it has been and still is a pleasure to continue the search particularly during the summer-time and weekends throughout the year. Without her direction my plant records would not be as extensive or as accurate - she set up my GPS and showed me how to use it!'* **Paul Skelton**

*'We shall all miss Sharon enormously - but I hope she still comes on the occasional WBS outing. Over the years she has skilfully identified dozens of often pathetic specimens that I have posted to her including some really obscure species. I once recall sending her a bundle of scarce *Cerastiums* from SPTA which she carefully sorted into the different species. She also made a special trip from Westbury to near Tidworth to confirm presence of *Filago pyramidalis* on the CCDA. However, when out with her she also made me feel pretty inadequate with her encyclopedic knowledge of scarce grasses - not to mention the bryophytes - which are an alien world to me - although she has always tactfully not rubbed in the knowledge gulf between us. Whoever succeeds Sharon will have a difficult act to follow!'* **John Moon**

Sharon, of course, is not leaving us, just stepping down as VC Recorder. She is still on the WBS committee and I am sure that she will remain active as a Wiltshire botanist. We can expect to see her frequently on WBS outings and she is unlikely to escape from plant ID requests. Taking on the VCR role from her is a challenge and I will rely on her for advice. **Richard Aisbitt**





# Get to Know Your New VC Recorder - Kat Newbert

## How did I get here?

So, I'm probably still a relatively new face to Wiltshire, I moved here at the end of 2018 for work as an ecological consultant at Johns Associates in Bradford-on-Avon where I am now a senior ecologist. Sadly, most of my time in the county has been spent in lock-down so I'm still to meet many of the WBS members in person.

I grew up in the Forest of Dean where my childhood was immersed in nature. This is where my love of botany started, as I was always fascinated by the woodland flowers and carpets of moss. I wish at this point someone had told me it is possible to have a career specialising in these things.

When I eventually escaped from the forest, I went to study my undergraduate degree in archaeology in Bournemouth University, very different to what I do now! I eventually found some sense and went to complete my master's degree in Applied Ecology at the University of Gloucestershire, where I tailored my modules to focus on plant ecology. It was during this time I started attending BSBI field meetings in Monmouthshire which led to also attending other BSBI groups and cementing my interest in botany.

I'm particularly interested in the less flashy plants such as sedges and ferns which are often overlooked. In my spare time I love visiting a range of different habitats around the country, one needs a change from chalk grassland every now and then. This year I am planning to visit the Outer Hebrides to see Machair grassland, if Covid regulations allow.

I'm looking forward to the field season ahead, catching up with familiar faces and meeting new ones.

*Kat*



Kat in a favourite habitat



Kat with Bird's-nest Orchid



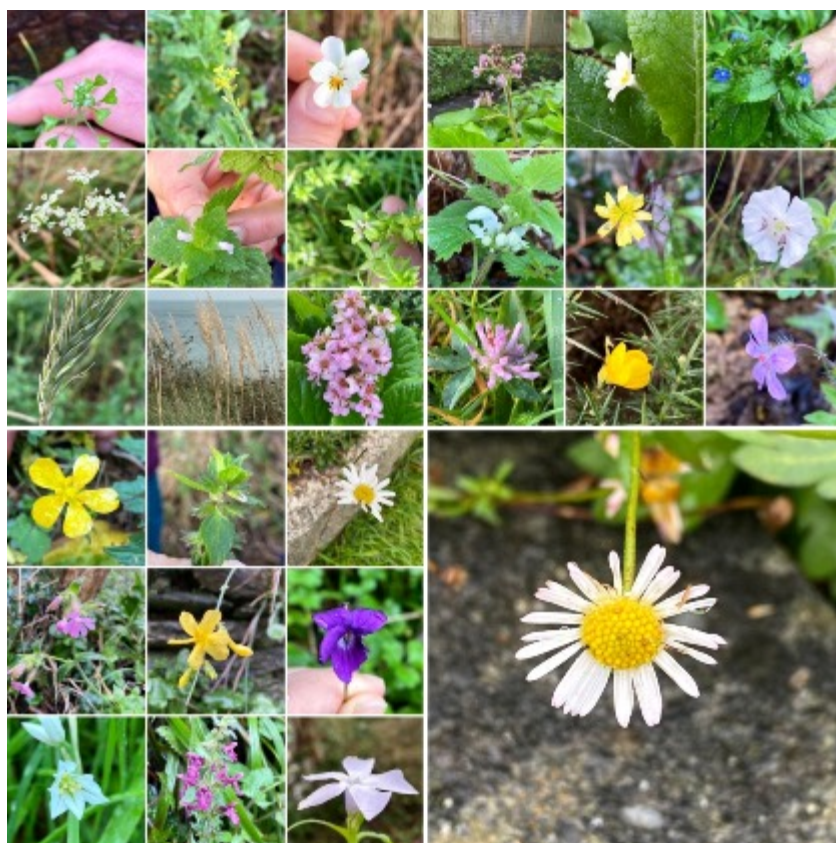
# New Year Plant Hunt

Every year the BSBI invites botanists to search for plants in flower over the first four days of new year. This gives us an incentive to get out and look for plants again and maybe link up with other botanists. It also becomes something of a competition. I did my three-hour search of Swindon streets, car parks, public parks and industrial areas and came up with 24 species. Not bad, you might think. Sunny Swanage got 107! It must be that Gulf Stream.

BSBI have done their analysis and sent me the email below. If you want to explore further, the links work.



## New Year Plant Hunt 2022: the results



Dear Richard,

We're happy to announce that we've completed our analysis of the results of the 2022 New Year Plant Hunt, when BSBI members and supporters head out to record wild and naturalised plant species in bloom in midwinter.

This year saw the highest ever number of participants (1,895) who submitted the highest ever number of lists (1,256).

The number of records was, however, slightly down compared to last year (20,612 vs 21,419) and fewer species were recorded in bloom: 669 compared to 710 last year. That 2021 total was an all-time record - so, with more people than ever out plant-hunting, why were there fewer species in bloom this year?

Our in-depth analysis suggests two possible reasons:

- temperature anomalies: although the period leading up to the 2022 Hunt was 1.1 degrees above average, the same period before the 2021 hunt was 2.7 degrees above average;
- the ongoing effects of Covid which meant there were fewer group Hunts compared to pre-pandemic.

Read the full, [in-depth analysis here](#).

Pressed for time? Read [the summary](#) which has gone out today to our media contacts.

Huge thanks to everyone who took part in the 2022 Hunt. As our CEO Julia Hanmer says, your contributions "further our understanding of the pressures that plants face" and "are essential to help us understand how our wild plants are responding to climate change".

Best Wishes, The NYPH Support Team

PS Thank you to Dan Ryan for his montage of some of the flowers spotted on his New Year Plant Hunt in Cornwall

# A Summer of Learning - the Identiplant Course

It's less than a year since I joined Wilts Bots and started the Identiplant course. But I've learned so much and met so many new plants and friendly and helpful people on field trips that I already feel at home in my new world – with a lifetime of happy learning ahead.

When a friend told me about Identiplant last spring I was immediately hooked. The Field Studies Council (FSC), who developed the course, describe it as “a distance learning course in plant identification for beginners in serious botany”.

It was originally an online course, though my 2021 intake was organised locally, with facilitator Penny Lee providing the course materials as pdfs and marking our assignments.

“This course is not designed for absolute beginners but for anyone who can identify some plants but needs help to improve. It teaches participants how to identify plants systematically and not just by simple recognition. This leads to the confidence and accuracy that is essential in recording,” says the FSC website.

I am something of a course junkie but am delighted to say it is one of the most useful courses I have completed over the years. It was challenging from time to time, as it should be, but I can truthfully say that I have improved in all five areas of learning outcomes: improved observational skills, familiarity with botanical terminology, confidence in using floras and botanical keys, developing the necessary critical faculty for accurate identification, and learning the key diagnostic features of our commonest plant families – though unfortunately there's nothing the course can do to improve my ‘forgeterie’ and I have to keep looking up the key features.

The course is divided into 15 fortnightly units, all but the last with practical plant-finding, identification and description activities. The first three units concern themselves with essential theory: classification and names, terminology, and keys respectively, with sample plants to find. The remainder focus on plant families, from each of which we had to find examples of two or three species from a list and then describe both their family characteristics and the key identification points of the plant we had found, using *The Wild Flower Key* by Francis Rose. This was very useful, but not always easy.



My eyesight is such that using the suggested x10 lens is tricky. For the course it was not a problem as the plants we worked with are common enough that I was able to take home specimens and look at them under my microscope - £30 worth from eBay that I can hook up to a phone and use to take photos. A brilliant investment in cheap Chinese technology.

But for rarer plants in the field my difficulties are greater. I am a good photographer, but that's not always enough. A x15 hand lens has helped, but I still find grovelling with it while trying to avoid sitting or kneeling on another potentially interesting plant very difficult. I'm hoping I might improve with a bit of help on future field visits.

Working through this course meant I saw and became interested in plants that I must have walked past hundreds of times but never noticed. Some were part of the course work and many others that just planted themselves in my eyes and invited me to look more closely. A few were so large I can't imagine how they never beckoned me before.

I'm now starting out on recording the plants that grow in a km square near where I live that has been barely recorded before, so immediately putting new skills to work in the knowledge that I can ask for help. And so many more field trips to look forward to. My partner enjoys them too, so now we are joint members, with many thanks to all who have made us so welcome.

Jennie Levin

*My first submission to the County Recorder, Platanthera chlorantha, turned out to be a plant that hadn't been previously recorded in its km square near Battlesbury Hillfort. Beginner's luck.*





*Pilosella officinarum*, Mouse-ear Hawkweed, studied for unit 14.

*Involucre of Pilosella officinarum under the microscope, showing both black glandular and white, unforked hairs. NB No photos are required or accepted for Identiplant. All assessed work is written only.\**



*Section through flower of Pilosella officinarum under the microscope showing achenes and pappi on the flattened receptacle.*

\*A note from a tutor ...

Photos are not required, or even suggested, but they are certainly accepted. One of my students last year included photos with his submissions and this was helpful in confirming that he had found the right plants.

With photos like Jennie's ...





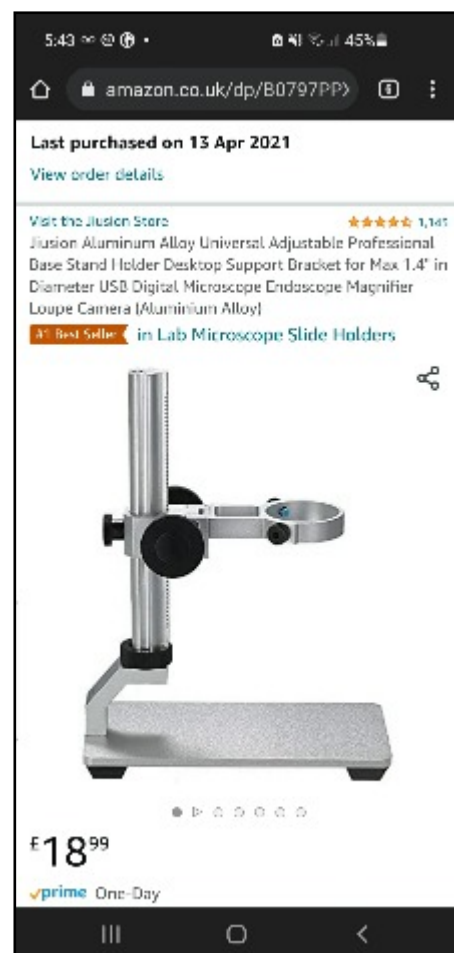
## Jennie's Low-cost Microscope

These pictures show what I have been using. The better stand is essential, but if you buy the microscope first you may be offered the stand at a discount. I was surprised how well it focuses and how quickly I adapted to looking at my screen while focusing.

It works with PC or android phone and you can take photos with either. I have an android phone with a very good camera. I guess the results would partially depend on how good the camera is.

If you have a steadier hand than me you could use it in the field as it is very light and fits easily in a pocket without the stand.

*Jennie Levin*



## Notes from our AGM

Our AGM, on March 5<sup>th</sup> 2022, saw some changes to our committee: Pat Woodruffe, Anne Appleyard, Paul Darby, Sue Fitzpatrick and Ness Williams have decided not to seek a further three year term; all were thanked for their contributions to the Society. Kat Newbert and Steve Jackson had decided to join and were elected along with Richard Aisbitt, Martin Buckland, Sharon Pilkington and Alison Robinson, whose terms finished this year.

Richard Aisbitt and Sue Fitzpatrick stepped down as Chair and Treasurer and Martin Buckland as Meetings Secretary, although Martin has organised our current meetings and will remain the point of contact for this year.

Dave Green was elected as Chair, Martin Buckland as Treasurer and Alison Robinson was re-elected as Secretary.

The committee has recently formed a number of working groups, including a Project Group and Editorial Group. The Project Group, led by Dave Green, includes Martin Buckland, Kat Newbert, Steve Beal, Jenny Bennett, Steve Jackson and Pat Woodruffe, and works on furthering the aims of the Society through recording and monitoring. The Editorial Group, led by Richard Aisbitt, with Pat Woodruffe and Steve Jackson, works on producing the Newsletter. If you are interested in joining these groups then do contact Dave ([d.green7@btinternet.com](mailto:d.green7@btinternet.com)) or Richard ([richard@theaisbitts.co.uk](mailto:richard@theaisbitts.co.uk)); both are open to all members and there is no need to join the committee.

If your contact details have changed recently then do contact me to update them. ([alisonrobinson300@gmail.com](mailto:alisonrobinson300@gmail.com)).

Subscriptions were due on January 1<sup>st</sup>. If you have not already paid, or have arranged a payment then do contact Martin for more details ([martinbuckland8@gmail.com](mailto:martinbuckland8@gmail.com)).

*Alison Robinson, Secretary.*





WBS visitors to Gower, 1999 - Pat and John, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> from the right

## John Presland

John sadly passed away in late February. He has a long history as a Wiltshire botanist; many who took part in the Wiltshire Flora Mapping Project (WFMP) in the 1980s will remember him. Dave Green knew him even before then.

Dave first met John about 41 years ago when he was in close contact with Joan Swanborough, his predecessor as North Wiltshire Plant Recorder. Dave was taking over as recorder from Joan, who was becoming unwell. She asked Dave to contact John and they discussed a peculiar *Hieracium* he had found on the railway line at Trowbridge. After

much hunting and letters to Peter Sell, this plant turned out to be one of only very few populations of *Pilosella praealta* subsp. *thaumasia* in the British Isles. The population is still extant.

John was also one of the first to be recruited for the WFMP, and was a stalwart of those flora mapping days. He became the coordinator for the ten kilometre square ST86 and personally contributed 1,500 records for the square

At the end of the project, the Wiltshire Botanical Society was formed with John as a founder member. As well as being active on the committee of the WBS, he frequently attended outdoor meetings. Dave has recollections of John with camera and extensive flashlight accoutrements, which looked like a set of handlebars attached to the camera. He was always somewhere in the background photographing a rarity.

He also joined us on out-of-county trips, starting with the first WBS residential weekend. This was to Gower in South Wales in 1999 where he was accompanied by his wife Pat. His latest with us was to the Peak District in 2014 and we have photographic evidence of both. Pat Woodruffe remembers that he was struggling with rough ground and steep climbs even then, especially at The Roaches.

John contributed many more botanical records, especially around Winsley. He monitored the flower-rich Winsley Hill protected road verge until 2015 and had presumably identified the verge and arranged for its protection. Inspired by the rich flora of stone walls around Winsley (he led a tour of these for the WBS), he wrote and published the small book "Conserving the Flora of Limestone Dry Stone Walls", available from Summerfield Books.

He edited and printed Wiltshire Botany, our scientific journal, published between 1997 and 2013. This included articles that were longer and more detailed than could be included in the newsletter. He also included lists of the year's plant records, carrying on a tradition set up in the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society magazine. The journal is a mine of information on Wiltshire's botany and is well worth revisiting. All issues are available to download from the WBS website. He also contributed more widely, writing articles and sending photographs to BSBI News.

As John got less mobile, he continued to write and publish, producing a series of colourful and informative books – Botany for Naturalists: A Colour Guide; Botany Where You Are; Botany as a Hobby 1: Botany in the Field; Botany as a Hobby 2: Botany in House and Garden; Botany as a Hobby 3: Botany in Literature; and Easy Digital Plant Photography. These are all available from the Amazon website.

*Richard Aisbitt and others*



John with Jacob's Ladder - Peak District, 2014



## John's funeral

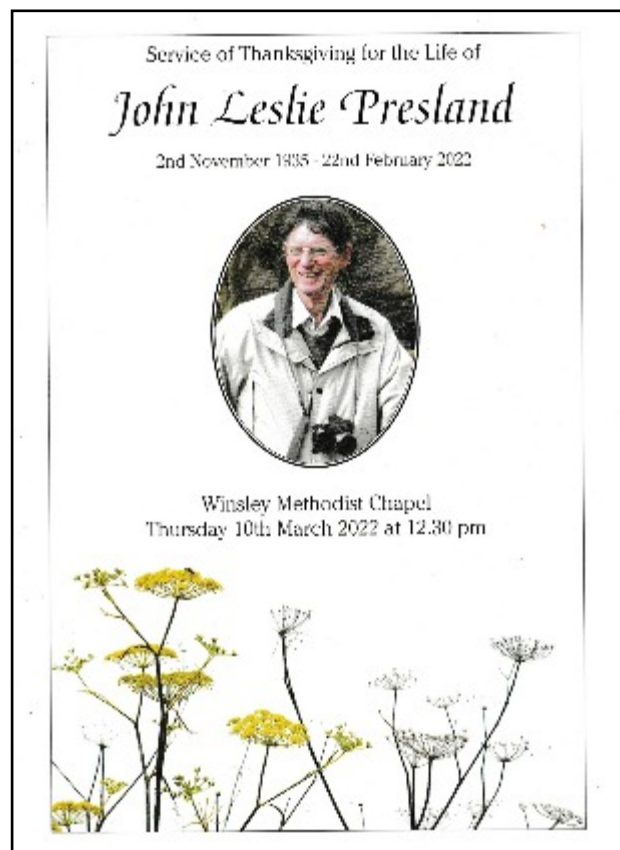
I attended John Presland's funeral, on behalf of the Wiltshire Botanical Society, on the 10th of March. The service was held at Winsley Methodist Chapel.

I was joined by Dr Simon Young, another founder member of the Society. John's son Philip gave the eulogy, and two grandchildren read Scripture passages. John's body was interred close to his wife, who pre-deceased him last year, in the churchyard of St Nicholas Church. This is a beautiful churchyard with a conservation area that John knew well.

The service was well attended by family and friends from throughout his long professional and botanical life. A reception was held at the local village hall.

John had asked for any donations to be made out to the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust.

Dave Green



## BSBI Handbook: Lady's-mantles

Read our exclusive [interview with author Mark Lynes](#) about the writing of the new Handbook.

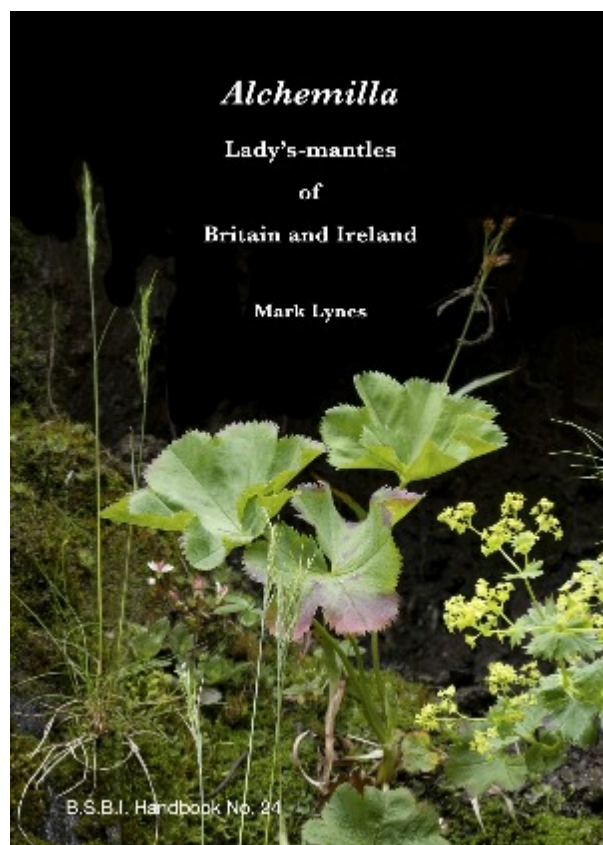
*Alchemilla: Lady's-mantles of Britain and Ireland*: BSBI Handbook #24

The latest addition to our series of [BSBI Handbooks](#) for difficult plants is *Alchemilla: Lady's-mantles of Britain and Ireland* by Mark Lynes. The new Handbook will cost £20/ €23.50, and is due for publication in April but a pre-publication offer, exclusive to [BSBI members](#), opens on 31st January and runs until 31st March - members will pay only £12.50/ €14.75 (excl. P&P).

The UK and Irish *Alchemilla* flora stands at twenty species: fifteen natives and five introductions. Of the native species, four are recently-published names by the author of this new work, set to become the standard for the genus in these islands.

Sections on the *Alchemilla* plant, guidance on identification, synopsis, dichotomous key, and key-character tables, precede the full species-accounts. Each species has sections on etymology; distribution, habitat and status (for most species, contributed by [BSBI Head of Science Dr Kevin Walker](#)); general appearance and full description; distribution map; and the crucial discussions on confusion species. Diagrams illustrate distribution, density and posture of stem and leaf hairs. Numerous colour images show key comparative features of each species.

To take advantage of the pre-publication offer, BSBI members should go to the password-protected [members-only area](#) of this website. Remember to have your password to hand ([email us](#) if you've forgotten it).





# Letters from Donald Grose

(the author of 'The Flora of  
Wiltshire', 1957)

When looking up something in 'The Flora of Wiltshire' by Donald Grose (DG) which had belonged to my late husband, I discovered two letters to Geoffrey (G) from the author tucked inside the book and dated 1958, more than sixty years ago. Some references in the first, typed letter, relate to records G made on Porton Ranges when he was working at MRE (Microbiological Research Establishment). He always told me that he was able to wander freely on the ranges and that no one else at that time seemed to recognise their botanical value. The site was not designated as a SSSI until 1977. His records certainly seem to be the first for the site, although those for Meadow Clary *Salvia pratensis*, Lily-of-the-valley *Convallaria majalis* and the Twiggy Spurge *Euphorbia virgata* on Isle of Wight Hill proved to be over the boundary in VC12 in Hampshire.

In his second letter, DG says 'The loss to Wiltshire of some of the species is a blow, but perhaps you will find them later on the right side of the border!' Sue Fitzpatrick and I have recorded the *Euphorbia* on the ranges at Thorny Down in Wiltshire, although it is now attributed to Cypress Spurge *E. cyparissias* and *E. virgata* is no longer a valid name, being a synonym for *E. waldsteinii*. Suffice it to say that the taxonomy of this group of spurges has been subject to much debate and revision (see 'Plant Crib 1998' by T.C.G. Rich and C. Jermy and various editions of Stace, amongst other floras). The status of Cypress Spurge as a native species is debated and Stace describes it as 'native-looking in chalk grassland in E. Kent and elsewhere in SE England, naturalised in rough grassland and waste places throughout'. Clapham, Tutin and Warburg's 'Flora of the British Isles' (1962), which was the botanical 'bible' before Stace for those of you too young to have grown up with it, states that it is 'Possibly native in calcareous grassland in a few places from Kent and Wilts to Westmorland; more commonly occurring as a garden escape'. The 'Hampshire Rare Plant Register' (2011) by Rand and Mundell suggests that the Porton population might be a relic from the garden of the Old Lodge building demolished in 1920, but Phil Wilson (PWi) points out that it occurs several hundred metres

WANBOROUGH 249  
DOWNS EDGE,  
LIDDINGTON,  
SWINDON.  
12 July 1958  
Dear Mr. Appleyard,

Please forgive delay in answering your letter. I have only just returned from holiday and found it waiting.

I am most interested in the very remarkable array of good 'finds' you have made in the Porton area. It is a district I do not know well for, although I have visited the Tower Hill woods several times, I have been afraid to venture far into the army ground southward. The last time I was on those downs was about twenty-five years ago.

Will you please give me additional information? I notice that *Salvia pratensis* and *Convallaria* are given as 'Isle of Wight Hill' - were the localities in Wiltshire? If so, can I have place-names on this side of the boundary?

Leopard's-bane. Is this *D. pardalianche* or *D. plantaginifolia*?

I am very interested in *Euphorbia virgata* and would be glad to have a small specimen if you can conveniently gather one for me. There are two forms - both seem to like army territory!

Next Wednesday I am going to Redlynch for a botanical meeting and on the return journey in the early evening I hope to visit your locality for *Phyteuma* at 240339. The sketch map you kindly made shows the site clearly.

Yours sincerely  
Donald Grose

WANBOROUGH 249  
DOWNS EDGE,  
LIDDINGTON,  
SWINDON.  
17.7.58  
Dear Dr. Appleyard.

Thank you so much for sending the *Euphorbia*. It is the form which grows at Stonehenge and Bulford and differs somewhat from the plant at Larkhill. It arrived in excellent condition and will make a nice herbarium sheet.

Thank you also for the other information. The loss to Wiltshire of some of the species is a blow, but perhaps you will find them later on the right

side of the border!

Yesterday evening I visited the Winterslow locality of *Phyteuma* and found the plants without difficulty. They are finer and taller than those which grow about Avebury. It is an interesting extension of the distribution.

The Botanical Society Recorder for N. Hants is E.C. Wallace, 2 Strathearn Rd., Sutton, Surrey. I have no doubt he would be pleased to know of any discoveries you might make.

Yours sincerely,  
Donald Grose

**Transcription of Letter from Donald Grose 17.7.58**

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Yours sincerely  
Donald Grose





Balkan Spurge on Porton Down

away from the old garden and considers it possibly native. He also considers that the Meadow Clary in the same location is native here in a very similar habitat to sites on Salisbury Plain. The habitat is certainly chalk grassland and the rare Slender Bedstraw *Galium pumilum* in the same area is undisputed as a native. PWi did, in fact, record the Meadow Clary at a new site on the Wiltshire part of the ranges in 2006, (Wiltshire Rare Plant Register 2007, Sharon Pilkington) so DG rather belatedly got his wish!

The other species mentioned in the letters is Round-headed Rampion *Phyteuma orbiculare* that G discovered in East Winterslow. I believe that his was the first record here, although the site is now well-known. DG was certainly unaware of it prior to G contacting him.

I think it is important that those of us who are, or have been, involved in plant recording in a professional capacity acknowledge the enormous contribution made by amateur botanists now and in the past. 'The Wiltshire Flora' (1993) produced by the Flora Mapping Project that was the origin of our own society, includes an article on 'Six Wiltshire Botanists' by Ann Hutchison with an appreciation of Donald Grose (1900-1973) and his wife May (1903-1990).

Anne Appleyard



Meadow Clary on Porton Down



Round-headed Rampion (Parsonage Down)



# I like plants – should I record them?

Yes please! So, you have an interest in wild plants. You like to find them and work out their names. Why not take down the details and pass these on so others can benefit from what you have seen?

## Why should you make plant records?

Do you enjoy finding a nice plant? If you turn your find into a plant record and send it in, it becomes interesting and useful for everybody.

Making a list of plants for a site is a good exercise for you. If you then send in your list of plant records, it enables others to make habitat assessments, aid conservation, and spot trends.

## What happens to plant records?

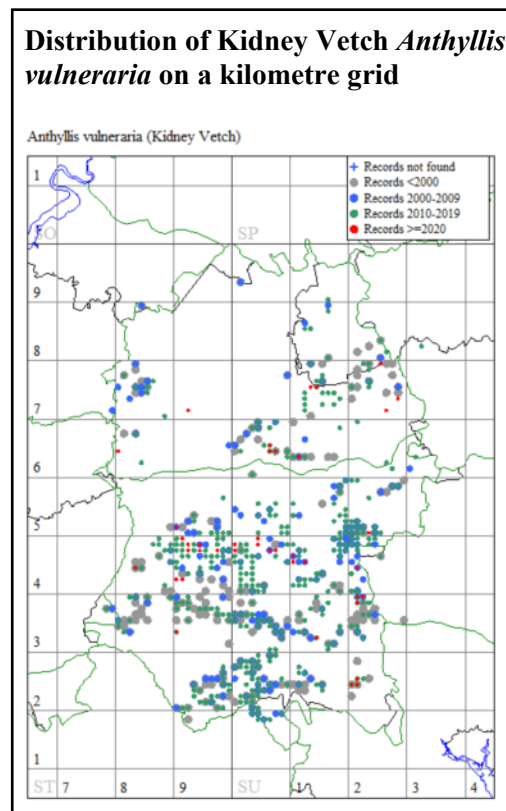
County recorders add records to their database; ours has over a million plant records. These are passed onto local record centres (for us, the Wiltshire and Swindon Biological Record Centre, WSBRC, in Devizes) and to the Botanical Society for Britain and Ireland (BSBI).

## How are these records used?

The **County Recorder** can map plants across the county, showing up patterns in distribution and good places for plants. Gains and losses can be seen.

**WSBRC** can inform the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and other conservation bodies of good habitats and changes in them. They screen planning applications to alert Wiltshire Council and Swindon Borough Council to threats to wildlife. Landowners such as National Trust, RSPB and many others can access the data and use it to inform management proposals.

The **BSBI** provides free plant distribution maps for the British Isles on its website. The data has many uses, for instance analysing changes in plant numbers allows them to produce national 'Red Lists' that show which plants are threatened.



## What do you need to note down?

**What:** the plant name, preferably the binomial, but English names are OK if they clearly refer to one species.

**Where:** we need a place name, usually the nearest place on the OS map and an Ordnance Survey grid reference, like SU137794. We also need a vice-county number (usually VC7 – North Wiltshire or VC8 – South Wiltshire). More on VCs and grid references later.

**When:** the date when you saw the plant, preferably in the form 17/03/2022. A month-date like 'March 2022' is acceptable if you are not sure.

**Who:** your name as recorder must be included somewhere. If other people were recording with you, add their names. If an expert confirmed your identification, give their name as 'Determiner'.

**Notes:** you can add details of the habitat or numbers of plants if this would add to the record. Include extra details of the location – names of woodlands, site compartments etc.

## How do I send in records?

**By email:** this is a good way if you have one or a small number of records. Make sure that you include all the *what, where, when, and who* information. Send to me ([richard@theaisbitts.co.uk](mailto:richard@theaisbitts.co.uk)).

**On an Excel spreadsheet:** useful for larger numbers of records. This will ensure that each record is kept separate and has all the necessary information. There are ready-made sheets on the WBS website at <https://www.wiltsbotsoc.co.uk/recording>. There is a basic one with headings on the columns that you can fill line by line.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
1	Plant Name	Site Name	Grid Reference	Vice County	Recorder	Determiner	Date	Quantity	Comment
2	Vinca major	Swindon	SU15088328	7	Aisbitt R.	Not given	01/01/2022	Present	BSBI New Year Plant Hunt. In Flower
3	Petasites fragrans	Swindon	SU15118330	7	Aisbitt R.	Not given	01/01/2022	Present	BSBI New Year Plant Hunt. In Flower. Track edge, outside Quarry Wildlife Garden LNR
4	Bellis perennis	Swindon	SU15098331	7	Aisbitt R.	Not given	01/01/2022	Present	BSBI New Year Plant Hunt. In Flower
5	Vinca minor	Swindon	SU15268340	7	Aisbitt R.	Not given	01/01/2022	Present	BSBI New Year Plant Hunt. In Flower
6	Capsella bursa-pastoris	Swindon	SU15388340	7	Aisbitt R.	Not given	01/01/2022	Present	BSBI New Year Plant Hunt. In Flower
7									
8									



Another version gives much more help and checks your entries, including the spelling of plant names. You type into the boxes on a form. This automatically transfers the data onto the spreadsheet behind.

Record Entry - v2.33, MapMate Taxon List matched to Stace 3rd Edition

Taxon: Vinca major  
 Vernacular: Greater Periwinkle  
 Site: Swindon  
 GridRef: SU15088328  
 VC: 7  
 Recorder: Aisbitt R.  
 Determiner: Not given  
 Date: 01/01/2022  
 Quantity: Present  
 Method: Field Observation  
 Sex: not recorded  
 Stage: Not recorded  
 Status: Not recorded  
 Comment: BSBI New Year Plant Hunt. In Flower

Buttons: Autofit column widths, Page Up, Page Down, First Record, Last Record, Line Up, Line Down, Set Default Values, Mark Taxon Errors, Clear Taxon Errors, Mark Unusual Taxa, Clear Unusual Taxa, Mark GridRef Errors, Clear GridRef Errors, Mark Date Errors, Clear Date Errors, Copy all records to new sheet, Save records as text file

**On paper:** if you don't use a computer, you could put your records on paper, writing them on a blank printed table and posting these or handing them in. I can provide blank recording sheets.

**Recording Apps:** schemes like *iRecord* and *iNaturalist* are getting ever more popular, with several of our members using them. These records go onto the *iRecord* website and wait for verification. Unfortunately, they may then sit there for extended periods before being transferred to other databases.

**Note:** they allow you to use an alias rather than your real name. Please do not do this as a genuine name is required for any biological record. Also, make sure that you give a useful location name; the apps allow entries like 'Wiltshire' or even 'UK' – don't use these!

*Living Record* is a web-based scheme popular with some Wilts recorders. You sort out sites and grid references by clicking on a map and then list your finds.

### What do I need with me in the field?

A **notebook**, for listing plant names and details.

Maybe **BSBI recording sheets**: These are useful if you are doing a survey and listing large numbers of plants. There is a version for each vice county that lists its more common species. You cross through the taxon name for each plant you see. There is space on the other side for extra details or plants that are not listed. You can transfer the names to a spreadsheet later – the Excel recording form will accept the code numbers for each taxon, so you don't have to type in the name. You can download the sheets from <https://www.wiltsbotsoc.co.uk/recording>.

By special request, I can transfer the records for you if you provide me with the recording sheet.

An **ID guide**, almost certainly.

### Anything NOT to record?

Plants in gardens (a possible exception: Mistletoe).

Planted trees (but if you think they have some interest, add "planted" to the notes).

## What about grid references?

Grid references give unambiguous positions on Ordnance Survey maps. The country is divided into 100 kilometre squares and the two letters at the beginning of the grid reference tell you which square you are in. These are ST and SU for almost all of Wiltshire.

Between 2 and 10 numbers come after the letters; the more you have, the greater the precision.

**SU 12 34** is the address of a 1 km square. This one is 12 km east from the western SU boundary and 34 km north from its southern boundary. Kilometre square precision is adequate for recording common and widespread species.

**SU 126 342** is the address of a 100-metre square within SU 12 34. Use at least a 6-figure grid reference for anything unusual or interesting.

**SU 1260 3425** is the address of a 10 metre square. Use this for anything rare or unusual that someone might want to find again.

10-figure grid references give the position of a 1 metre square. This is better than the accuracy of a hand-held GPS, so knock off the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 10<sup>th</sup> digits to give an 8-figure grid reference. Never round up as that moves you to the next 10-metre square.

**Note 1.** Spaces within grid references make them easier to read, but they should be removed for botanical records.

**Note 2.** If you are in a large site, start a new list for each kilometre square. Please do not use a central grid reference (“site centroid”) for the whole site.

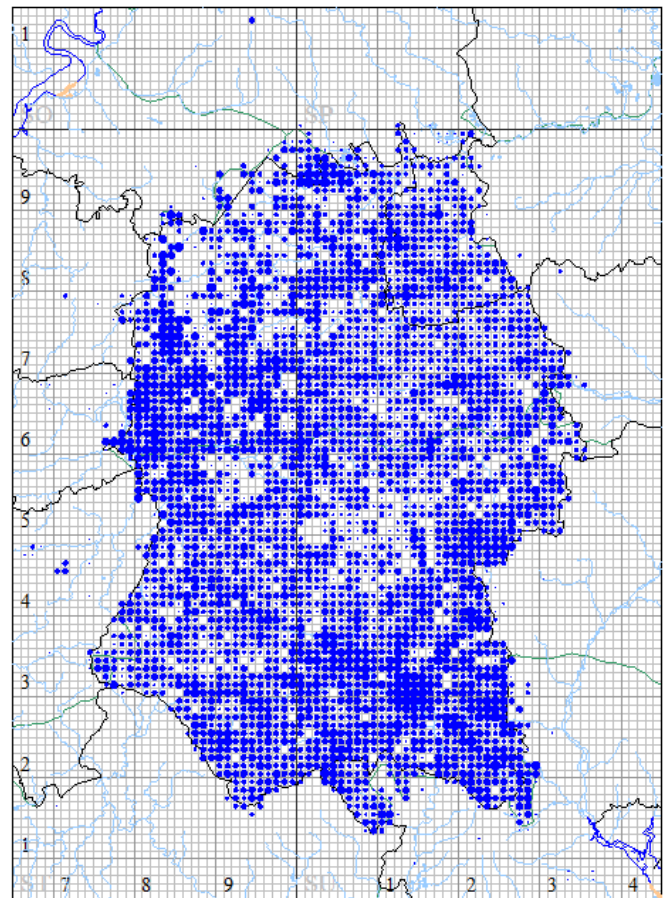
**Note 4.** You can also work out a grid reference using a paper Ordnance Survey map.

**Note 3.** Any error in the numbers can make a grid reference useless. Take care.

## Species numbers in Wiltshire kilometre squares showing gaps in recording

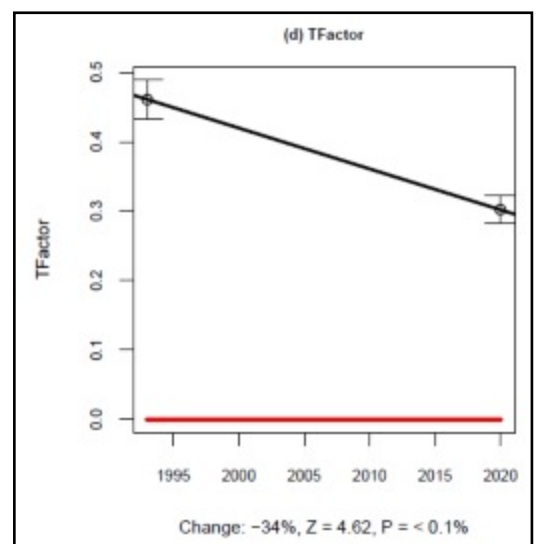
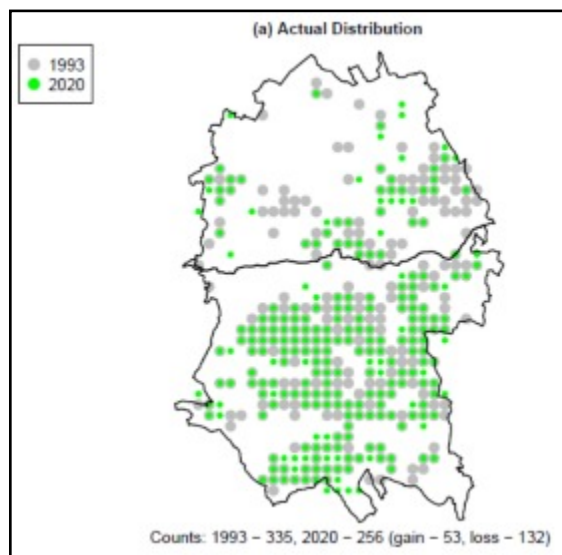
Wilts Species Density 2000+

19 Mar 2022



## Changes in the distribution of Kidney Vetch *Anthyllis vulneraria*, a chalk downland specialist

The map shows the loss of the plant between the Wiltshire Flora survey (1993 – grey dots) and the BSBI Atlas Update (2020 – green dots), particularly in the Lambourn Downs area. The chart shows the calculated change.





## Using a GPS

A hand-held GPS will give you a 10-figure grid reference. It will also show the likely error in metres. Allow this to settle before taking the grid reference. Remove any un-wanted digits.

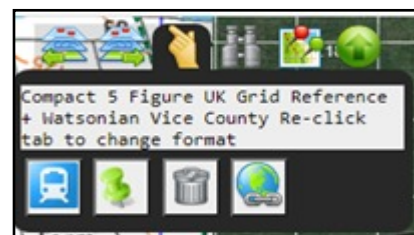
## Using a phone

A modern mobile phone works well as a GPS. You can download free apps that will show the grid reference (and the error) on screen. They can also display Ordnance Survey maps (usually at a cost). Some recording apps will put the grid reference straight into your record without any typing.

## Grid References and Vice Counties on the Web

You can get grid references and vice county numbers from maps or satellite photos on the web. Using vice counties allows large counties like Wiltshire to be split into more manageable sizes. Wiltshire is split into North Wilts (VC7) and South Wilts (VC8), with the Kennet and Avon Canal as the dividing line. County boundaries have changed since the VCs were mapped out, so they do not always align with county boundaries. Here are Sharon Pilkington's instructions for grid references and VCs from her guide to BSBI Atlas recording.

"If you are recording on the boundary of two different vice-counties and are unsure which one you are in, the Where's the Path? website will display grid references and vice-counties at: <http://wtp2.appspot.com/wheresthepath.htm>. Bring up your desired view (it works for OS maps, satellite views etc.) Zoom in as far as you can and look at the control box at the top of the screen. Click repeatedly on the hand until the message changes to 'Compact 5 Figure UK Grid Reference + Watsonian Vice County ...' (it can be a bit fleeting). Then move your cursor to exactly where you want to check the grid reference and VC and just read off the figures in the box. It works best at high zoom, and will still sometimes waver between two VCs if for example you were in the middle of a river forming the vice-county boundary. Another excellent reference website is [www.cucaera.co.uk](http://www.cucaera.co.uk). Click 'Grid reference Plotter' then zoom in on the map."



## A final note

These instructions were meant to be short and simple, but just grew.

If you are doubtful about sending in any botanical records, send them to me anyway. Do this in whatever form suits you. Any problems can be sorted out.

Richard Aisbitt, BSBI Recorder for Wiltshire

# Plant Records 2020

## Explanatory notes

The following list contains all species that are new to the County or Vice-counties. In this list 'new' refers to records gathered since the early 1980's and the publication of the 1993 Wiltshire Flora. In addition, the word 'recent' refers to this period also.

Recording in 2020 overall was much reduced due to Covid and whilst this list is limited in size, the full list will be available to view on the WBS website.

The information contains both scientific and common names based on the *New Flora of the British Isles 3<sup>rd</sup> edition*. (Stace); together with site, brief information where supplied and the initials of the recorder. First County or Vice-county records appear in bold italics. For interest, some species may have the IUCN threat criteria attached as documented in *A Vascular Plant Red List for England (BSBI:2014)*.

## Initials of Recorders

DG ----- Dave Green  
HCr ----- Helena Crouch  
JBr ----- Jane Brown  
JRM ----- John Moon  
KAT ----- Katherine Newbert  
MBu ----- Martin Buckland  
MKi ----- Martin King  
PMW --- Pat Woodruffe  
RAi ----- Richard Aisbitt  
RM ----- Richard Mielcarek  
SPi ----- Sharon Pilkington

## VC7

**Allium ampeloprasum (Wild Leek)**; Bradford-on-Avon (ST86), two plants growing out of pavement edge at Wine Street. In recent times the adjacent property had been a high-end florist. Perhaps the seed had originated from a flower arrangement? DG. **1<sup>st</sup> Wiltshire record.**

**Carex x subgracilis** (C. acuta x acutiformis); Reybridge (ST96), within the derelict Wilts & Berks Canal. A large population of hundreds of flowering spikes expanding by benign neglect and rhizomatous growth. DG and confirmed by M.Porter, BSBI Carex referee. **1<sup>st</sup> Wiltshire record.**

**Catapodium rigidum ssp. majus** (Fern-grass); Swindon (SU18), Marlborough Road; frequent plants over 2km extending from SU14202095 to SU17368289, mostly along pavement to wall-angles, RAi. **1<sup>st</sup> Wiltshire record.**

**Cytisus scoparius ssp. scoparius (Broom)**; Martinsell Hill (SU16), two plants, Jbr. **1<sup>st</sup> VC7 record.**

**Dahlia x hortensis** (Dahlia); Cumberwell Landfill site (ST86), DG. **1<sup>st</sup> Wiltshire record.**

**Epipactis x schulzei** (E. purpurata x E. helleborine); Savernake Forest (SU26), a clump of seven very tall flowering stems on ride verge. The tallest of the seven was 91cm but a further two plants nearby up produced a specimen to 97cm. RM; determined by BSBI referee John Richards. **1<sup>st</sup> Wiltshire record.**

**Fumaria reuteri** (Martin's Ramping-fumitory); Rowde (ST96), five plants in flower in a pub car park. MBu & DG, and confirmed by Tim Rich, BSBI referee. **1<sup>st</sup> Wiltshire record.**

**Gnaphalium luteoalbum** (Jersey Cudweed); Bradford-on-Avon (ST86), eight clumps in driveway paving and on adjacent pavement edge at Christchurch Road. DG. **1<sup>st</sup> VC7 record.**

## Qualifying initials

IUCN -- International Union for the Conservation of Nature  
NS ----- Nationally scarce  
CR ----- Critically endangered  
EN ----- Endangered  
VU ----- Vulnerable  
NT ----- Near Threatened

**Helianthus x laetiflorus** (Perennial Sunflower); Heddington Wick (ST96), a well-established clump which is either a garden escape or from dumped material, MBu. **1<sup>st</sup> Wiltshire record.**

**Helleborus argutifolius** (Corsican Hellebore); Rowde (ST96), self-sown seedlings in kerb stones, MBu & DG. **1<sup>st</sup> Wiltshire record.**

**Hieracium grandidens** (Grand-toothed Hawkweed); Somerford Keynes (SU09), a revised identification for H.exotericum at this site in 2018. DG and determined by Brian Burrow BSBI referee. **1<sup>st</sup> Wiltshire record.**

**Himantoglossum hircinum** (Lizard Orchid) [GB:NT; Eng:LC]; SU17 Tetrad U. A single, flowering plant. Precise location data withheld. Identified from photograph by SPi. **1<sup>st</sup> VC7 record.**

**Kniphofia uvaria** (Red-hot-poker); Seend Cleeve (ST96), garden escape and well established at wall to pavement angle, MBu. **1<sup>st</sup> Wiltshire record.**

**Lotus subbiflorus** (Hairy Bird's-foot-trefoil); Bradford-on-Avon (ST86), in a raised bed adjacent Timbrell's Yard pub, DG. **1<sup>st</sup> VC7 record.**

**Malope trifida** (Mallow-wort); Cumberwell Landfill site (ST86), a single plant, DG. **1<sup>st</sup> Wiltshire record.**

**Oxalis debilis var. corymbosa** (Large-flowered Pink-sorrel); Cumberwell Landfill site (ST86), a single plant, DG. **1<sup>st</sup> Wiltshire record.**

**Phaseolus coccineus** (Runner Bean); Neston (ST86), two plants growing out of dumped soil, DG. **1<sup>st</sup> Wiltshire record.**

**Pisum sativum var. arvense** (Field Pea); Bromham (ST96), Netherstreet Farm, a few plants within a fodder maize crop and presumed to be volunteers from a previous crop, MBu. **1<sup>st</sup> Wiltshire record.**



**Rumex cristatus** (Greek Dock); Lower Seagry (ST98), two separate colonies in the central reservation of the M4, SPi. **1<sup>st</sup> VC7 record.**

**Tagetes patula** (French Marigold); Berryfield (ST96), two plants in road gutter, HCr & DG. **1<sup>st</sup> Wiltshire record.**

**Trifolium subterraneum** (Subterranean Clover); Cumberwell Landfill site (ST86), around twenty plants on recently dumped but levelled out soil, DG. **1<sup>st</sup> VC7 record.**

## VC8

**Alisma lanceolatum** (Narrow-leaved Water-plantain); Trowbridge (ST85), Paxcroft Mead Lagoon, two sites, DG. **1<sup>st</sup> VC8 record.**

**Amaranthus powellii** (Powell's Amaranth); Codford St.Mary (ST93), single plant on edge of kerb, DG & KAT, confirmed by Quentin Groom BSBI Referee. **1<sup>st</sup> Wiltshire record.**

**Arum italicum ssp. italicum** (Italian Lords-and-Ladies); Codford St.Peter (ST93), a single plant at base of a fence, DG. **1<sup>st</sup> VC8 record.**

**Carex x boeninghausiana** (C. paniculata x remota); Gare Hill (ST73), two sites, single tussocks each, HCr & DG. Confirmed by Mike Porter, BSBI referee. **1<sup>st</sup> Wiltshire record.**

**Colutea arborescens** (Bladder-senna); Trowbridge (ST85), Paxcroft, Ashton Road, a single bush in hedgerow, DG. **1<sup>st</sup> Wiltshire record.**

**Dryopteris affinis ssp. paleaceolobata** (Golden-scaled Male-fern); Gare Hill (ST73), ten plants, HCr & DG; confirmed by Roger Golding, BSBI referee. **1<sup>st</sup> VC8 record.**

**Fumaria capreolata** (White Ramping-fumitory); Westbury (ST85), between five and ten plants in flower over mound of dumped spoil. Fruits were not mature enough to identify ssp. SPi. **1<sup>st</sup> Wiltshire record.**

**Guizotia abyssinica** (Niger); Whiteparish, Anchorsholme (SU22) Hop Gardens, two plants flowering close to niger bird-feeder, PMW. **1<sup>st</sup> VC8 record.**

**Hieracium grandidens** (Grand-toothed Hawkweed); Westbury (ST85), Long River Road, several plants at woodland edge and road verge, SPi; confirmed by Brian Burrow BSBI Referee. **1<sup>st</sup> Wiltshire record.**

**Hieracium sublepistoides** (Grey-bracted Hawkweed); Ludgershall (SU25), Windmill Hill Plantation, collected by JRM and determined by Brian Burrow BSBI Referee via DG. **1<sup>st</sup> VC8 record.**

**Hieracium vagum** (Glabrous-headed Hawkweed); Trowbridge (ST85); a small population in a car park, DG. **1<sup>st</sup> VC8 record.**

**Lathyrus heterophyllus** (Norfolk Everlasting Pea); Martin Down (SU01), MKi. Confirmed by SPi and Martin Rand. **1<sup>st</sup> Wiltshire record.**

**Lobularia maritima** (Sweet Alison); Chapmanslade (ST84), a very small patch of plants amongst other, unknown aliens, DG. **1<sup>st</sup> VC8 record.**

**Phalaris arundinacea var. picta** (Variegated Reed-grass); Westbury (ST85), locally common, dumped soil, SPi. **1<sup>st</sup> VC8 record.**

**Potentilla intermedia** (Russian Cinquefoil); Trowbridge (ST85), Mascroft Road, Paxcroft Mead; four plants growing at the base of a newly planted hedge, DG, confirmed by SPi. **1<sup>st</sup> Wiltshire record.**

**Pyrus pyrastrer** (Wild Pear); Hilperton (ST85), two sites at Ashton Road, split by the bypass, where three trees have suckered. First seen, 29/07/2020 before being formally identified by fruits on 24/08/2020. DG, and confirmed by SPi. **1<sup>st</sup> VC8 record.**

**Rostraria cristata** (Mediterranean Hair-grass); Westbury (ST85), Church Street; two plants growing at a wall to pavement angle, DH and confirmed by SPi. **1<sup>st</sup> Wiltshire record.**

**Salix x multinervis** (S. aurita x cinerea); Gutch Common (ST82), two sites on the common on damp organic soils. One has the habit of *S. cinerea*, is around 4m tall but has distinctly rugose leaves and persistent stipules, both SPi. **1<sup>st</sup> VC8 record.**

**Sempervivum tectorum** (House-leek); Limpley Stoke (ST76), two small specimens found in moss-covered rock and believed to be self-generated and not planted, DG. **1<sup>st</sup> Wiltshire record.**

Compiled by Martin Buckland

## The Committee

Dave Green	WBS Chair, Project Group Leader, WhatsApp Group	07900 248992	<a href="mailto:d.green7@btinternet.com">d.green7@btinternet.com</a>
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Kat Newbert	Co-Recorder, Facebook Group	07578 822322	<a href="mailto:katherine_newbert@hotmail.co.uk">katherine_newbert@hotmail.co.uk</a>
Sharon Pilkington	Web Site Editor	01373 827074	<a href="mailto:sharon.pilkington1@btinternet.com">sharon.pilkington1@btinternet.com</a>