



Bog Pimpernel *Anagallis tenella* - Plaitford common

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To a Wiltshire Flora 2000 to 2024

A Project Group Update

The BSBI 2020 National Atlas of the Flora of Britain and Ireland that ran from 2000 to 2019 attracted many volunteers who recorded plants across Wiltshire, some from the very beginning but mostly from 2010 onwards.

As you will be aware, an Ordnance Survey map is divided into 10 km. squares and these in turn by 1km. squares. It is these 1km squares or monads that we were and still are interested in recording within. Each 10 km sq or hectad had a 'Guardian' who had accepted the area within which to record. This did not stop anyone else from recording anywhere in Wiltshire, indeed quite the opposite for the Society actively encouraged anyone to record plants where they were, and this is where you as a member can continue to help.

Our own Wiltshire Flora was published in 1993 and was based on work between 1984 and 1991. This is now 30 years old and perhaps not a little dated. Whilst the BSBI have enough data to satisfy their requirements it is felt that a few more years to fill in more gaps in our knowledge was needed and so it was proposed to continue with this atlas-style work for a while longer to enable a greater cache of records to be collected thereby giving us a sound 25 year period from which to report and potentially publish a new flora.

What the Society would like is for members not only to enjoy what they see when out and about but to record what they see as well. This can be through the Living Record App or by the local records office submission form, both available from the Wiltshire & Swindon Biological Records Office, www.wsbrc.org.uk.

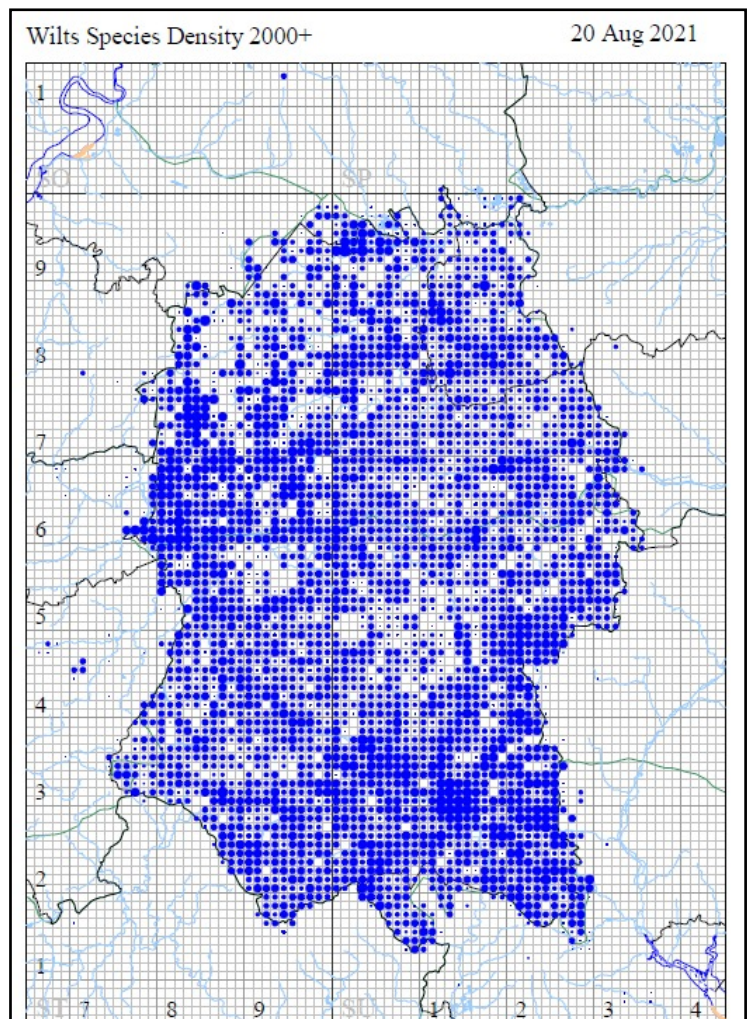
Alternatively, if you want to be more progressive, on the Wiltshire Botanical Society website www.wiltsbotsoc.co.uk there is a link to recording and data entry spreadsheet with instructions. (Don't be put off, it's not as hard as it may seem). Also found in that section is a 'dotty' map that gives an indication of what has been fulfilled. An empty spot indicates no records and the size of a spot indicates how many records have been gathered. In addition and perhaps easier to appreciate are separate hectad maps under '10k_counts' that give the current number of records. From these you can see which 1km squares are devoid of records and those with only a few. Anything less than a hundred may well be worth another look unless it's an arable or ryegrass 'desert'.

All these hectads have a present guardian but many of those have more than one hectad and would be more than happy for someone to take one off their hands or perhaps share one. Contact Martin Buckland for further details. martinbuckland8@gmail.com

At the very least there is so much still to do that if you want to wander where you will, the chances of someone duplicating work at exactly the same time of the season is quite small.

Happy plant hunting!

Martin Buckland, on behalf of the Project Group.



Leif on the Plain



A few weeks ago Sharon and I were invited to meet up with Leif Bersweden at a site on Salisbury Plain. Many of you who are reading this will know who Leif is and his link to WBS but I will explain ...

Leif was definitely the youngest ever active member of WBS (I am excluding those brought on the backs of parents or in push chairs). I first got to know him when he was 14 and eventually persuaded him to come along to some of our meetings. It was clear that he was a budding botanist and one whom we would watch develop. Leif did quite a lot of recording for the Atlas 2000 project and, during his gap year, set out to record all the native British orchids that summer. This he did and published 'The Orchid Hunter' in 2017. Even before this he had co-written 'Winter Trees' with Dominic Price. Having graduated with a degree in Biology from Oxford, Leif went on to Kew Gardens to carry out research work for which he has recently been awarded a PhD. Unsurprisingly perhaps, his research topic involved the relationships of certain orchids using DNA technology. He was able to tell us that the Lady Orchids *Orchis purpurea* found on Porton Down are most closely related to their counterparts in Kent, rather than to those from across the Channel.

So, did Leif want something more than a happy chat in a good location with a few choice botanical finds? Yes. He is now enjoying a two year publishing contract with a view to writing two new books, the first of which will be about how people become inspired by plants. Sharon and I were guinea pigs and we will wait to see what transpires when the book is published in about a year's time.

It proved to be a memorable morning, not only for meeting up with Leif again but also for seeing a good quantity of Purple Milk-vetch *Astragalus danicus*, some wonderful clumps of Burnt Orchid *Neotinea ustulata*, a few plants of Field Fleawort *Tephrosia integrifolia*, and some wonderful views of the extent of the Plain.

It's great to find someone who is happy in their work, feels overjoyed to have been given these opportunities, and who wants to spread the botanical word, especially to the younger generations. I wish him well.

Pat Woodruffe



Purple Milk-vetch - Pat



Field Fleawort - Pat



Burnt Orchid - Pat

Recollections of an out of county member



It was back in 1995 that I first joined the Wiltshire Botanical Society. I had attended a BSBI field meeting in the Tisbury area, led by John Akeroyd. We enjoyed a very pleasant walk of about seven miles, culminating in a visit to John's home, to see some rare plants, and where we met Abi the tabby, who promptly hid under a bush at the site of all these strange feet invading her home. Oddly I remember the name of the cat but not what plants we saw! I think there may have been Meadow Saxifrage *Saxifraga granulata* and possibly a hellebore. During this meeting, I first met Jack Oliver and Joy Newton. Jack gave me a copy of the WBS newsletter, so I became a member.

Not long afterwards, Jack turned up at a meeting of the Hampshire Flora Group in the New Forest, where we searched for Wild Service Trees *Sorbus torminalis*. Jack recruited my friend John Ruppertsbery to the society, despite being bitten by John's little dog! I have learned the hard way that it's always unwise to extend a hand to a strange dog, and Morar was very nervous with strangers. But Jack was very forgiving, and John duly became a member. He accompanied me to many meetings in the next few years. Although we were both members of Hampshire Flora Group, and had several good friends among their members, we especially enjoyed our Wiltshire excursions. Maybe it was the greater number of field meetings at that time, which led to smaller groups, or maybe it was the sense of exploring new or less familiar territory. And we were always made very welcome. Highlights include Cherhill Down, Great Cheverell Hill, Morgan's Hill, Salisbury Plain, Tottenham House (Savernake) and many others. At a memorable meeting at Pepperbox Hill, John found himself, by chance, cornered among the bushes between Jack Oliver and Roger Veall, both retired psychiatrists. We pointed out to them that they had the material for an entire conference in John! This was the occasion when a very large cannabis plant was discovered in a secluded spot, obviously having been carefully tended by someone who must have scrambled up the embankment from the A36.

On one occasion we visited a garden near Devizes where we were shown round by the owner. I remember there was a large amount of Purple Toothwort *Lathraea clandestina*, presumably growing on willow. Coralroot *Cardamine bulbifera* was well established in the wooded area, and was rapidly becoming something of a pest, in fact the owner reckoned the bulbils could probably roll uphill. He gave away pieces to anyone interested, and I took some away. It

is now well established in the semi-wooded area at the bottom of my garden, and I can confirm that the bulbils do appear to roll uphill, though that may have something to do with the movement of badgers and foxes that abound here in urban Southampton. The plant has not yet reached pest proportions, but that may be due to the pigeons grazing it when it first emerges in early spring. The mauve flowers are quite attractive, and the dark brown bulbils clinging to the stems are an interesting feature.

We also attended the residential trip to Gower in 1999, the visit to Branton Burrows in 2000 and one day of the Kingcombe Meadows trip in 2002. On Gower, we all stayed at a farm where we were very well fed, but we were surprised to be awoken at midnight when the hardworking farmers began to feed the horses in the stables below our window after a long day harvesting potatoes. Later I took part in the South Wales trip in 2003 on my own, as John was recovering from major heart surgery. This was memorable for the Kenfig dune system and Wye valley meadows and woods. We were also given a tour of some of the coalfield valleys, where Pat had contributed to reclaiming the spoil heaps with her knowledge of what plants would tolerate the toxic conditions. Then in 2015 I joined in the residential visit to West Sussex, much nearer my home, but an area that was mostly new to me, apart from Kingley Vale. John had taken me to see the amazing ancient yew trees there on the day I first met him, back in 1989. He knew I would be impressed! This made a fitting finale to the WBS trip of 2015.

My identification skills were never great, but WBS gave me the opportunity to help with surveys along with experts, such as Roger Veall and John Ovenden (at a recording meeting at Martins Down). I felt a bit overwhelmed by such erudite companions, but they were very kind and friendly. I have contributed very few Wiltshire records over the years, but did take part in recording for Atlas 2000 with the Hampshire Flora Group. Before that, I used to accompany my mother, a very keen botanist and obsessive recorder, first in Worcestershire and later in Cornwall. I learnt a great deal from her, but sadly I feel I have forgotten almost as much since her death in 2002.

In 2007, I used my inheritance to buy a bungalow near Bridport in West Dorset, coincidentally quite near to Kingcombe. From then on, many of our weekends were taken up with visiting Dorset, and as I was still working part time, there was little opportunity for joining midweek field meetings. At times, I regret not buying a property in Wiltshire, but West Dorset is a wonderful area with a rich fauna and flora.

John's health had been declining for some time, and he became increasingly unable to walk for more than a short distance. I can't remember the last time he accompanied me to a field meeting, but it may have been to Savernake Forest some years ago, when Jack showed us a most wonderful ancient hawthorn. Or possibly a late autumn visit to Henry Edmonds' farm, when on a misty morning Henry showed us the eggs of Brown Hairstreak *Thecla betulae* butterflies on Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*. Later we enjoyed home-made soup in the farmyard, surrounded by very free-range rare breed poultry. Sadly, John died in July 2019, having visited his beloved New Forest for the last time only a few days before. Although he was always very interested in plants, butterflies were his real passion. He was especially fond of the Pearl-bordered Fritillary *Boloria euphrosyne* and spent many hours monitoring the New Forest colony, becoming an acknowledged expert on the species, and earning the friendship and respect of the Forest keepers.

Now I have more time on my hands, it would be good to catch up with the society, when Covid regulations allow it. It is several years since I have been to a field meeting and I am afraid my botanical skills are very rusty. But I know I would still be welcomed.

Mary Cockerill, Southampton

Do you have any news or comments? I would be pleased to publish these in the next issue. Maybe you would like to write a full-blown article.

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Plaitford Common, New Forest

Saturday 17th July 2021 - a Botanical Society outing

It was wonderful to be back out with the Wiltshire botanists on this hot summer's day and, for most of us, to see friends whom we have missed for many, many months. Indeed, being together again and exchanging news and views was a big part of the day but it was also heartening to have some new faces amongst us and we hope that they will join us again in the not too distant future.



Early Hair-grass - Pat



Chantarelle - Pat

Our venue was some of 'our part' of the New Forest, just over the county boundary into Hampshire and yet still in VC8. The plan was to visit mainly the wetter areas, rather than the dry heathland at Canada Common, and after this rainy early summer, we were able to manage that easily. We started right on the county boundary at Plaitford and soon found plenty to occupy us all. The first half an hour or so provided a quick crash course in the typical bog plants such as Bog Asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum*, Marsh St John's-wort *Hypericum elodes*, Round-leaved Crowfoot *Ranunculus omiophyllus*, White Beak-sedge *Rhynchospora alba* - while Sharon picked out five

different species of *Sphagnum*. There were two species of Sundew, *Drosera rotundifolia* and *D. intermedia* and perhaps it is a pity that such well-known but specialised plants are passed over quickly without much thought about how they supplement their diet so amazingly.

The Common appears to be grazed all year, mainly by horses, and in a dry season it can be hard to find anything except the few less tasty leaves that they have left behind. This was not the case and, particularly in the wetter areas where the stock seldom go, we added Floating Club-rush *Eleogiton fluitans*, Bottle Sedge *Carex rostrata*, Water-purslane *Lythrum portula* and many others. I confess that I miss-identified the latter and took it to be Hampshire Purslane *Ludwigia palustris*, which just shows how easy it is to make assumptions. I hope the two photographs will tell the tale.

We chose a much drier area for our lunch, one where material had been imported in order to give access to one of the pylons that traverse the site. The small annual grass Early Hair-grass *Aira praecox* was prevalent here and we also spotted the much rarer Allseed *Radiola linoides* as well as Bird's-foot *Ornithopus perpusillus*. In a wetter area the heads of Cotton-grass *Eriophorum angustifolium* were conspicuous.



Keeled Skimmer - Pat



Allseed - Pat (inset: Richard)

Our final stop was one where several streams ran more or less parallel to each other with small carr areas between them. The Society visited this area in 2016 and it was good to refind Royal Fern *Osmunda regalis* doing well and even slowly increasing. The rare White Sedge *Carex canescens* (previously *C. curta*) was also present together with some lovely groups of Bog Pimpernel *Anagallis tenella* and a fine display of a fungus which was later confirmed by Ali Green to be Chanterelle *Cantharellus cibarius*.

We were all rather hot and sticky by the end but between us we had amassed a list of around 150 species. Our thanks to Dave Green and to Sharon Pilkington for sharing their knowledge and for finding so many minute gems that are so easily overlooked. Thanks also to Anne Appleyard for keeping the record sheet so meticulously.

Pat Woodruffe



Royal Fern - Richard



Hampshire Purslane - Pat



Water-purslane - Pat

Why I record plants

I thought I'd start with our group's title: the Wiltshire Botanical Society (WBS), but, in particular, the middle word.

Botanical: relating to botany (OED).

Botany: (i) the scientific study of the physiology, structure, genetics, ecology, distribution, classification, and economic importance of plants. (OED).
(ii) the plant life of a particular region, habitat, or geological period. (OED).

Not sure that the WBS covers all the criteria of (i) but we certainly cover item (ii)

Region: Wiltshire. *Habitat:* well documented. *Geological period:* ongoing with periodic bursts such as the Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland's (BSBI) Atlas 2000 to 2019; *Wiltshire:* always.

So why do I record and why do we need to record?

Firstly, it's part of WBS's rationale. Recording is not all about finding rarities nor is it a rush around gathering notes on everything without a chance to appreciate and perhaps photograph plants. Furthermore, it is fun and maybe a little addictive. I participated in the BSBI Atlas as a way of putting something back into the hobby that I enjoy and those that also do it know that they are contributing to the knowledge of the plant kingdom's distribution and potential protection. All data is gathered, even the humble daisy, for it's only through surveying and recording all plants that we learn what populations are doing. Furthermore, routine surveying as with the Atlas, brings continuity to known sites and species, raising their profile for the decision takers and policy makers to stand up for them and to protect them.

I appreciate that the Atlas was a bit of a 'mammoth' for some people and was not popular with having an extensive time frame but there are many other schemes one can get involved with where the time frame is small i.e. once a year. Wiltshire Council have been running a Protected Road Verge Scheme since 1970 where volunteers, as individuals or small groups, monitor verges annually (WSBRC - the Wiltshire and Swindon Biological Records Centre - keeps and analyses these and other records). Another scheme run by the BSBI and Plantlife, among others, called the National Plant Monitoring Scheme aims to provide an annual indication for abundance and diversity of an area because presently there is not a good measure of changes in population across the country. Plantlife also run the Back from The Brink / Colour in the Margins Project whose minimum focus is just on ten species of arable plant.

The historical legacy of biological recording in Britain and Ireland is unique and inspiring and is the envy of many other countries. Many naturalists are committed to studying our flora and fauna, and WSBRC's work helps to ensure that we make the most of their observations. The vast datasets built up through the expertise and commitment of the volunteer recording community enables a range of ecological questions to be addressed; for instance distribution trends derived from the large-scale and long-term datasets provide evidence for many purposes, particularly in relation to understanding environmental change.

In addition, WSBRC and BSBI helps the recording community to publish atlases, data and other online resources to provide essential information which informs research, policy and the conservation of our heritage of wildlife. The innovative use of technology helps to harness the enthusiasm and knowledge of naturalists and enable them to collate and analyse their records; if you have a smart phone you can easily download the iRecord App that allows you to record any species (not just plants) on the go.

So, why do I do it?

Makes me go out into the Countryside (not that I need an excuse).

I discover new places.

It serves a purpose.

I am putting something back.

I enjoy pottering around.

I see other flora and fauna species.

My own sense of well-being.

I enjoy it.

And yes, I might find a rarity or two.

If I'm preaching to the converted, then I say well done. If not, then I say give it a go...

Martin Buckland