



B R I S C

BIOLOGICAL RECORDING IN SCOTLAND

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Recorder News

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largest book about water beetles. In 1904 he met with Frank Balfour Browne at a village pump in the Cambridge Fens and agreed with him that it would be a good idea to study the distribution of water beetles.

The first recording scheme and B-B

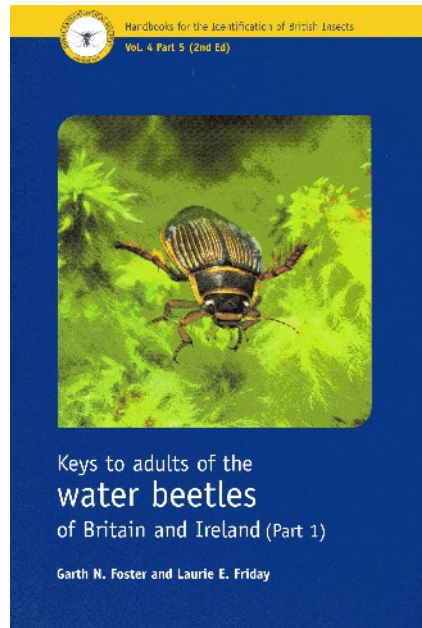
By 1950 Professor Balfour-Browne, born at Goldilea by Dumfries and

WATER BEETLES IN SCOTLAND - A SHORT HISTORY

Garth Foster

Korea to Dumfries

In 2008 Changdo Han managed to get into North Korea to collect some water beetles. He and his colleagues identified fifteen species, ten of which had been described as new to science in a remote house near Drumlanrig Castle in the 19th Century. There Dr David Sharp quietly looked after an insane member of the nobility whilst receiving parcels from all over the world and writing what is still the



retiring nearby on the Mouswald road, had travelled in most of Britain and Ireland, lived in a good few mansions in Scotland, England and Northern Ireland, and amassed 28,000 of his own records and about the same again of others, probably the earliest recording scheme for invertebrates in the world, beaten only by plants and snails. B-B, as he was always known, published three books about water beetles, an autobiography (but it was about water beetles), and hundreds of scientific papers, the occasional fish, moth and dragonfly being thrown in early on until he saw the light – and spent the rest of the time on, you’ve guessed it, water beetles.

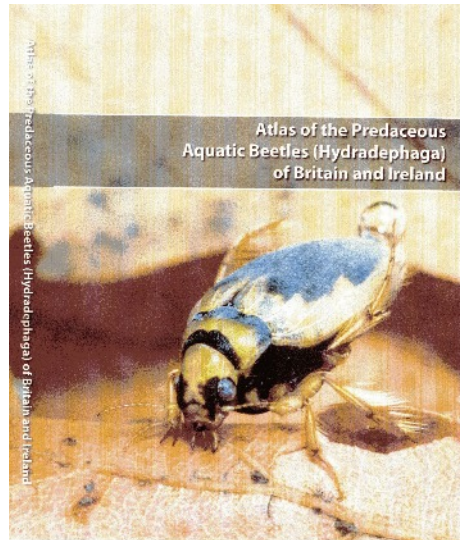
The second recording scheme

Things have moved on a little. At the last count there were 481,000 records in the recording scheme for Britain and Ireland. The Scottish list stands at 59,000, which, given the main location of both previous organiser, B-B, and the present one, is an embarrassingly low 12 per cent of the total. To be fair there are less species to record in Scotland, about 250, compared with about 380 overall. It has to be “about” because it is not really possible to define where a water beetle stops and a land one starts. Some families, such as the whirligigs (Gyrinidae) and the diving beetles (Dytiscidae) are clearly aquatic, though even they have to come on land to pupate. At the other extreme are some weevils and other-foilage feeding beetles that live on plants the roots of which need waterlogged soil. The real

definition of a water beetle is any beetle daft enough to fall in the pond net.

Reading and doing

B-B’s books are still a good read even if the name of some beetles have changed and some really interesting species have been discovered since their publication. The present plan is to produce three handbooks for the Royal Entomological Society and three matching atlases for the Biological Records Centre, after which a revised



data-set will be made available through the NBN Gateway or similar. We might claim three out of six so far with two handbooks published and one

Continued on page 5



Ex-Chairman's Column

Jonathan Willett

As the days lengthen, the bumblebees buzz around my garden and the Daffodils

are about to appear, it does feel like Spring is in the air. But then Ben Wyvis gets a new covering of snow. However, the equinox has passed and it is getting warmer, even if only in one's mind. The sheer bustle and activity of all life re-awakening at this time of year is energising. Soon most of the Summer migrants will be appearing. The Ospreys are already arriving and the Frogs are spawning; what next? Spring inspires not just naturalists but also artists. I just found out about Ted Hughes's poem *Swifts* - if you haven't read it already, do seek it out. I loved the lines, "*They've made it again, Which means the globe's still working*".

On the subject of renewal, my optimism has been renewed in finding a potential solution to the current patchy coverage of our Data Hubs/ LRCs etc. that may - no will, be in the offing this year. Firstly SBIF is re-jigging itself and the SBIF coordinator Christine is going to be working for the NBN, so this will be more closely aligned with the NBN whilst still delivering SBIFs aims. These aims are pretty much the same as the NBN's, hence the decision to move the post to this new host. It makes for clearer lines of responsibility and focuses SBIF on its role as a forum,

lobbying and advice group with the aim of delivering this "*Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to establish integrated local and national structures for collecting, analysing and sharing biological data to inform decision making processes to benefit biodiversity.*" The text of the e-petition to the Scottish Parliament from 2008.

The SBIF Committee is keen that, "*a review and redesign of the Local Environmental Record Centre (LERC) and recording group network with a view to realigning the network (subject to stakeholder consultation)*" should be undertaken as soon as is possible. Key funders are supportive of this and I think it is the best chance we have had in 40+ years to really come up with a solution that integrates and evolves existing structures whilst also facilitating the creation of new ones to help fill in any gaps. It will be no one-size-fits-all solution and it has to take into account both local and national requirements. But there is a very strong case to be made for an integrated network offering data services to organisations, whilst also supporting local recorders. I look forward to the seeing the consultation responses.

You will have noticed it is still me typing all this, so I have made it to another Chairman's column! I just can't let go... The BRISC Committee hope to make an announcement in the next issue of Recorder News as to who will take over.



Editorial

I hope you find the articles in this edition interesting. Many thanks to those contributors and please keep sending me ideas and articles!

You will see a lot in this copy about changes to SBIF etc so enough said. LRC coverage of Scotland has taken a leap with TWIC's expansion into central Scotland - see the news on their website <http://www.wildlifeinformation.co.uk/> So now they will be helping to achieve what JW talked about on page 3.

Meanwhile the most busy time for terrestrial biological recording begins; though some taxa like bryophytes are almost easier to record in winter as their colours illuminate the grey days. There is a huge range of events for introducing family and friends, to strengthen your skills or enthuse your particular bent. If you are already a member of a society and signed up to their newsletter you will get information of field meetings and recording blitzes, but if new to this area of voluntary effort, you can go to the BRISC sources <http://www.brisc.org.uk/Sources.php> for links to natural history societies and LRCs or the BRISC facebook page.

Citizen science projects are also proliferating. These include many recording opportunities and are an excellent way to get a taste of a science based subject without being a scientist. The products are incredibly useful - for example the Plantlife report '*State of Scotland's Juniper*' which depended on much 'amateur' recording effort.

There are too many events to list here but note training days for Atlas recording of several taxa are being held by relevant

organisations - BSBI, NeSBREC etc. Orkney's Wildlife Information & Records Centre has several training courses in July for less well covered taxa. The TWIC Spring Conference is at Galashiels close to the new railway - details on page 10. The Field Studies Council, whose programme we sometimes list but lack of space this time prevents - has a huge range of courses for all levels of skill - <http://www.field-studies-council.org/>

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COPY DEADLINE for the July 2016 issue is June 24th

All articles preferably in electronic format. Illustrations welcomed preferably as separate jpegs.

Please send to the BRISC editor.

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atlas in press, and we might need to plan a seventh volume, all the corrections and updates!

Publishing hard copy atlases may seem a bit old-fashioned in this online age, but it has proved beneficial in cleaning up the data-base. And the data-base goes on. New records are welcome and there is free guidance on identification and, within reason, access to the data. There is still much to learn about water beetles, ranging from their nuclear DNA to their fossil record, but with basic recording by enthusiasts being all-important.



Garth Foster
Aquatic Coleoptera Conservation
Trust

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National Plant Monitoring Scheme

Now entering its second season, the National Plant Monitoring Scheme (NPMS) needs your help in tracking trends in the quality of semi-natural habitats throughout Scotland, and the UK.

National recording schemes are designed to monitor the health of various species groups, and the value of them lies in aggregating as many records as possible. Public participation over the long-term is the key to success.

The NPMS is a simple method of recording a range of specific wild plants within fixed 5m x 5m plots that can tell us something of the quality of the habitat in which they grow. The scheme is designed to allow participation by anyone interested in the wild plants that make up the countryside; with three levels of identification available, participants can start at a level they feel comfortable with, and then if they wish, increase their skills by recording more plants at a higher level.

The need for national schemes to regularly monitor wildlife has been recognised for quite some time. Annual recording of birds, some mammals and butterflies are currently the most comprehensive datasets on which to assess changes in the UK's wildlife. There are atlases and other periodic surveys showing the

distribution of different taxonomic groups but there tend to be large gaps between updates. Changes in habitat quality are difficult to assess from surveys conducted at different scales, both of time and location.

In 2009 the Joint Nature Conservation Committee produced the UK Terrestrial Biodiversity Surveillance Strategy that identified the need for a more strategic approach to gather data to aid decisions and actions for biodiversity conservation. "Currently, around 100 separate surveillance and monitoring schemes include biodiversity, and running the schemes involves around



Linglie Moss, Selkirk

30 bodies making an annual equivalent spend of approximately £11.5 million, with the value of volunteer effort at least three times this figure. Many of these schemes have been planned in isolation from one another, and the data generated may only be used within single reporting requirements" (JNCC 2009).

The main gaps identified were in the frequency of surveillance for plants, fungi and invertebrate species. This is critical as these groups underpin functioning ecosystems.

Plant recording schemes have been operating for some time now, but there were difficulties in deriving robust statistical analysis of annual trend data from these schemes. Many things could be learned from the existing plant data, but it wasn't collected in a format that allowed it to be used with other data to track change in quality.

A new vision was required for a national plant recording scheme:

- A functioning scheme that provides technically sound outcomes relevant for conservation policy, while attracting and retaining volunteer recorders.
- Data that are complementary to other surveillance schemes, and can be analysed with these to provide novel results.
- Planning for the long-term, requiring long-term relevance and long-term commitment.

A partnership project was set up in 2011 to take forward this vision, involving BSBI, the Centre for Hydrology and Ecology and Plantlife, with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee co-ordinating the scheme. The task was to design and test a national surveillance scheme for vascular plants, able to assess changes

for individual species and thereby indicate quality of semi-natural habitats.

In conjunction with a wide range of experts in varying disciplines, a methodology was devised, and small-scale field trials were set up in 2012/13 to test and fine tune the protocols and materials.



Ungrazed grassland - Gala Rig, Selkirk

The basis of the survey, as with the Breeding Bird Survey and the Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey, is a random sample of 1 x 1km squares (or monads) throughout the UK. The selection of monads was weighted through the presence of semi-natural habitats in the square. The habitats selected for the scheme is compatible with Annex 1, UK BAP Priority habitats and EUNIS, and there are strong correspondences between NVC tables and NPMS habitats.

Species selection was critical as they had to represent a broad spectrum of plant functional types within a given habitat, while choosing species that were relatively easy to identify.

Rare and 'difficult' species were excluded, while weight was given to plant species that were typical or representative for a given habitat – "axiophytes". They also had to be common enough across the UK to be able to be recorded within random, fixed 5m x 5m plots.

The habitat and species lists were refined over the trial period, with 400 volunteers testing and giving feedback on various aspects of the scheme design.

Support for surveyors was an essential part of the design of the scheme and a range of printed and online materials



Tail Burn - Moffat Water

have been produced, including an easy-to-follow survey guidance booklet, and a full-colour species identification guide to the plants to be recorded.

Here's how it works and what you need to know to join in:

It involves two visits annually to an allocated 1km square and data,

including photographs, are entered online. The photographs are important to find the recording plots again in subsequent years.

The NPMS is open to anyone with an interest in wild plants, regardless of level of expertise. If you would like more information, please visit the website <http://www.npms.org.uk/> where you can sign up, read about the survey and download all the information you will need in order to take part. Alternatively, you can contact the scheme coordinator at support@npms.org.uk.

An interactive map of the allocated monads can be found on the NPMS website if you are interested in seeing if there is a square near you.

Currently in Scotland volunteers are surveying 147 1km squares. The more squares that are covered, the better the information available to environmental policy makers and practitioners, to aid decision-making and action for biodiversity. So please do visit the NPMS website and have a look at what is involved. If you think you can help then join us in looking after the nation's wild plants.

Davie Black

Conservation Co-ordinator, Plantlife Scotland

Photos by Sarah Eno



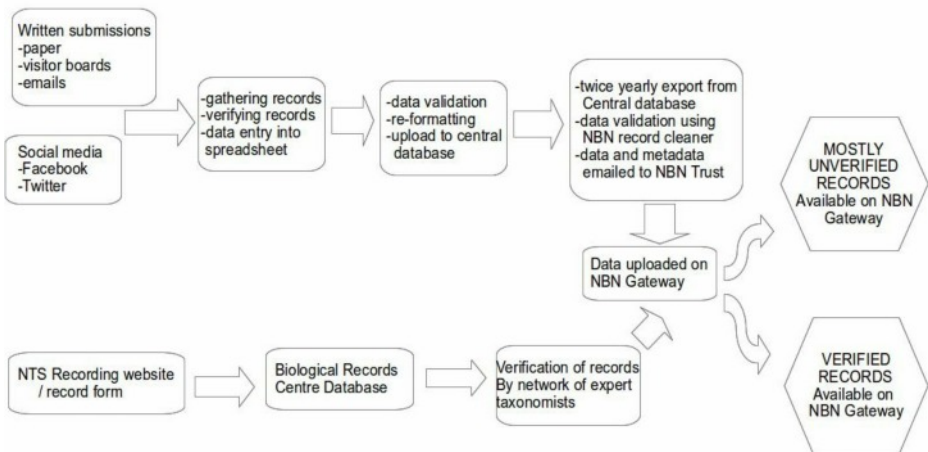
explore the Trust's gardens, woodlands, moors, and mountains.

NTS is the third largest landowner in Scotland with stewardship of over 76,000 hectares of countryside such as the magnificent Ben Lawers mountain range and the stunning islands of St Kilda. A relatively small Ranger's Service monitors priority species and habitats as part of a rolling programme of survey and monitoring work. However, with such large areas to cover and strict time commitments, it is the common and less charismatic species which often go under recorded.

The NTS Rangers Service gratefully receives many wildlife records from members of the public but these are often restricted to the rare or the magnificent. This website provides a simple and accessible system where anyone can tell us what they have seen, be it an earthworm or an eagle,

The National Trust for Scotland has in collaboration with iRecord designed a new wildlife recording web page at

www.nts.org.uk/wildlifesurvey where visitors to NTS properties can record the plants and animals they see as they



and hopefully inspire budding recorders to keep telling us!

The easy to use form provided by iRecord caters to the beginner as well as the more experienced recorder. As the site is mobile enabled this can even be done on the move and a photo upload option allows easier verification of the record. The simple to use mapping tool means more accurate locational data can also be recorded.

Crucially, the anticipated surge in wildlife records will not infringe on precious staff time as little data management is required. The diagram below shows the traditional data flow for records received by visitors to Trust properties (green & blue) compared to the simpler, quicker, and more accurate data flow from the new recording page (red).

As the recording form is provided by iRecord through an iFrame link, records will go directly to the (BRC) iRecord database where they can be verified by an established network of experts.

Verified records will then be shared with the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) where they will be available via the NBN Gateway and the Atlas of Living Scotland allowing them to achieve their full potential by contributing to scientific research, conservation projects and decision making nationwide.

Christine Oines
NTS Countryside Data Officer



SPRING CONFERENCE

*Tools & Technologies to assist
Biological Recording*

Saturday 30th April, 10 am to 4 pm at
the MacArts Centre, Galashiels.

We will aim to showcase a variety of resources available, from iSpot and online recording to new sensor technologies like eDNA. The conference will provide opportunities to find out about wildlife recording initiatives across the region including information on how to get involved - and live demonstrations of BirdTrack and iRecord over the lunch break.

Entrance is FREE and includes a buffet lunch, but **booking is essential**.

To book go to Eventbrite
<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/twic-spring-conference-tools-technologies-to-assist-biological-recording-registration-23415598686> and fill out the online booking form.

Deadline for bookings is Wednesday
27th April 2016.

UPDATE FROM THE SCOTTISH BIODIVERSITY INFORMATION FORUM (SBIF)

Change is in the air for the Forum. Over the last few months there has been much discussion between the Forum, BRISC and the NBN Trust about the best way for the three organisations to effectively work together. Then it became clear that the Forum's work is very closely aligned with that of the NBN's in Scotland, visible especially through our support for the development of the Atlas of Living Scotland, which we see as a crucial part of the data pathway.

As a result of the discussions, my role of SBIF Co-ordinator has been transferred to the NBN Trust, with effect on the 1st April. With the post also being made up to full-time it presents a great opportunity to improve data mobilisation and sharing in Scotland, which is also at the heart of the Forum. In addition, in order to continue advising and facilitating this

work, the SBIF Steering Group has been retained as an Advisory Group to the NBN in Scotland; I will continue to work closely with them and on behalf of SBIF Supporters. We will also continue to work closely with BRISC. Please ensure you are signed up to the <http://nbn.org.uk/news-events-publications/latest-stories-from-our-network/enews-sign-up/> in order to be kept informed about our work.

In the immediate future my work will focus on our data partners in Scotland and in particular data for the Atlas of Living Scotland. We are also working through all the user feedback that the Atlas has received so far (thank you if you have sent in comments) with a view to implementing changes where we can.

Please do have a look at the Atlas beta site <http://www.als.scot/> explore the interface and continue to submit your thoughts and ideas directly to the Atlas. We want to hear about what you like about the Atlas as well as what you

would like to see changed. Please also consider joining the user testing group contact details can be found on the website.

The Atlas can be followed on Twitter: @AoLScot.

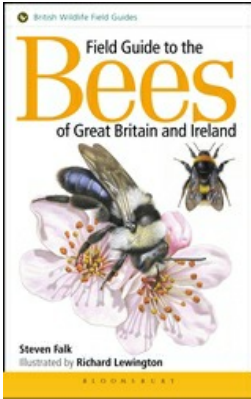
Christine Johnston, NBN Scottish Liaison Officer

Email: c.johnston@nbn.org.uk

NBN website: www.nbn.org.uk

Twitter: @NBNTTrust

REVIEWS



Field Guide to the Bees of Great Britain and Ireland

by Stephen Falk

Illustrated by Richard Lewington

Bloomsbury
2015

When the idea for this book was first floated, it caused considerable controversy among bee-folk. The appearance of the finished volume late last year should have ended any concerns – it is an excellent resource dealing with a very important group of insects which has long been ignored in comparison with the more user-friendly butterflies, moths and dragonflies. Much of the deficit of attention is down to the lack of suitable identification materials. This book goes a long way to fill the gap.

The first thing to say is that, despite the title (and not only because at 800g and nearly 30mm thick it is not easy to carry in a pocket), this is not a field guide. That point is made clearly in the introduction. With very few exceptions, and then only after considerable experience, our bees cannot be reliably identified to species in the field. Anyone starting out from scratch will need to tackle some intimidating terminology, and get up close and

intimate with pinned specimens under a stereo microscope.

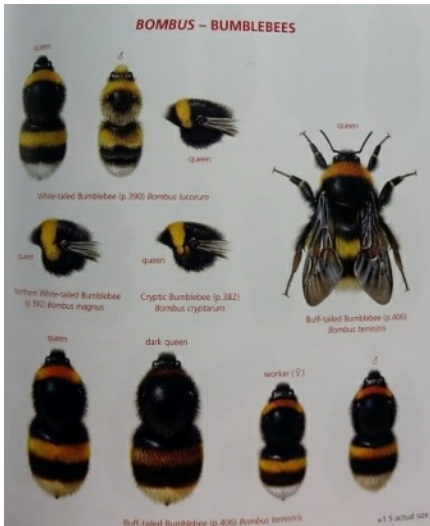
That should not discourage engagement with the group. Our knowledge of the current status and distribution on bees – even the relatively simple bumblebees – in Scotland is at best patchy, relying on the handful of active resident recorders, all of whom would fit comfortably into a couple of normal family cars. Give the national concern about pollinators in general and bees specifically, this is a regrettable gap in our knowledge. Any increased recording will be a good thing, and if this guide does not spur naturalists to expand their taxonomic horizons, nothing will.

One enormous advantage we have in Scotland is that our bee fauna is vastly smaller and less diverse than in the south of England. Indeed, as the solitary species are sun-lovers, it is surprising that we have even as many species as we do. That means that one-third of the genera in the book can be safely ignored, and some of the others are very scarce and restricted in Scotland. Of the 34 species of *Lasioglossum*, a difficult genus, only 12 are known from Scotland. In *Andrena*, the largest genus, we have only 26 of the 67 UK species. This makes the task of becoming competent in Perth much less onerous than it would be in Plymouth.

Given the complexity of the subject, Steven Falk has made the keys as simple and accessible as is possible,

and the choices are clarified superbly by the illustrations, both photographs and artwork. It is fitting in the digital age that the book is explicitly complemented by his Flickr photograph albums. If you have not browsed these yet, stick it on your to-do list – they cover much more than bees.

The genus and species accounts are comprehensive and informative, and even people who might not tackle the more technical demands of identification will learn about the fascinating biology and ecology of bees. The guide has managed to accommodate the needs of the entire spectrum of interest, from general interest, to aspiring specialists, to existing specialists. That is no mean achievement.



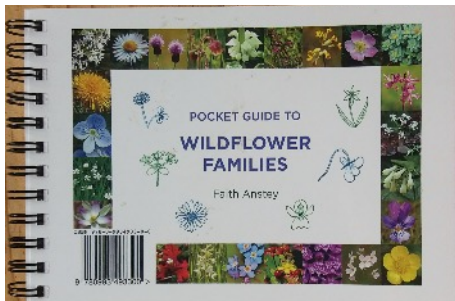
feel distinctly lukewarm towards the English names provided. Mentioning vernacular names for bees is the best way to start a violent argument among existing bee-specialists. I am very flexible on the matter, judging that the popularity of a group of insects is directly proportional to the number of English names in common use. How else can moths (which I find almost totally devoid of charm or interest!) be so popular, while the immensely intriguing bees are so ignored?

However, I am not sure that the often contrived neologisms in this guide will help – not, at any rate, for many decades. While they may aid initial engagement, any use of existing texts or conversation with specialists (except for Steven himself) will inevitably require familiarity with Latin binomials. For me, the White-jawed Yellow-face Bee will continue to be *Hylaeus confusus*.

In summary, this is an essential resource for anyone who wants to learn about our Scottish bee fauna. It is certain that anyone who develops the skills of identification of solitary bees in Scotland will quickly add to our knowledge and understanding of this under-recorded group of insects, so get down to your favourite bookshop and have the guide ready when the first bees tell us spring has arrived.

Review by Murdo MacDonald

Any negatives? It would be unkind to be too harsh about the occasional misspelling of scientific names which jumped out of the page at me, but I



Pocket Guide to Wildflower Families

Written and published by Dr Faith Anstey, 2016.

ISBN 978-0-9934933-0-0

Available p&p free for £6.99 from <http://www.wildflowerstudy.co.uk/>

Dr Anstey wrote this book when as an amateur botanist she could not find a simple way to get started on identifying plants. The book proved to be popular and has been used recently in joint BSBI – Plantlife workshops - see below. As a result of that testing, this version has been updated to this neat, ring-bound, waterproof and pocket sized stand-alone guide.

After some useful introductory pages the key gets you to sort out if the plant is a monocot or a dicot. If the former you are sent to the last three pages for the Orchidaceae and Amaryllidaceae. The rest of the Guide is devoted to the largest group - the dicots, basing the initial sorting on illustrated flower forms: e.g. whether the form is composite, an umbel, 4 -petalled, or having 5 free petals, open radial and numerous stamens.... and so on

through to flowers green and insignificant etc. Once you have decided on the flower form you go to the relevant page in the Guide where three photographs of species typical of that family are illustrated. A brief description of typical features is given but you are directed to the relevant pages of The Wildflower Key (Francis Rose 2006) or Collins Flower Guide (2009) for further keying out.

A lot is packed into this little book including a basic glossary. I thoroughly admire the work which must have gone into organising the best way to introduce novices to identifying wild plants. The fact that it has been tested in numerous workshops will have ensured this system is as workable as possible. The Guide is aimed at anyone walking casually in the countryside or to aid more focused attention to botanical learning. I aim to give a copy to my ex-SNH boss who retires later this year and wants to get back into field work!

Review by Sarah Eno

WORKSHOPS:

There are four *Identifying Wildflowers* workshops being held with BSBI in Glencoe and Stirling in May and Loch Ness and Dundee in June this year.

See:

<http://www.wildaboutplants.org.uk/events-calendar/category/scotland/2016-05/>



NBN NEWS MARCH 2016

New NBN website

The all new, all singing and dancing NBN website has launched! The website is a site for our Network and now gives far greater prominence to our members by highlighting their organisations.

As well as a focus on our members, the website also brings together information and resources from across the Network.

For those of you who were familiar with the old website, the main changes are:

- New Members' Pages
- Discussion facility at the end of news articles or pages
- A database of wildlife surveys and recording schemes – "Find a survey or scheme"
- Related articles link to news stories
- Quick links to key sections from the home page
- User friendly navigation, makes it accessible from novice through to NBN expert!

The best way for you to find out more about the website is to spend a bit of time navigating your way around and familiarising yourself with the various sections and pages. We hope you like what you see, but if you think something is missing, or that we could make something better, just let us know. We'd love to hear

from you and get your feedback. www.nbn.org.uk

Atlas of Living Scotland – we want your feedback

We are still really keen to get your feedback on the Atlas - good or bad - we want to know your thoughts! To give feedback on the site please visit www.als.scot and email the team at: info@als.scot

We will bring you more news on the Atlas projects throughout 2016, but in the meantime, if you would like to contribute to the Atlas as a Data Partner or would like more information about the site, please contact us at: info@als.scot.

If you want to join the User Testing Group please contact us at support@nbn.org.uk

New CEO for the NBN

The NBN Secretariat is delighted to announce that our new CEO, Jo Judge, will be joining us at the end of May.

We are sure Jo will be in touch with many of you personally once she is in post, but in the meantime, you can find out a little more about her on the NBN website: <http://nbn.org.uk/news/new-nbn-chief-executive/>

NBN Action Plan

The NBN Action Plan has now been finalised and you can find the final document on the website <http://nbn.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/nbn-action-plan/>

We really value the time that everyone has put into responding to the Action Plan consultation and have taken on board your comments and suggested changes. These changes have all been outlined in a table also available on the website.

Most significantly the total number of actions has reduced from 104 to 95 following a merger of various duplicate actions flagged up during the consultation process.

The Action Plan also highlights the role of the Working Groups in implementing the Action Plan this year.

We look forward to continuing to work with you and once again thank you for the time you have committed so far in starting to realise the NBN Strategy.

NBN Working Groups

To deliver the NBN Strategy, eight working groups are being set up to tackle actions identified as priorities by Network members in the recent round of consultation.

The working groups will focus on:

1. Quality control and verification
2. Mobilising historic data
3. Biological recording online
4. Improving biological data flows
5. Increasing use of our data
6. Captivating and engaging people
7. Network support and development
8. Strategy for the UK Species Inventory

Two working groups, 'Quality Control and Verification' and 'Biological Recording Online', have now been fully formed and an initial meeting was held on the 12th February. The membership of these groups was informed by the Action Plan consultation. Invitations were then circulated to ensure we formed groups that accurately represented the diversity of our Network. Minutes of these meetings will be available for Network discussion soon.

Did you know?

You can help us raise money just by doing your normal shopping!

Help us raise money for four free registrations at the NBN Conference – and you don't even need to do anything other than your normal shopping!!

Over the past year, each time the NBN Secretariat has bought a train ticket, booked a hotel or simply ordered some stationery we have been collecting a small donation through the easyfundraising web tool.

We haven't bought anything different and continue to always seek the best deal and just by doing our normal purchasing NBN has received approximately £170 in donations through the scheme!

This year, we are setting a target of £400 to be raised by our supporters so that we can fund the registration fee of up to four places at the NBN Conference 2016 for members who would otherwise not be able to attend.

Why not help and get spending!
<http://nbn.org.uk/news/easyfundraising/>