

Recording

The *Field Botanist's Record Book* and the *Beginner's Diary*

The main yearly activity for members is keeping the *Field Botanist's Record Book* (formerly known as, and still often called the WFS diary). The record book lists the names of 1000 of the commoner (and a few rarer) plants of Britain and Ireland likely to be readily identified by amateurs and blank pages on which to enter additional taxa (species, sub-species or hybrids). It is available in print or in downloadable form from our website. Alternatively, members may prefer to keep their records in the form of a spreadsheet or as a list as long as the details mentioned below are included.

The *Beginner's Diary* includes nearly 160 of the commonest wild flowers, giving habitat information for each species and identification tips.

Members may, of course, use their record book, diary or list however they like but if they want their plant recording to be monitored and reported on in the *Wild Flower Magazine* they should follow the guidelines below.

Completing the *Field Botanist's Record Book* and records in other forms

The main purpose of the record book is to encourage people to improve their wild flower and fern identification skills. Over the years many people have found it a useful and enjoyable way of doing so. It provides a record of what plants you have seen and when and where you saw them. It will also make you familiar with the minimum requirements for a biological record: what was seen, where, when and by whom.

The following details about each plant recorded should be included: Scientific (Latin) and English names, date seen, where found (giving the location including the county). Other details we recommend including, especially for less common plants, are: if not seen in flower, whether recognised from the fruit or the leaves; brief details of the habitat; whether seen on an organised meeting or otherwise identified with someone else's help.

You should only record a plant if you are satisfied that you have correctly identified it. If you have been shown it by somebody else, for example on a field meeting, you should aim to have understood what is distinctive about it so that you would have a good chance of recognising it again. Plant identification apps may be used to point you in the right direction but you should always cross reference any identification they make with the descriptions or keys in a field guide or flora.

Especially for a beginner, many plants can only easily be identified from their flowers but that is not always the case. For example, docks are easier to distinguish when they are fruiting as are our two native species of oak. Ferns and similar plants do not have flowers at all and you won't need to see its flowers to identify Holly. If you have had help from a more experienced botanist to identify a particular plant, please make a note in your record book.

Plants entered in the record book should be growing in the wild i.e. unplanted and uncultivated where you saw them and have been seen in Britain or Ireland. We appreciate that it may not always be easy to tell if an individual plant has been planted or not! Branch Secretaries should be able to offer advice.

It can be good practice to start a new list each year, especially when starting out in botany, to refresh and reinforce what you learnt last year. However, that is entirely up to you and, if it suits you better, you can just record your additional finds each year. Please indicate to your Branch Secretary which option you have chosen. Junior members should start a new list each year.

Any plant can be recorded if it appears as a numbered or lettered plant in the latest edition of Clive Stace's *New Flora of the British Isles*. If you do not have access to a copy of this, in almost all cases, the plants which you find, for example, in an illustrated field guide, will be in the *New Flora*, though it is possible that the name will be different. Your Branch Secretary will be able to point out any exceptions.

In most cases you will be aiming to identify the species of plant (the numbered plants in the *New Flora*) but, in some cases, this can be very difficult and the record book allows you to enter a record of an aggregate covering a group of similar plants. Examples include Eyebright *Euphrasia* agg. and Bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg. If later you learn to distinguish individual species within one of these aggregates, you can amend your list but, if counting the number of species etc seen you should not count the aggregate as well as one or more individual species.

Species of Bramble *Rubus*, Dandelion *Taraxacum* and Hawkweed *Hieracium* are so numerous and difficult to distinguish that they should only be recorded if confirmed by an expert in the genus.

You can record hybrids listed in the *New Flora* if confident of their identification.

The lettered plants in the *New Flora* are subspecies. You may choose not to distinguish these and just record the species. As with the aggregates, if you later decide to record a subspecies, you should not count the species as well. In some cases, where all except one subspecies are restricted in their distribution or are very distinctive, it will be reasonable to assume that what you have already recorded was the common subspecies. For example, Thyme-leaved Speedwell *Veronica serpyllifolia* has one very widespread subspecies, ssp. *serpyllifolia*, and one, ssp. *humifusa*, only found on mountains in the Scottish Highlands. On the other hand, Ivy-leaved Speedwell *Veronica hederifolia* has two widespread subspecies so, if you record the species, you cannot later assume which subspecies it was.

Recording in Parnassus

On recording 2000 taxa (species, sub-species or hybrids) members may join Parnassus where they need not confine their records to those detailed in Stace's *New Flora* but may count any taxon (species, sub-species, hybrid, named variety, cultivated variety or forma) found wild in Britain and Ireland. Members in regional branches may note such taxa for retrospective counting upon entry to Parnassus.

Records for each year should be sent as a list or spreadsheet and, as a minimum, should include: scientific name, date, habitat and location information (including county).

Records of taxa not in Stace's *New Flora* should be submitted with a literature reference to show that the name is valid. Critical taxa and any which are difficult to identify should be validated by an expert botanist.