

## How to record plants in Shropshire

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With the new Flora out of the way we can think about the next stages in botanical recording in Shropshire. It is difficult to know what to record after a Flora project has just finished because one tends to assume that it has all been done rather thoroughly. But of course that is not true – there is always lots out there to be found, and there are opportunities for all members of the Botanical Society to make a contribution. But please note that not all records are useful to us. In particular, short lists of common plants are not valuable. We need data that can either tell us something we don't already know or which in future will be useful in an analysis such as detecting change.

There are four types of data that we use in botanical recording, and everyone can contribute to at least one of them.

1. **Detailed individual records.** These are by far the most interesting and useful records, and they are the obvious ones for Bot Soc members to contribute. The main difficulty is deciding what species to record – it has to be something unusual or interesting. Hopefully the new Flora will help people to know when they have a first county record or a rarity. Other appropriate subjects include difficult plants and axiophytes.

The way to make a detailed record is to get an accurate grid reference, a precise date, a detailed description of abundance and habitat, and – most importantly – proof of the identification. This could be a specimen plus determiner's name, and a photograph. You must make a detailed record if you do find something new or rare.

2. **Monad Lists.** A monad is a 1 km x 1 km square, which are clearly marked on Ordnance Survey maps and are therefore easy to identify. The aim is to record all the species present. A good plan is to assign an afternoon to recording a monad – 3 or 4 hours, at least. Try to get at least 100 species; 150 or more is a good list in most monads. An alternative is to record the monad many times over a year and just aggregate the list. That way we don't get the precise date of each record, but you should be able to produce a longer list – 200 species or more in most squares. Our hypothesis is that such lists could be repeated in future, creating lists that would indicate change but, to be honest, that has not really been tested yet. Over large numbers of squares it should work.
3. Rather similar to monad lists are **Site Lists.** The aim is to find a simple, discrete site and record everything in it thoroughly. The site needs to fall into or approximate a 1 km square, because that is the grid reference that will be assigned to it (overly precise site centroids are not used). Nature reserves, woods, meres, small hills, farms and churchyards can be appropriate sites to survey. A single field is usually too small to bother with. Don't worry too much if the site projects a small distance across a 1 km boundary but, if anything rare occurs in the extremities, you will of course complete a detailed individual record instead. Larger sites like the Long Mynd or the Stiperstones need to be divided into their 1 km squares. A site list would normally be at least 100 species and would be made over the course of a single day or a whole year.
4. **Quadrats.** By far the best form of recording is the vegetation quadrat – it is precisely localised, repeatable and analysable. But you do need to know what you are doing to record a quadrat, so if you are not absolutely sure then please don't bother. Normally a quadrat would have a full species list for

a patch of vegetation (between 2 m square and 50 m square) plus abundance and a photograph as well. Email me if you want to record quadrats.

### **Submitting records**

We are very happy to receive records on paper or electronically. You can download the recording form from the web site, [www.bsbi.org.uk/shropshire.html](http://www.bsbi.org.uk/shropshire.html) and make your list on the front, with detailed records on the back.

For electronic records you can download an Excel table listing all the plants from the web page and use this for creating a list. If you have Mapmate, you can input records and then export them as a spreadsheet for submission.

Records should be sent to the county recorder, Sarah Whild ([s.whild@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:s.whild@mmu.ac.uk)), as soon as possible after they are made, so they can be checked while the information is still fresh in your mind and you can go back to the site and have another look if need be. If you have found anything new, you might be asked to provide evidence in the form of a specimen or a photo (in fact, many good recorders these days will have taken 50 photos of any field trip they go on, so they can check things later, and this is very beneficial practice). Please do not be worried if your records are questioned – we all make mistakes and your aim must be to convince everyone that you have got it absolutely right.

Specimens should be pressed and dried and mounted on a sheet of A4 paper and put into a plastic pocket. For aquatics and charophytes, fresh specimens can be accepted but check with the county recorder that she can accept fresh specimens! Any hybrid mints or hybrid willows should be supported by vouchers and of course, any first county records.

### **Accessing records**

It can be very useful to be able to access previous records for an area or a species to help in your recording, but do be careful about working from old lists – it can be very tempting to guess that an unknown plant is what was given on the list; but you should never make a guess on that basis. Always identify plants properly and, as general advice, it is safer and more fun to make your own list in the first place and then compare it with the old records.

In Shropshire recorders are particularly fortunate in being able to access all the data for the county from either the Ecological Data Network web site (<http://shropsbotdata.org.uk/index.php/shrops>) or from the NBN Gateway (<https://data.nbn.org.uk/>). There is nothing like it for any other county in the British Isles – everywhere else it is effectively impossible for the ordinary recorder to access any data; so do make use of these facilities.

We can also give you feedback, which usually comes in one of two forms: comparing your records with previous ones, or giving you a report on all your records. If you ask, we can also analyse your records to tell you what your strengths and weaknesses are.

So please carry on recording, and enjoy learning new plants.