

Flora of Cumbria Recording Group, Plumgarths, 5th March 2016

As group members will know, this meeting marked an important watershed in Cumbrian botany.

Dr Geoffrey Halliday stood down as Vice-county Recorder for the BSBI for the two vice-counties 69 and 70, and the mantle passed over to a team of three: Mike Porter, Phill Brown, and Jeremy Roberts.

Geoffrey started the meeting with a tribute to the late Jean Parker who sadly passed away on 27th February. Geoffrey asked for a period of silent contemplation of our memories of Jean, of her life, and her long involvement with and contribution to our group.

Geoffrey delivered a summary of the previous year's activities and finds, and then officially stepped down as the county recorder, passing over the chair to Mike.

Presentation

Mike began with a tribute to Geoffrey concerning his long period of chairing the recording group, and his inestimable contribution to Cumbrian botany.

Mike said (in summary),

Today is a significant day for Cumbrian Botany – the end of an era. Geoffrey Halliday who has been the BSBI Vice-county Recorder for both Westmorland and Cumberland for more than thirty years is stepping down from that position. For the past thirty years he has been at the centre of Cumbrian botany – highly regarded within the county, and beyond, for his deep and wide-ranging knowledge of local botany. In the early years of my interest in plants I was very much in awe of him but, on making his acquaintance, first by an exchange of letters and then in person, found him to be very welcoming and friendly. I was especially impressed to find that he respected my opinions on a subject about which he knew infinitely more than I did!

The demands made on Vice-County Recorders are considerable and have, I suspect, increased over the years. They include: maintaining the records of vascular plants, ensuring the validation of all records, participating in Society projects, reporting to the Society on recording activity, promoting botanical activity, assisting other Society members with identification or information requests, answering outside requests for information and compiling a Rare Plant Register for the county.

Three of us are taking over as Vice-county Recorders and we approach the task with some trepidation. We feel we have more than enough to keep us busy, yet Geoffrey looked after Cumberland and Westmorland for more than thirty years without any assistance whatsoever. A tremendous achievement!

However, perhaps his greatest achievement in the county's botanical field has been *A Flora of Cumbria* published in 1997. Many people worked on the gathering of records but it was Geoffrey who drew everything together, and wrote the accounts, producing a book that is not only tremendously informative but also delightfully readable and, at times, utterly beguiling. Of late, very large, and heavy, county floras have been produced leading to humorous comments suggesting the comparing of floras in terms of "gross tonnage"! Other floras may well be heavier but none has surpassed *A Flora of Cumbria* in terms of accessibility, charm and sheer readability.

Peter Bullard, managing director of Cumbria Wildlife Trust, next spoke:

When I first met Geoffrey in January 1988 he was a well-known and highly-respected botanist. I was applying to be Conservation Officer for Cumbria Wildlife Trust, and – as a trustee, and Chair of the Scientific and Advisory Committee – Geoffrey was on the interviewing panel. The interviews started at Latterbarrow Nature Reserve, with one of the most eminent botanists in England checking candidates' botanical skills. Geoffrey was friendly, encouraging and not at all intimidating. Fortunately, both of us could identify limestone flowers in January!

Geoffrey quickly asked me to look after a hectad for the already well-progressed *Flora*. I soon discovered how hard it was to improve this already impressive data-set. Adding new species to my twenty-five tetrads

around Ambleside was no easy task, and Geoffrey was always helpful, checking my sometimes inaccurate identifications and updating the plants recorded in NY30. Such attention was replicated for everyone who helped with *A Flora of Cumbria*.

When the Trust Director left, Geoffrey became my temporary line-manager, and again was always supportive, encouraging and knowledgeable. By 1988 Geoffrey had already been an active nature conservationist for many years, appearing successfully at two public enquiries to protect wildflowers in Cumbria. The Lakes Inquiry stopped Wastwater and Ennerdale becoming reservoirs and protected *Elatine hexandra*, whilst the Hampsfell Inquiry stopped all further limestone pavement removal application through the landmark decision that limestone pavement should stay in the countryside and not be used for rockery stone. Geoffrey had also been instrumental in ensuring that the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981, included protection for limestone pavements, the first ever protection for a habitat.

Helen Brown said:

As one of the more recent recruits to the Flora Group I am honoured to say a few words.

I retired and moved to Cumbria in 1999 and soon met Jean Parker who invited me to join her and Margaret Gregory on their botanical outings. In due course I met Geoffrey at a field meeting and he sought me out and made me feel very welcome.

Margaret always spoke in awe of Dr Halliday, and I quickly understood why, as his knowledge and enthusiasm are immediately obvious. When I took over keeping the records for the far north-east hectads from Margaret, Geoffrey was very supportive, helping and advising me.

At field meetings I learnt much from Geoffrey as we tried to identify specimens in the lunch breaks, even in pouring rain! His energy seemed boundless, leaving others behind on the hills, even scaling a deer fence. He is indeed a remarkable man.

Thank you Geoffrey from us all.



Jeremy then presented Geoffrey with a gift from the group, as a memento of his time as chairman, and as a token of our appreciation of his many contributions to Cumbrian botany: a framed painting of that characteristic Cumbrian flower, *Primula farinosa*, commissioned from the artist Sue Linton, SBA, CPGFS (photo, Mike; see also page 8).

At this point there was a break in proceedings, and a champagne toast to Geoffrey, wishing him continuing good health, and hoping for his involvement in the group into the future.

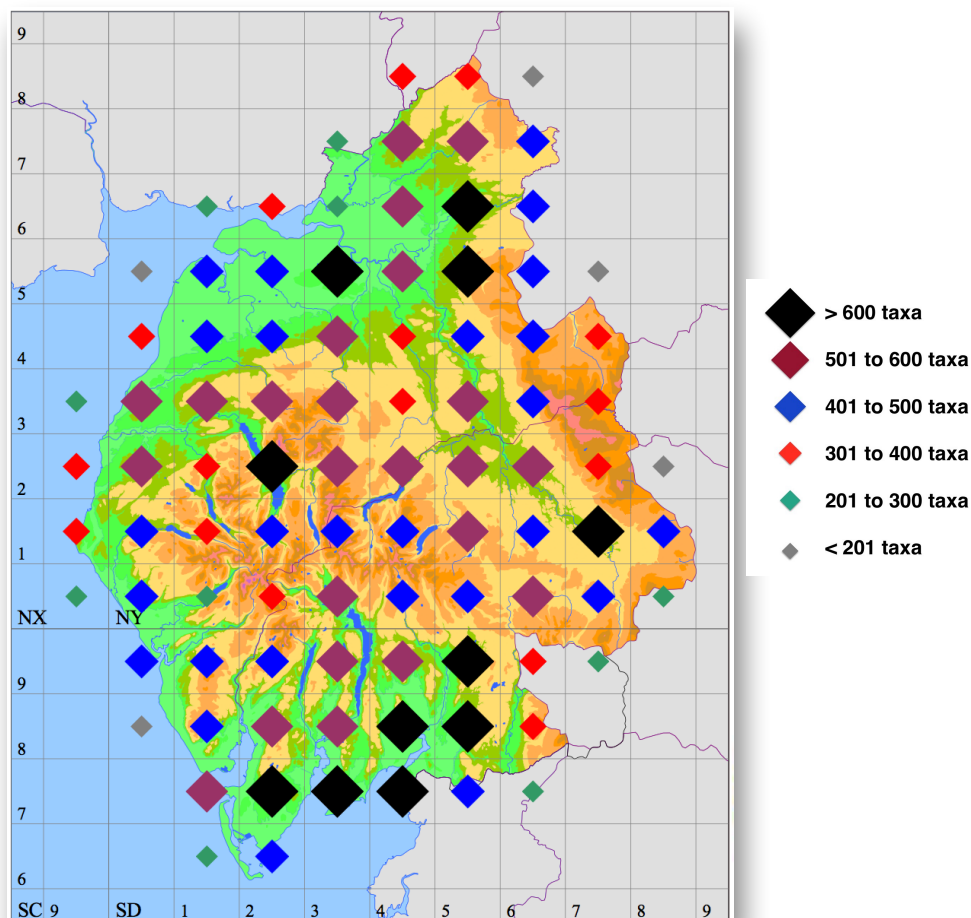
The focus for 2016-2019

After the break Jeremy gave an on-screen presentation, of which the main points are summarised here (after shifting smoothly into the present tense).

Phill is taking on the role of data-inputting and data-processing.

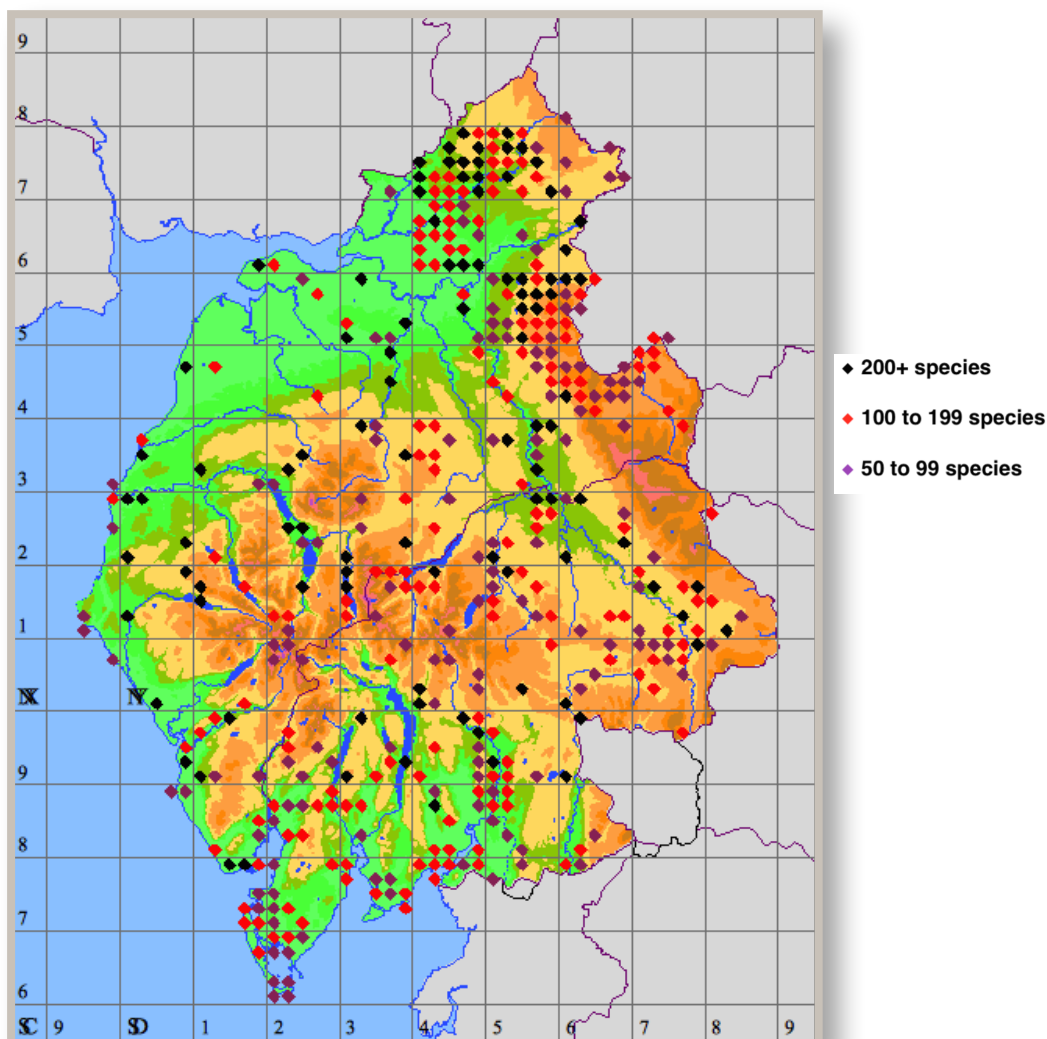
Geoffrey has already passed over his set of Cumbrian records, this taking place between their respective copies of MapMate (the database application in use for communications with BSBI's database).

A recent map output from MapMate by Phill (below) gives an idea of the number of records **per hectad**, for 2000 to present, and gives a reasonably positive picture of the number of records we *already* have available for the BSBI's *Atlas 2020* project (the fieldwork for which finishes in 2019).



A large contribution to this picture is the set of over 36,000 records entered at the hectad level. BSBI has confirmed that such hectad records will be useful for mapping at the scale used in nationwide mapping.

However, hectad records will in many cases derive *from original records gathered at a better resolution* – i.e. tetrad, monad, or better. For our *local* purposes we need records at as high a resolution as possible. The map below, illustrating records stored at **tetrad** level or better, shows significant areas of the county from which few records at tetrad resolution, or better, have as yet been input to MapMate. (Note that tetrads with fewer than 50 current records are not mapped.)



We know that very many records exist ‘on paper’ around the county. These include large numbers of records which have never yet been offered for input, but there must also be records from which the hectad-level inputting derives, the originals of which may have been collected, by yourselves and others, at a better resolution.

We would now like to *access as many records in both categories as we possibly can*, for two good reasons:

- after 2020, when we start a new round of recording, older records will rapidly lose currency, and risk being ‘lost to science’
- for our *county* records we need to maximise the resolution and content of input records as far as we can.

The latter case relates, most significantly, to *future updates* to *A Flora of Cumbria*, in whatever form those might take. It is a somewhat startling fact that, as *A Flora of Cumbria* was published in 1997, 2017 will mark twenty years since the publication of that landmark volume!

We would hope to be in a position to present updates to the existing flora, in *some* format, at *some* point from 2017 onwards. For that to happen, however, we need adequate *data*!

It is therefore imperative that we lay hands on as many records as possible that have been gathered in the period since 1997. You have already been alerted to this ambition: to see what you can be offer, in what format, and when.

We are grateful to a number of recorders from whom we have already had strong responses, and would urge anyone in the group who has records to start to consolidate them in a form ready for inputting.

It is clear from all this that there will be a huge task in converting paper records into digital formats, and the three new VCRs have already started. We know, however, that there is far more than can be dealt with in any short time-frame!

A: Recording in 2016

It would seem obvious that the tetrad map displayed above will look very different by the time this 'backlog' of records is entered. It should then indicate accurately where we need to focus our recording efforts in the remaining years of *Atlas 2020* recording.

However, it looks unlikely that we shall be able to give any indication of how that tetrad picture will look in any short time-frame. We are finalising dates for field-meetings based on judgements as to areas worth extra recording input, and we will post these as soon as they are available.

B: Converting paper records into computer data

We are hoping to tackle the data-entry task by encouraging recorders themselves – yourselves! – to take more responsibility for at least starting the conversion process (i.e. of paper data to computer data), if not indeed completing it.

We think that *many recorders*, albeit with some added help, advice, and encouragement, would *have the skills* to take on the computerising of records. Technology has moved on at a really startling pace, and this move we believe needs to be a part of this progression.

There are various routes that recorders might adopt:

- turn (paper) *notes* into (paper) *lists* – to make it easier for someone else to digitize; that could be as simple as a list of BRC codes (helpfully with abbreviated names alongside to provide a cross-check), and obviously with grid-ref, locality name, date, and recorder name(s)
- turn paper lists or notes into *computer* lists yourself, of BRC codes, as in the previous point
- enter your paper lists or notes into the simple **data-input forms** (see next section!)
- help others with data-input, by agreement amongst yourselves.

The data-input forms

Phill has created two simple data-input forms which have already been used with success by several recorders to turn paper notes into digital format. These are the '**Data Entry Form**' and the '**List-input Form**'.

Phill demonstrated these data-input forms (to expressions of appreciation as to their obvious simplicity and efficacy!), and discussion followed.

For *much more information and to download these forms*, please visit the dedicated page on our (your) website, at:

cumbriabotany.co.uk/index.php/the-flora-of-cumbria-recording-group/inputting-your-data/

These forms are ideal as they *generate copies of your data* which you simply send to Phill, by e-mail, etc, in a format ready for him to import to MapMate. One-to-one instruction on running these applications can be offered.

Record formats

We are encouraging recorders to keep firmly in mind that we are seeking **records**, which consist essentially of these five items:

species name + grid-reference + site name + date + recorder(s) (+ any comments)

The *precise date* of your information is what we need in future recording: we are no longer encouraging cumulative lists by year or date-class, and would simply ask you to log information in the record format as above. (This is where the data-input forms are so useful: they do most of the 'hard work' for you!)

We need *all* the species you spot, not just additional to hectad- or tetrad-lists.

Recording resolutions

The majority of counties already follow the advice of BSBI to make records at better spatial resolutions than in the past. Thus whenever possible record your plants within single **monads**, (i.e. four times more exact than in tetrads) but then also be prepared to give better resolutions if you find plants of interest – thus grid-references to 6- or 8-figures.

If you are 'out for a day', many hours can be spent profitably in a single monad (if you are choosing a richer monad in an area). When you find that the *rate of adding to the list is slowing*, then move into other monads, and record there in the remaining time.

It's a matter of *maximising the number of records you gather for the time spent*. Time spent pushing up the total in one area is much less profitable in terms of records per unit time, than is moving into new areas.

In the more-diverse lowlands, those 'areas' just referred to might well be monads. If there is a richer spot that allows localised recording at 6-figure resolution, then that is extremely useful information. Rare plants deserve closer attention still: numbers of plants; area covered by a colony; associates, etc. – all data collected is useful, *and* is often enjoyable to collect as well! (Photos – so easy in these 'digital days'! – showing a wider view of the site, a closer view of the extent of the plants, close-ups to confirm the identification, etc., can be hugely useful – or indeed essential – to relocate plants, in addition to good grid-references.)

In upland areas where it is easy to cross many monads, or indeed tetrads, in the course of a day's trek, you would never reach your destination if you tried to record in each! Then choose to spend a little time in recording a good flushed area you happen to cross – but with the 'added value' of a 6-figure grid-reference.

These are the sorts of decisions to make, and we do not want to be prescriptive: enjoy your days out, and make the best use of your time and your skills to collect useful data.

Website

The Cumbria Botany website (one page of which is mentioned above) is at

cumbriabotany.co.uk

This has introductory sections on Cumbrian botanical recording, on the 'landscapes and flora' of Cumbria, a 'news & comment' page to which you are invited to contribute, and a page specifically for this group, at

cumbriabotany.co.uk/index.php/the-flora-of-cumbria-recording-group/

... for which a **password, foc**, is needed.

There are other pages linked within, such as the data-inputting page mentioned above.

We hope to continue to add resources of all sorts to this website, and to the 'FoC' page to make it a useful 'first port of call' for you. Let us know what you would like to see added.

Finally, the 'Cumbria Botany Group' **Facebook** page currently has 71 members, at

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/CumbriaBotanyGroup/>

... which you are invited to join (several members of this group are members). As the season progresses, so more posts are appearing.

At the conclusion of the meeting (after a great deal of discussion on many topics, which could have gone on for the remainder of the afternoon!) we thanked Peter Bullard, as we do every year, for his hospitality at Plumgarths, and for the use of the room and facilities. We are grateful to Mike Porter for providing refreshments!

We do hope to keep a dialogue going between ourselves and our recorders. Please do feel entirely free to contact any of us with your queries, concerns, puzzles, comments, prompts, opinions...

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19 March 2016



'Primula farinosa'
by
Sue Linton, SBA, CPGFS