



# National Plant Monitoring Scheme

## Monitoring our wild flowers

Photo: Plantlife

## Newsletter - Spring 2016

### Welcome

Welcome to the new annual newsletter of the National Plant Monitoring Scheme! We hope that this newsletter will be both a celebration of all that the NPMS has achieved in the preceding year, and a preview of developments to come. In this first edition we review the amazing achievements of NPMS volunteers in 2015, take a look at one surveyor's experience of one of his two squares, and reveal exciting training opportunities and new resources available to all NPMS surveyors in 2016.

### Website and communication

One of our key aims is ensuring that volunteers know what is happening within the NPMS. We have striven to provide as much information as possible on the project website, including an introductory article on the scheme that appeared in the magazine *British Wildlife*, and lots more supporting materials.



Follow us on Twitter [@theNPMS](#) to help spread the word



*Greater Knapweed.* © Oliver Pescott

### Introduction

It is wonderful to think that the NPMS is now one year old! The response to this new monitoring scheme has been phenomenal, and we are confident that the enthusiasm and passion of the hundreds of botanical volunteers taking part across the UK means that this scheme has a bright future. Which of course also means that a bright future for

our plants is more likely! The philosophy behind the NPMS is one of providing the best evidence to conservationists and scientists on changes in plant populations and habitats. Therefore every volunteer participating in the NPMS provides valuable evidence, using which we can assess the trends of many species, and make predictions about the future.

### THIS ISSUE:

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- p.5** Take a look at one surveyor's experience of his square.
- p.6** Exciting training opportunities revealed.
- p.6** New resources available to all NPMS surveyors in 2016.

## Participation in 2015

Despite having to get to grips with a new approach to plant recording, we were mightily impressed by the number of NPMS one kilometre survey squares allocated to surveyors last year: 1,168 to be precise! Whilst many of you told us that you would be starting to survey in 2016, almost half of you returned 2015 data for your squares. That translated into over 1,800 plant monitoring plots for which we have received wildflower abundance data! [See page 3](#) for a more detailed breakdown of last year's results.

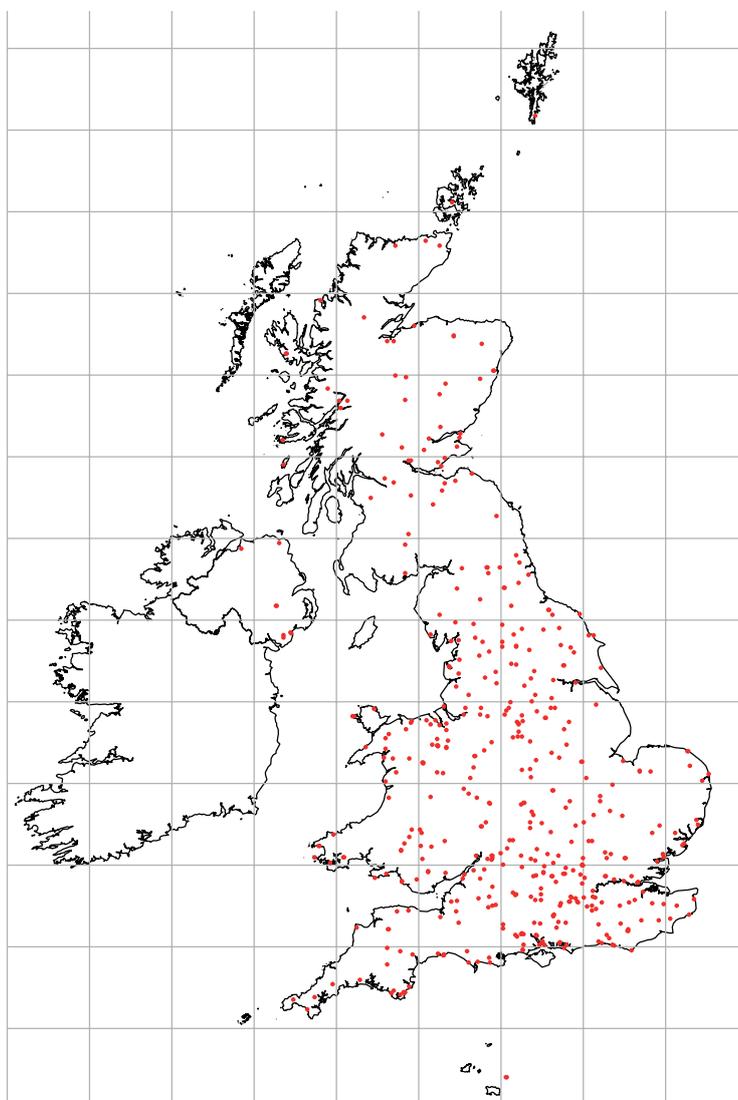


## Training

Providing training to volunteers is another key part of the NPMS: we really want to make a strong contribution to increasing the skills of UK naturalists. Our partnership with the Field Studies Council 'Tomorrow's Biodiversity' programme helped us to deliver 39 training courses in 2015. More on this [on page 6](#).

## Conservation

The reason for any monitoring scheme is to provide robust data on trends in species' populations to those in a position to create policy, fund research, and manage habitats. Already we have been starting to use data collected last year to investigate trends in species richness in farmed environments, and to ask questions about whether NPMS data can help inform remote (i.e. satellite) habitat sensing for ecology.



## Your achievements in 2015

From almost 1,200 squares allocated to surveyors in 2015, data was collected from 463. These stretched the length and breadth of Britain: from a square in the Shetlands, down to two in the Channel Islands, through many others in between. The geographical reach of NPMS volunteers was extremely impressive! The map above shows the locations surveyed in 2015.

## Plots and surveys

The NPMS methodology asked surveyors to establish 5 plots in their square; however, we realise that this is not always possible (e.g. if one cannot

gain permission to access parts of one's square), and so we are very happy to receive back whatever amount of data you are able to collect. Even one surveyed plot provides a baseline from which to monitor plants and habitats into the future. We were very happy to see that surveyors recognised the adaptability of the method: whilst 5 plots was the most popular option chosen, many people submitted data with fewer than 5 plots, or occasionally more.

In addition, more than half of surveyors managed two surveys of their plots. This was especially impressive given that extra effort was required in the first year in order to reconnoitre one's square and select plots.

## Habitats

The NPMS has definitely been ambitious in asking surveyors to identify habitats. This was always intended to be an important part of any new UK plant monitoring scheme; however, we also felt that naturalists would relish the opportunity to learn more about habitats, and increase their understanding of the countryside. The table below shows how many plots were recorded in the NPMS 'fine-scale' habitats in 2015.

In 2016 we are aiming to run more field courses aimed at learning to identify habitats, with the BSBI, and, to produce instructional habitat videos (in collaboration with the Field Studies Council). We were also fortunate in 2015 to secure a deal for NPMS volunteers on the recent WILDGuides publication *Britain's Habitats* (ISBN 978-0-691-15855-6), which we still recommend as an excellent guide to British and Irish habitats.

NPMS fine-scale habitat	Count
Acid fens, mires and springs	33
Arable field margins	134
Base-rich fens, mires and springs	23
Blanket bog	15
Coastal saltmarsh	24
Coastal sand dunes	18
Coastal vegetated shingle	29
Dry acid grassland	41
Dry calcareous grassland	75
Dry deciduous woodland	222
Dry heathland	84
Hedgerows of native species	255
Inland rocks and scree	17
Maritime cliffs and slopes	23
Montane acid grassland	30
Montane calcareous grassland	5
Montane dry heathland	12
Montane rocks and scree	11
Native conifer woods and juniper scrub	14
Neutral damp grassland	73
Neutral pastures and meadows	186
Nutrient-poor lakes and ponds	17
Nutrient-rich lakes and ponds	31
Raised bog	1
Rivers and streams	41
Wet heath	44
Wet woodland	50

## Website improvements

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all of our surveyors for their efforts entering their data online in 2015. We have taken on board all of your feedback from last year, and we have implemented a number of improvements to the website. These include a simplified 1 km square request system; improvements to the plot creation and data entry tools; and the option to upload species photos to support your records. We will also update our YouTube videos as soon as the updates to the website are online.

Also, look out for additional plant ID 'cribs' arriving on the website in the next month!

[www.npms.org.uk](http://www.npms.org.uk)



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## Surveyor stories

Over the past year we have heard some wonderful snippets from volunteers about anything from how they got involved (during an archaeological dig in Orkney) to close encounters whilst surveying (cows and bogs anyone?).

We all know the physical benefits of getting active and spending time outdoors, but the NPMS can be a great social tool as well. After taking early retirement due to poor mental health, NPMS Volunteer Georgina Gittins has used plant and butterfly surveys to help rebuild her life. Georgina has been able to work through trust and exclusion issues by spending time surveying her local patch (see photo) and building relationships with the warm, friendly people that she has met along the way.



It would be great to hear from more of you about your experiences taking part in the NPMS – have you found anything unexpected in your plots? Maybe you've taken great photographs, like the stunning shots of Slapton from Johanna Westgate below. Send them in to the NPMS Coordinator and you could feature in a blog or newsletter.



*Snowdrop Valley on Exmoor. Photo - © Shutterstock*

## The NPMS – in partnership

During 2015 we have been striving to develop partnerships with other organisations to ensure that the NPMS becomes the best that it can be.

One of the most exciting is our link with the Tomorrow's Biodiversity project ([www.tombio.uk](http://www.tombio.uk)); this is a Field Studies Council project with funding from the Esmée Fairburn Foundation. The project aims to identify important gaps in biodiversity identification and monitoring skills, as well as barriers to filling those gaps, and is developing solutions involving new training and resources. The project has been able to provide us with funding for training opportunities for NPMS volunteers, with over 100 volunteers attending events that they supported in 2015.

The support has continued into 2016 with further funding provided to develop toolkits for our Mentors to use ([see page 6](#)), and to recruit external trainers to provide a varied training programme in 2016. It has been great to work alongside the 'tom.bio' project



team to explore new resource ideas, such as habitat ID videos, which will be piloted this summer.

We are hugely grateful to a number of other National Parks, AONB's and Wildlife Trusts that have also helped provide venues for training and support at events, as well as spreading the word amongst their volunteer networks. See the full list of everyone who has been involved below.

In 2016 we have also been working on getting some major landowners and other stakeholders, such as the National Trust, RSPB, Defence Estate etc., involved with the NPMS. A workshop in April will help us to shape what the NPMS can offer these organisations in terms of monitoring data and how they can help use the scheme to complement their organisational priorities.

## Surveying an upland NPMS square (SE0173) on Great Whernside

by Kevin Walker

One of my NPMS squares was in a very remote part of Upper Nidderdale near to the top of Great Whernside (704 m). Access was not an issue because the moorland is open access but getting to it was another matter. I didn't fancy the most obvious approach (a 4 mile walk up a valley with the last 2 miles through deep heather interspersed with bogs!) so I rang a fellow recorder who suggested a much easier alternative. This required a longer drive and very steep climb to the summit but a recce in June confirmed this as the best option and also that I'd need about 5 layers, even at the height of summer, and a 5 hour window to do the work.



*Looking across SE0173 towards Angram Reservoir, Upper Nidderdale. The plot in the foreground comprises montane heath and a 'peat hag' caused by late snow lie*

The square took in a very 'cold' shoulder of the mountain, ranging from 600 to 690 m altitude, with no visible signs of humans for miles except for the occasional 'grit pan' left out for the red grouse. About 95% of the square comprised 'grouse-moor' with the rest made up from acid mire, streams, eroded 'peat hags' and sandstone scree. The grouse-moor was really a mixture of montane and wet heath and although

quite species-poor had plenty of a remarkable selection of shrubs including Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), Crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*), Cowberry (*Vaccinium vitis-idaeus*) and Cloudberry (*Rubus chamaemorus*). Choosing locations for the plots on such featureless ground was challenging and would have been impossible without GPS. Also it quickly became obvious that photos would be essential for relocating plots. During two visits I ended up recording 20 species (at Inventory Level) in 5 plots (3 in montane heath, 1 in wet heath and 1 in acid mire). If I'd been doing Indicator Level then the total would have been half that amount but both visits were hugely enjoyable all the same, despite the weather, with great scenery, fantastic views of dunlin, short-eared Owl and merlin and some great plants en route including Stiff Sedge (*Carex bigelowii*) and Fir Clubmoss (*Huperzia selago*) on the summit of Great Whernside and quite a few populations of Creeping Forget-me-not (*Myosotis stolonifera*) in the adjacent square (Nidderdale being the British HQ for this Nationally Scarce species).

I'm looking forward to returning again this summer!



*Spot the berries! Crowberry, Cloudberry, Billberry and Cowberry all growing together in SE0173 on Great Whernside*

## How did our training go in 2015?

By Hayley New

Plantlife, BSBI and NMNI were able to provide 39 workshops in 2015, which 318 volunteers attended. The workshops were focussed on getting to grips with the methodology, data entry and beginning to identify those trickier species groups.

Feedback from the training was overwhelmingly positive, with great feedback about all of our trainers and the content that they were able to deliver.

The social aspect of the workshops was also well-received, with many participants learning from each other and swapping contact details so that they could keep in touch.

It was fantastic to visit so many places across the UK and it was wonderful to meet so many of our volunteers. As you can see from the selection of photos the weather was mostly (but not always) on our side!



*Training at FSC Nettlecombe Court*



*National Museums of Northern Ireland NPMS training day  
Photo - © CEDaR*



*Slightly soggy at FSC Blencathra*

## What's coming up in 2016?

Check out for our exciting and varied 2016 training programme, with lots of introductory ID courses. Visit [www.npms.org.uk](http://www.npms.org.uk) to book.

Our first cohort of NPMS Mentors will also be up and running this season, take a look at the 'Resources' page of the website to find out how to get in touch if you need a bit of local support in order to get started with the NPMS.

E-mail: [support@npms.org.uk](mailto:support@npms.org.uk)

[www.npms.org.uk](http://www.npms.org.uk)

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the National Parks and AONBs who have supported the NPMS in 2015, particularly the Brecon Beacons National Park, Dartmoor National Park, North Pennines AONB, Chichester Harbour AONB and Cannock Chase AONB. The Wildlife Trusts, the Field Studies Council, Richard Burkmar, Charlie Bell, Andrew van Breda, ALERC and the local records centres, and parish councils across England and Wales have also provided much valued assistance in numerous ways.