BOOK REVIEW


Superficial comparison of the distribution maps in the New Atlas of the British and Irish Flora (Preston et al 2002) with those recorded in the Atlas of the British Flora (Perring & Walters 1962) show many changes resulting from a variety of causes – increased urbanisation, changes in farming practices, spread of non-native invasive species, or climate change. A survey of species from 811 tetrads in a regular grid across Britain, carried out in 1987 by BSBI recorders, provided a firm basis for further research to resurvey these sites and measure distributional changes for individual species. This publication is the result of the excellent collaboration between the valuable network of BSBI recorders and staff of the Biological Records Centre (BRC).

The range of species covered include native and long-established introductions, and more recent introductions as well as some rare or very widespread species. In reporting the results, the species are grouped under broad habitats – coniferous woodland, calcareous grassland etc., to try to identify patterns of change within a habitat.

What is happening to ferns? Their inclusion is clear from the front cover, with an illustration of Hart’s Tongue Fern, Asplenium scolopendrium (referred to here as Phyllitis scolopendrium). This species is included in two broad habitats, ‘Broad-leaved, mixed and yew woodland’, and ‘Inland rock’ that includes cliffs, scree, quarries and limestone pavement. In both habitats it seems to be increasing its range, and in Scotland appears to be colonising walls and open woodland, perhaps in response to a reduction in frosts. Similarly, Polystichum setiferum, another woodland species, also shows significant increase and may also be benefitting from milder winters. In contrast Cystopteris fragilis, more commonly found in rock outcrops or walls in the north and west, shows decline, particularly in lowland sites that may no longer provide damp, shaded conditions. Large decline is also recorded for Dryopteris expansa and D. oreades, although the results of their analyses are based on small samples.

This book raises a lot of questions. It also highlights the importance of good and accurate recording and, I hope, stimulates further activity in BPS field meetings.

REFERENCES


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