

Lichens – Next Steps to finding out more

You have just completed a basic course in lichen identification and you are probably feeling inspired but at a bit of a loss as to what to do next. Don't worry, every lichenologist has felt like this. With the help of this document we hope to be able to build your confidence to take the Next Steps in lichenology. Fortunately there are now a wide range of resources to help, both in printed and electronic form and in person to person contact.

The following documents can be downloaded from the BLS website, and their aim is to help you take your Next Steps:

- Introduction to Next Steps
- Next Steps Field Guide Part 1
- Next Steps Field Guide Part 2
- Next Steps Recording
- Next Steps Recording Spreadsheet
- Next Steps Feedback

The aim of this introduction is to point you at these resources so as to develop your skills in lichen identification, giving you the confidence to start making valuable records of lichen distributions.

There are two nationally relevant books on lichen identification, a field guide by Frank Dobson and 'the Flora'. For the beginner 'Dobson' is the book to own as it illustrates and describes all the most common lichens. The flora on the other hand is the standard textbook. At first glance it is large and daunting but the keys are extremely useful and straightforward to use.

Lichens: An Illustrated Guide to the British and Irish Species. 2011, 6th Edition, F.S. Dobson, Richmond Publishing Co.

The Lichens of Great Britain and Ireland. 2009, 2nd Edition. D.C. Smith and others, British Lichen Society.

Three internet sites provide extensive photographic archives of British lichens.

<http://www.uklichens.co.uk/>

http://www.lichens.lastdragon.org/index_C.html

<http://www.irishlichens.ie/>

While there are a few lichens that can grow almost everywhere, most lichens are only found in specific types of habitats and particular air quality. In practice, the number of lichens you are likely to encounter at a single locality are many fewer than a casual browse of the above national resources might suggest. For the new lichenologist this is a boon. A number of inexpensive or free pamphlets describe the lichens of specific habitats you might visit and are aimed directly at your skill level. These include:

Urban

Urban environments including churchyards

Guide to common urban lichens 1 (on trees and wood) - Field Studies Council

Guide to common urban lichens 2 (on stone and soil) - Field Studies Council

Churchyards

Guide to common churchyard lichens - Field Studies Council

A Field Guide to Common Churchyard Lichens. F.S. Dobson.2006, Richmond Publishing

Woodlands

Lichens and Elm Trees. Available as foldout chart, or downloadable free from www.plantlife.org.uk/publications

Key to lichens on twigs - Field Studies Council

Key to common lichens on trees in England. Available from http://dbiodbs.units.it/carso/chiavi_pub21?sc=351

Atlantic coastal woodlands

Lichens and Bryophytes of Atlantic Woodland in Scotland

Lichens of Atlantic Woodlands - Guide 1: Lichens on Ash, Hazel, Willow, Rowan and Old Oak

Lichens of Atlantic Woodlands - Guide 2: Lichens on Birch, Alder and Oak

All are available as fold out charts, or downloadable free from www.plantlife.org.uk/publications

Heaths and montane moors

Lichens of Heaths and Moors - Field Studies Council

The Montane Heathland Lichen Guide - available from www.hutton.ac.uk

Coastal

A Field Key to Coastal and Seashore Lichens. F.S. Dobson, 2010, Richmond Publishing

Lichens of Rocky Shores - Field Studies Council

We are very lucky in Britain in that there is an active network of lichenologists across the country. The British Lichen Society provides support for the study of lichens at all levels. It organises a number of field meetings throughout the year at which new members are welcome in a highly social atmosphere. The society provides a range of resources on its website, and perhaps most importantly of all a list of local contacts who can provide you with help in identification and an opportunity to meet up to look at the lichens in your vicinity.

This is a fascinating time to be a lichenologist. Throughout Britain lichens are responding to changes in environmental conditions. In many urban centres lichens are returning as sulphur dioxide levels have fallen. However, in some rural areas lichens are suffering from nitrogen pollution (nitrogen oxides and ammonia), and everywhere lichens are responding to changes in climate. There are more people interested in lichens than there has been in the past, and this, coupled with the advent of digital photography, electronic communications and databases has meant that it is easier than ever for the newcomer to contribute to studies in the changes in lichen communities.

We recognise however that you may be unsure about making such records so we have produced a short Field Guide, available from the BLS website, detailing a small number of lichens which are easy to identify but which may be responding to environmental changes. Information on the distribution of these species would be most welcome and we have included details on how you can record the presence of these lichens and therefore contribute to a national scheme. This can be found in the document 'Next Steps Recording', together with an Excel spreadsheet for your records.

Last, but not least, we would welcome any feedback you may have on the materials included here or any other aspects of lichens. For details see the document 'Next Steps Feedback'.