In 2010 Scottish Natural Heritage and SEPA commissioned a comprehensive new survey and condition assessment of the saltmarshes of Scotland, including all sites over 3ha and a sub-set of smaller sites. A team of six surveyors undertook work on nearly 250 Scottish saltmarshes from June 2010 to August 2012. The final report was published last year (Haynes, 2016) and SNH kindly agreed to let me extract plant records from the underlying data for incorporation into the BSBI Distribution Database (DDb).

For each saltmarsh I received two MS Excel Spreadsheets, one of which concerned sample quadrats and the other ‘Target Notes’. From these I extracted over 20,000 plant records which are now in the DDb. Three passes were made through the data to extract named taxa from the quadrat lists, to extract named taxa from the Target Notes, and to use NVC listings to infer taxa. This last was undertaken after advice from Ian Strachan, one of the primary surveyors, and erred on the side of caution.

Extraction of records was not a quick process as the data had not been collected in a manner intended for this purpose, but once I had constructed suitable templates it was possible to convert each straightforward spreadsheet in less than 15 minutes. However, some turned out not to be entirely straightforward. I briefly fell into an elephant trap when I failed to notice that one surveyor had presented results in an unexpected order – leading me initially to use the wrong grid references for his quadrats. Errors such as dates differing between two spreadsheets for the same quadrats, or a set of quadrats being listed that actually belong to another site, took time to sort out.

During the process it was necessary to convert some nomenclature to current practice. Grid references in the original reports are 10-figure (i.e. a 1m square); these were reduced to 8 figures to avoid spurious precision.

Where possible, plants listed as ‘Additional Species’ were also extracted. Those listed that did not appear elsewhere were assigned to a tetrad or monad (best available) on the basis of all the Quadrat and Target Note grid references. For the majority of these Additional Species records, it was not possible to assign them to a tetrad or better and so these potential records were ignored.

With a few exceptions (e.g. *Salicornia*, *Spartina*), anything recorded as Genus sp., e.g. *Carex sp.*, was ignored and two species were excluded as being too improbable. The latter will probably come back to bite me.

This was a great deal of work and unsurprisingly a lot of records are of common saltmarsh species: *Agrostis stolonifera* (Creeping Bent), *Armeria maritima* (Thrift), *Festuca rubra* (Red Fescue), *Glaux maritima* (Sea-milkwort), *Juncus gerardii* (Saltmarsh Rush), *Plantago maritima* (Sea Plantain), *Puccinellia maritima* (Common Saltmarsh-grass) and *Triglochin maritimum* (Sea Arrowgrass) each have >1000 records. However, a number of new hectad records have come out of the study. In my own patch (v.c.104) the biggest effects were on *Carex oederi* (Small-fruited Yellow-sedge) and *Eleocharis uniglumis* (Slender Spike-rush), each with quite a few new sites. One of the most significant finds was of several new populations of *Carex salina* (Saltmarsh Sedge), previously known only from Loch Duich, in Lochs Sunart and Nevis.

Already, SEPA has asked for a subset of the extracted data which highlighted *Spartina* in the Firth of Lorn which had escaped their notice. With the amount of data manipulation undertaken it would be surprising if I have not introduced some new errors. I have undertaken a variety of cross-checking procedures but no doubt some errors remain and for these I take full responsibility. The records are from 34 Scottish vice-counties and the relevant Recorders have been given a simple query to find their records on the DDb.
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Reference: