

Popularizing bryology through publishing

The BBS exists to promote the study of mosses and liverworts. Fundamental to this study is knowing (1) what each species looks like, (2) how to distinguish them from similar species, and (3) where to find them.

Nevertheless, for the first hundred years of its existence, the BBS and its predecessor the Moss Exchange Club published nothing that was specifically and primarily designed to popularize bryology by meeting these basic requirements. In preparing their guides and Floras, Dixon, MacVicar, Watson, Smith and Paton were assisted by other members of the BBS, but the Society itself neither assisted with preparing nor published any of these books.

Recently, however, our Society has planned and launched three publishing endeavours that are set to change forever British bryology's public profile:

- ▷ the BBS's website makes available all manner of material to members and non-members alike;
- ▷ the Society's bulletin, now issued as *Field Bryology*, has become an attractive and collectable periodical, whilst developing its role in delivering information about bryophytes and bryologists;
- ▷ and our Field-guide will be the Society's first venture into the market for popular books; indeed, this guide will be the BBS's first identification manual and stands to become our most widely influential publication, reaching out into the wider community of naturalists and transforming our backwater of natural history into a popular and accessible interest for all naturalists, bringing us into line with most other fields of natural history that have benefited from field guides for many years.

The *BBS Field Guide* will make an ideal self-help start-up pack for identifying bryophytes, as well as a valuable aide-memoire for experienced bryologists. Indeed, the need for our guide has never been greater, for it is no longer possible for undergraduates at university to learn these field skills in the course of their studies from experienced field bryologists.

The way in which the *BBS Field Guide* has been planned and developed became possible as a result of several recent technological developments. First, it is now comparatively easy to take high-quality, close-up, digital photographs of small objects. Secondly, advances in printing procedures have improved the quality and at the same time significantly reduced

the costs of reproducing these images on paper. And thirdly, developments in computer programming have facilitated the design and layout of text and illustrations, with pre-publication drafts available to view on the web (www.britishbryologicalsociety.org.uk). Indeed, electronic communication has made it very easy for the *Field Guide* to become multi-authored. The days when a bryologist had to labour alone in order to prepare a Flora or field guide have gone.

The web also provides a powerful means of advertising publications for niche markets, and people will be able to buy the *Field Guide* on-line. The advent of 'Print on Demand' (whereby a customer orders and pays for one or more copies of a publication, and the item is then printed and posted direct to that customer) avoids the old conundrum of trying to anticipate sales and how long unsold copies are likely to lie in storage, with no return on expenditure for unsold copies. Moreover, no publication that is available by PoD need go out of print while its contents remain in demand.

These developments in producing and promoting publications will also enable the BBS to keep the retail price of the *Field Guide* very low, for they obviate any need to deal with commercial publishers, distributors and booksellers. By cutting out all these middle men, the BBS will retain control of all facets of production and distribution, from copyright through to sale and despatch of individual copies. This will enable us to issue revised editions of the guide whenever it seems bryologically (as opposed to commercially) appropriate to do so. All profit will accrue to the BBS and can be ploughed back into fulfilling the Society's charitable aim of promoting the study of mosses and liverworts, for example by holding down the retail price of subsequent editions of the guide. There are, then, compelling reasons to self-publish without contracting with middle men, an approach which will surely become standard practice in natural history, sciences and other niche markets in years to come.

Every BBS member will shortly be able to help our Society popularize bryology by taking advantage of a pre-publication offer and buying copies of the *Field Guide* to give to friends and relatives.

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