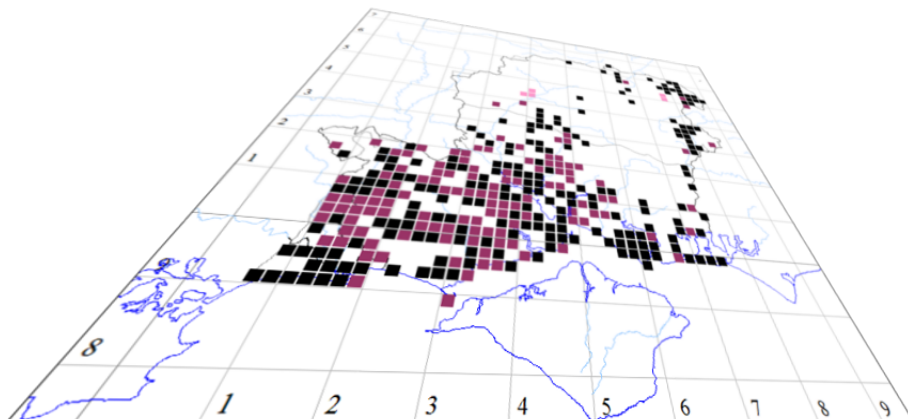# Chapter 10
Keeping up to Date and Getting Help

The author of this handbook is pleased to have errors pointed out and to receive suggestions for improvement and other comments.

Please send all communications to:
vc11recorder@hantsplants.net

Updates

Software is rarely static, and although some people like to cling to their trusty 1990s releases of favourite programs, there are usually good reasons for upgrading periodically – at least if the program comes from a company that isn't aggressively driven by marketing. The two most important reasons for upgrading are **enhancements** and **bug fixes**. Somewhere in between these two categories, but equally important if you are moving MapMate from an older to a newer PC with a later version of Windows, are **compatibility** upgrades.

To take advantage of updates after the first year of MapMate use, you'll need to pay the annual license renewal fee (or obtain your software through a scheme like that which the BSBI offers its members, which provides automatic renewal). You'll also need an Internet connection. You then have access to two facilities: **software updates** and **patches**. Changes to the core functions of MapMate normally have to be issued as software updates, and that will include most changes to keep compatibility with the latest versions of Windows. However a very broad range of MapMate features are actually delivered through the MapMate database, and these are made available as patches. As well as the obvious things like updates to taxon lists or new reserve Site lists, even an extension to MapMate like the Schedules and Catalogues package can be delivered as a patch.
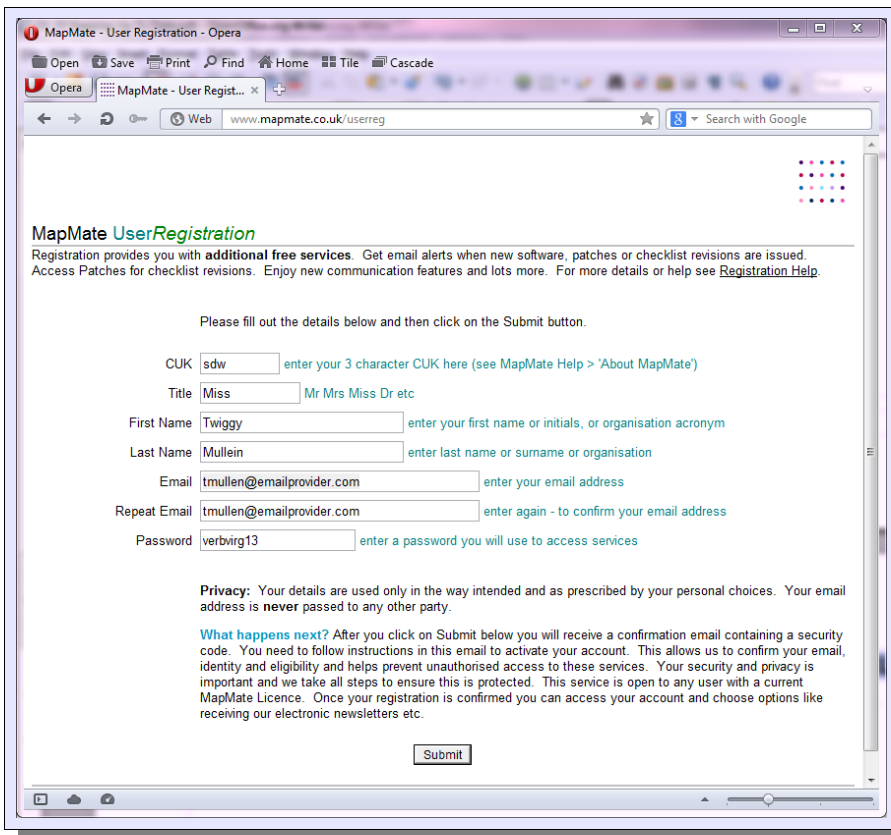
Registering on the MapMate web site

If you didn't do so when you first installed MapMate, you'll need to register your license before taking advantage of the services. Either make directly for www.mapmate.co.uk with your Web browser, or select **Help / MapMate Web Home...** from the MapMate main menu.

Fill in your details; if you're doing it on a computer in a public place, watch out for the fact that your password is not obscured!

Once you've received the confirmation email and followed its instructions, you'll be able to log on to the Web site to check for new patches. You'll also receive occasional emails concerning new patches available, important updates and any significant issues arising from new versions of Windows or other commonly installed PC software.

Software Updates

There are in fact two ways of getting a software update: online, or on a new release CD. The first is usually the most convenient both for yourself and for the supplier, but there are circumstances, discussed below, where it's necessary to get a new CD.

To check which version of software you currently have installed, run **Help / About Mapmate...** from the MapMate main menu.
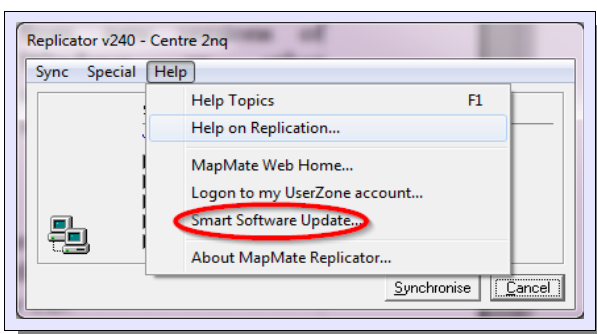
To run an online update, open the MapMate Replicator (**Replication** from the MapMate toolbar). Then select **Help / Smart Software Update...** from the menu bar. The update process will check what is available on the MapMate web site against what you have already installed, and only install newer versions.
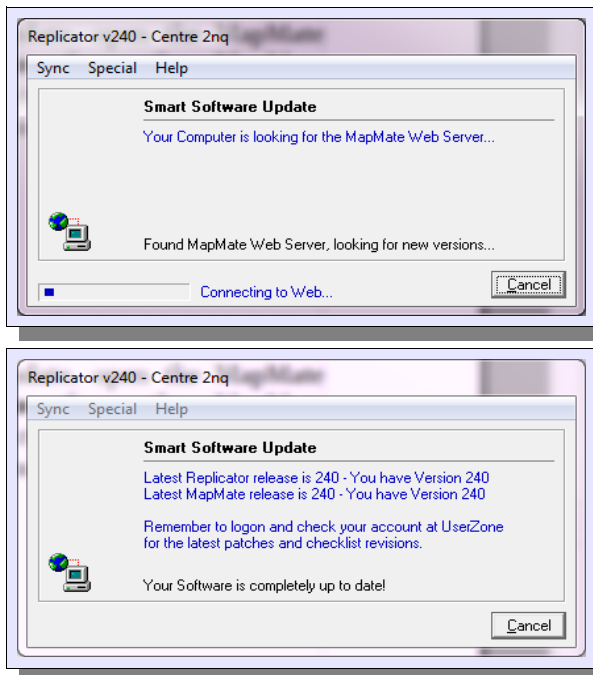
Once you've accepted the original prompt to continue, you'll see this screen. If your computer has a problem connecting to the Internet, this may persist for a long while, in which case you may have to **Cancel** and try again later. Also, if you have a firewall in place to block malicious access to your computer, you may be asked to confirm that this site is allowed to install files on your computer.

Eventually you will see a screen like this (if everything was up to date), or one informing you of changes made. To check whether everything went to plan, you can use **Help / About Mapmate...** again to check the current version.

If you are still using a version of MapMate prior to Version 2.0.0, you definitely need to get an update to the latest version on CD. Contact your supplier for this. Once you have it, update is just like a first time installation, but will preserve all your data.

A number of people experienced problems when moving on to more recent versions of Windows, especially if they then subsequently updated their MapMate version. If you encounter a problem like this, the first step is to contact your supplier or MapMate technical support, describing the problem you are having as precisely as you can. They may then recommend that you get a new update CD from them, or download files from the MapMate Web site that will do the same job.
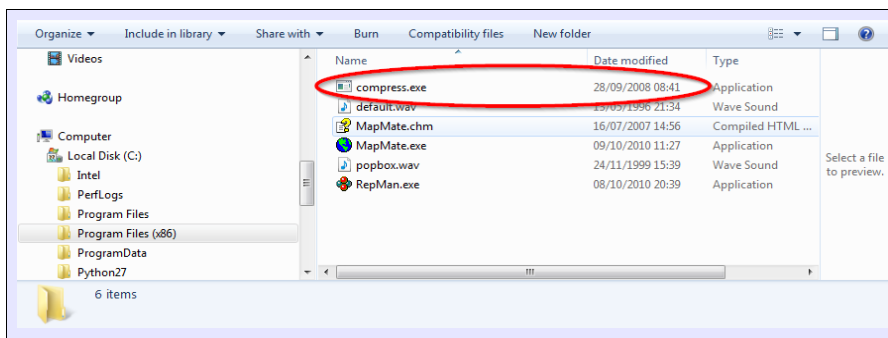
One difficulty that crops up manifests itself as an inability to generate sync files for data exchange with other users. Often the cause is an old version of a Microsoft program for file compression, which is an essential part of the sync file generation process. You will find this program, called **compress.exe**, in the folder where your MapMate programs are stored: on the more recent versions of Windows, this will probably be **C:\Program Files (x86)\MapMate**. It's important that you have the version of this program that supports your version of Windows.

To check that you are up to date, look on the User Zone of the MapMate Web site. Under **Useful 'Bits and Bobs'** you will find a file that provides the latest version of **compress.exe**. This file has changed over time, and it may not be immediately obvious where to look, but at the time of writing it's this one:
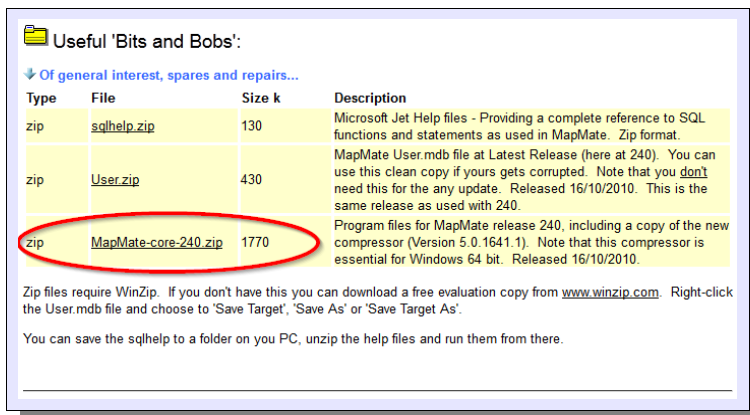
Incidentally, the advice about Zip files here is rather out of date: recent versions of Windows allow you to open Zip files with Windows Explorer just as if they were normal folders. And, if you want a more fully-featured program, there are free alternatives to WinZip such as 7-Zip.
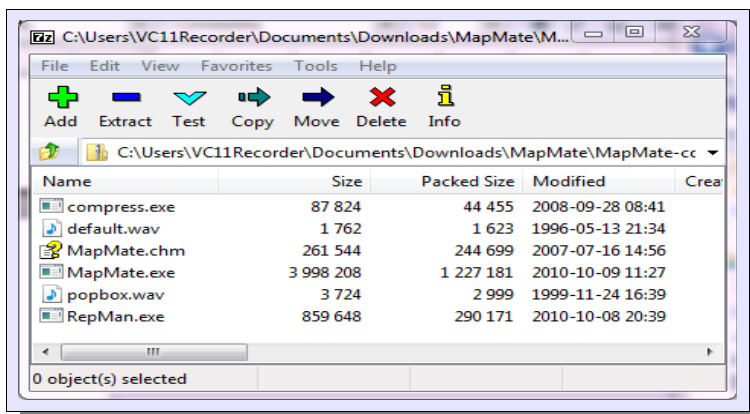
If you download and save this file onto your computer, you can use Windows or a Zip management programme to inspect its innards. Here's 7-Zip's view. You can then check the 'Modified' date orf **compress.exe** against the date of the one in your MapMate program folder. If you need to update it, simply extract the file from the Zip file, placing it in the MapMate program folder. If you want to be cautious, rename the original one first so that it is not overwritten and you can recover it in case of problems.

Patches

Patches are the method of delivering anything which is not part of the core software. This covers both functional optional extras such as the Schedules package, and updates to the database itself, especially the reference tables: the most familiar form of patch for most people will be the update to the Taxa table for a given species group.

You don't need to install all patches, but it makes sense to keep up to date with those which are advertised as 'Required' and 'For all users', and those which relate to species groups of interest to you.

By logging on from the MapMate User Zone you will be taken directly to the page for Patches. Each patch is listed by number, and will have a status of **Required**, **Optional** or **Verified**. If **Required** is shown against an individual species group, it is only required if you are taking, or will take, an interest in that group. That means that if you revise your areas of interest to take in more species groups,

you should check here for patches that relate to the new groups and that carry a date later than the issue date of your MapMate distribution CD. **Optional** implies that the patch adds value to MapMate, perhaps for a limited number of users, but is not essential to keep pace with the user community in general. If you have already downloaded and installed a patch, it will be shown as **Verified**. If you lose the benefit of that patch at a later date (for instance, by having to install a fresh copy of MapMate) and you don't have it to hand on your computer, there's nothing to stop you downloading it again, whatever its status.

The **Alert** column will tell you in which email alert the details of the patch were published. You can click on the number in the column to call up details, and you should always read these details before downloading a patch, to make sure you understand its effects. For instance, some taxonomic changes are not straightforward, and may have consequences that you need to consider before you apply the patch.
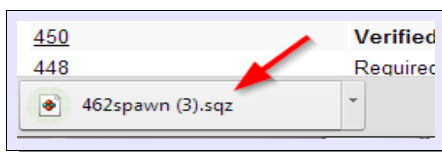
Click on the patch number itself to download the patch for installation. You will then normally be presented with a choice of running or 'opening' the patch immediately, or saving the file to your computer. (Some browsers, such as Maxthon and Chrome, don't make it immediately obvious that you have a choice here; but look for the text or icon that implies opening or running the file, either in the dialog box that pops up, or in the browser's task bar. The picture shows the link provided in the bottom left-hand corner in Chrome.)

Normally there will be little difficulty in running the file immediately to apply the patch; but if you do have problems, or you want to preserve a copy of the patch on your computer for future use, you can choose the 'save' option. You have free choice as to where to put it on your computer's file system; but eventually, in order to apply it, a copy must end up in the right MapMate data folder. On newer versions of Windows, this will be the **My MapMate\Data\Cache\Download** folder.
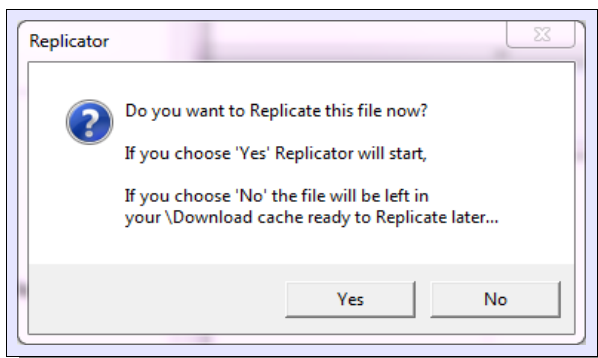
Opening the file from the Web site will immediately run the Replicator to apply the patch. That will first let you decide whether to run it straight away or put it in the download folder.
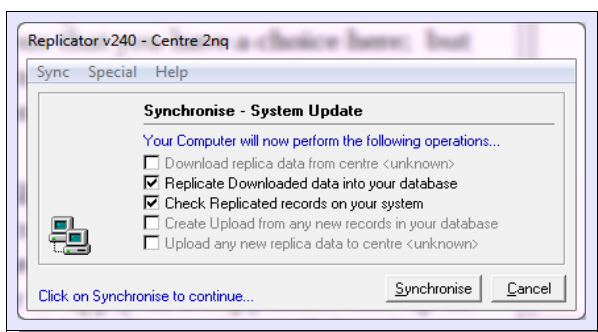
If you defer running it, or if you chose to save the file and put it in the download folder yourself, you will need to start the Replicator at a later time. Whichever way you come at it, the Replicator will then find the file and offer to apply the update.

If you're catching up with a series of patches, make sure you apply them in chronological order – that is, starting towards the bottom of the list and working towards the top. If you're downloading them rather than running them one by one, that won't be a problem: put them all in the download folder together, and the Replicator will do the sorting out for you from whatever it finds there.

If a patch implements taxonomic changes, it's sometimes best not to be an early adopter. Wait a few days, and keep an eye on the **MM-Users** group on the Web; more on this in the next part of the chapter. Look out for any issues that people find in the patch. These things do not always go smoothly.

Getting Help

Whether you need to learn how to do things or seek help with a technical issue, there are several excellent sources of help for MapMate, and a thriving and helpful online user community.

How Do I...?

If you are relatively new to MapMate or one of its features, and need leading into the topic with something that is more focused on the 'how to' and more fully illustrated than this manual, I can't recommend too highly Martin Harvey's series of video tutorials (28 at the last count), available at the BSBI national web site: http://mapmate.bsbi.org.uk/home. Even if you have absorbed everything in this book, you will find new angles and new insights on all the topics here; and if the MapMate learning process is causing you to overheat, Martin's measured and confident tones and his clarity of exposition will soon have you calm again.

Martin has his own web site, with a page devoted to MapMate resources at https://sites.google.com/site/kitenetter/Home/mapmate.

Also, don't ignore MapMate's own help resources. Accessible directly from MapMate itself, there are **Help** menus from both the MapMate main menu bar and the Replicator menu. In a few places these files are not fully up to date with the latest versions of MapMate, so if you find something that contradicts what I've written here, or more especially what Martin Harvey has shown in his videos, it's usually safe to assume that we are the more up to date source.

Online, the MapMate User Zone has a number of other useful documents under the heading **MapMate Short Papers and Resources**.

Finally, I strongly recommend you to join the online Yahoo! Group **MM-users**. This is a self-help group entirely independent of Mapmate Ltd. You will first need to get one of the moderators of the group to to invite you in; the group is moderated to prevent spammers, trolls and other weird life-forms from making participants' lives a misery and exposing them to unnecessary risk. Even so,

off-topic messages sometimes pop up purporting to be from unfortunate genuine users who have had their email accounts hijacked, and it takes a certain amount of time for a moderator to intervene. So, if you see anything that looks suspect, report it to the moderator and **don't open any links** that you see in that message.

I hope that hasn't discouraged you in any way from participating, because there is a wealth of helpful information to be found here at http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/MM-Users/. For example, if you are nervous of writing SQL to produce new user queries, you can state your requirements and someone will either come up with the code or point you to a place where you can find it. Among the many friendly and knowledgeable people on the site, one could single out Martin Harvey and Ian Thirlwell for the depth of their knowledge and their readiness to respond. The easiest route to getting invited is to use the link provided on the Web pages cited above. If you don't have one already, you'll need to register an identity with Yahoo! under which you log on. Until you have this, you won't be able to get access to the group.

Technical Problems

Although I've provided some advice on avoiding pitfalls throughout this manual, I'm not going to attempt a wide-ranging analysis of potential technical issues. For a product with a life-history as long as MapMate's (12 years), most generic problems will have been tackled; and difficulties now tend to arise in specific circumstances that need to be fully considered to find an answer.

Technical problems can be both deeply frustrating and extremely worrying, but if you want to get a speedy and satisfactory response to an issue, it's important that you collect your thoughts, marshal your evidence and tackle it systematically.

Is it clearly a fault in the software?

Unexpected crashes, error messages in 'computerese' and similar problems may as well be taken directly to the MapMate support team, whose email address you will find on the MapMate Web site.

Was it something I did?

First think back over anything novel or tricky you did with MapMate in the recent past. Also consider any updates or patches you installed shortly before the problem appeared.

If you have a reasonable doubt that it might have been something you did, or the result of using functionality you don't fully understand, you can consider first raising it as a query on the MM-users group. Someone else may have been there before you, or understand the background a bit better. If not, you will usually find that you'll be recommended to take it forward to MapMate.

Marshal your evidence

You will help yourself, and also earn the undying friendship of the user group and the MapMate support personnel, by presenting as much pertinent information as precisely as possible up front. Here are things to consider:

- Report the version of MapMate you are using.

- Report the version of Windows you are running it on.

- Think through the immediate steps you took to cause the problem to manifest itself, and document them.

- If you did any procedures out of the ordinary shortly before that (such as repairing a MapMate database), document those too.

- If the problem has a visible manifestation, take screen shots and supply those. This is particularly important with cryptic error messages; you may not understand them, but someone will – as long as they are faithfully reported.

Finally, don't forget that most problems, however serious, can be prevented from becoming disasters by following a backup procedure. Do your revision in Chapter 6 if you need to!