

Ecology in Somerset 2019: Somerset dandelions (*Taraxacum*) – update 2019

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SOMERSET DANDELIONS (*TARAXACUM*) – 2019 UPDATE

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Perhaps the most exciting development on the Dandelion front in 2019 concerned a specimen collected in 2017 which had been determined by AJR, in his capacity as national referee for Dandelions, as *Taraxacum litorale* (Leach and Richards 2018a; 2018b). There was speculation that this scarce and declining species of wet grasslands of the Baltic region may have arrived in Taunton on the clothing or footwear of an agricultural worker from Eastern Europe, or possibly on the tyre treads of a farm vehicle. It was, after all, found beside a lane leading to a farm employing many casual workers from Eastern Europe and running an import-export business buying and selling agricultural machinery.

This explanation became less plausible when, in 2018, what appeared to us to be the same species was found at further locations in and around Taunton. Also, amongst specimens collected in 2017 there was one from SJL's back garden that had been determined as a rather odd-looking *Taraxacum britannicum* that AJR had thought might be worth further study. Another collection in 2018, probably from the same plant, suggested strongly that this, too, was *T. litorale*. Yet with more specimens there came increasing uncertainty about the true identity of this dandelion, not least because *T. litorale* is supposed to be pollen-less whereas our plants usually had abundant pollen. AJR consulted with a German taraxacologist, Ingo Uhlemann, who looked at our material and concluded that it really couldn't be *T. litorale*, and that the peculiar combination of floral and leaf characters didn't seem to match any known taxon from mainland Europe. Thus, in early 2019 AJR described the Somerset plant as a new species within section *Celtica*, to which he gave the name *Taraxacum amicorum*, meaning 'Dandelion of Friends'. As he explained, "the name [*T. amicorum*] refers both to the Society of Friends [Quakers], whose Meeting House in Taunton was the venue for the BSBI *Taraxacum* workshop in 2016, and to the friendly circle of botanists in the Somerset Rare Plants Group who were inspired by that workshop to tackle the *Taraxacum* flora in their area" (Richards 2019). It is currently not known outside Somerset, and is likely to be either an English or a GB endemic. For sake of completeness, and to correct previous published references to *T. litorale*, all our records of *T. amicorum* are listed below.

We also list here several more records of *Taraxacum atrocollinum*, another section *Celtica* species that we included in Leach and Richards (2018b) and Leach *et al.* (2019) under its 'working name', and which, like *T. amicorum*, has now been formally described and named (Richards 2019). It was first collected during the 2016 Dandelion workshop by Les Tucker, and we still tend to refer to it by its local nickname 'Tucker's Beauty'! Its scientific name, *Taraxacum atrocollinum*, means 'Dandelion of the Dark Hill', celebrating the location of its discovery near Higher Buckland Farm, Staple Hill, in the Blackdown Hills. It really is a rather distinctive, characterful and (dare we say it) beautiful dandelion, and although we have now found it in a couple of sites in the west of the county it does seem to have a distribution very much centred on the Somerset/Devon border in the Blackdown Hills. There are apparently a few possible records of it from outside Somerset, including one from Shropshire, so it could prove to be more widespread than currently thought.

Taraxacum chlorofragale is a third recently described species (Richards 2019), recorded for the first time in Somerset in 2019. Like *T. pietii-oosterveldii*, found in our area in 2018 (Leach *et al.* 2019), it is a dandelion that was previously included within the morphologically variable '*T. nordstedtii*' group. Unlike *T. amicorum* and *T. atrocollinum* it is not a British endemic, being also known to occur in mainland Europe (Netherlands and Denmark). In addition to these three species, we also list below, in alphabetical order, six other taxa for which our records represent county and/or VC5 'firsts'. Dates refer to 2019 unless otherwise stated. All records are based on material collected by GEL, SJL and/or JW and determined/confirmed by AJR; in every case, voucher specimens have been deposited in the Somerset/SANHS herbarium in Taunton (TTN). From our work in 2019 a total of 90 specimens, comprising 58 species, are being added to this increasingly important reference collection. Apart from material gathered by us in VC5, the donation to TTN in 2019 also included several specimens collected in VC6 by Liz McDonnell and Margaret Webster. With all these additions, the *Taraxacum* flora of Somerset now stands at 156 species, 140 in VC5 and 90 in VC6.



Fig. 1 *Taraxacum amplum*, collected from Longrun Meadow, Taunton; voucher specimen to be held at SANHS/ Somerset County Herbarium (TTN) (Photo: Simon Leach)



Fig. 2. *Taraxacum chlorofrugale*, collected from Barlynch Wood, Exmoor; voucher specimen to be held at SANHS/ Somerset County Herbarium (TTN) (Photo: Simon Leach)

Taraxacum amicum – [1] Taunton, Sherford Road, in lane-side flower border (ST 2248 2326), 1 May 2017, SJL, det. AJR (this is the specimen originally determined as *T. litorale* and illustrated in *SANH* 161, p. 312, Fig. 2). [2] Taunton, Tangier Way/Wood Street, grassy road verge (ST 2256 2483), 14 Apr 2018, SJL, det. AJR, voucher deposited at National Museum of Wales in Cardiff (NMW), and designated the ‘TYPE SPECIMEN’. [3] Taunton, brick path in back garden of 15 Trinity St (ST 2350 2440), 9 Mar 2017 and 6 May 2018, SJL, det. AJR (originally determined as *T. britannicum*). [4] Thurlbear Wood, edge of path through woodland (ST 2673 2060), 8 May 2018, SJL, det./conf. AJR. [5] Adcombe Wood, footpath/track through woodland (ST 229 184), 18 May 2018, SJL, det./conf. AJR. [6] Orchard Wood, wood-bank beside public footpath (ST 252 201), with *T. atrocollinum* and *T. laticordatum*, 15 Apr and 28 May, SJL, conf. AJR. [7] G.B. Gruffy SWT nature reserve, in rushy grassland (ST 476 564), 13 May 2017, R.D. Randall, det. AJR (although originally ‘indet.’); this is so far the only record for VC6.

Taraxacum amplum (Fig. 1) – [1] Taunton, Longrun Meadow, grassy verge of footpath nr Tesco supermarket (ST 219 246), 23 Mar, SJL, det. AJR. [2] Brushford, in grassy lay-by at edge of village (SS 9224 2559), 11 Apr, GEL, det. AJR. First and second records for VC5 and Somerset.

Taraxacum atrocollinum – records listed here are in addition to those given in previous reports (Leach and Richards 2018b, Leach *et al.* 2019). [1] Putham Lane, on bank of damp sunken lane (SS 9331 3891), 25 Apr 2018, GEL, det. AJR. [2] Corfe, lane verge nr church (ST 2321 1970), 9 Apr, SJL, conf. AJR. [3] Bishopswood/Churchinford, verge of B3170 (ST 2388 1277), 9 Apr, SJL, conf. AJR. [4] Bishopswood, in lane verge and hedge-bank (ST 242 127), many plants, 9 Apr, SJL, conf. AJR. [5] Orchard Wood, wood-bank beside public footpath (ST 252 201), with *T. amicum* and *T. laticordatum*, 15 Apr, SJL, conf. AJR.

Taraxacum chlorofrugale (Fig. 2) – [1] Barlynch Wood, grassy road verge/start of footpath to Louisa Gate (SS 9347 2810), 30 Mar, GEL, det. AJR. [2] Culbone, verge of lane/moorland edge (SS 8491

4746), 31 Mar, GEL, det. AJR. [3] Colescombe Wood, on S side of wood in steep S-facing well-grazed agriculturally unimproved field (SS 8807 4552), 29 Apr, GEL, det. AJR. First and subsequent records for VC5 and Somerset.

Taraxacum dilaceratum – [1] Daws Wood, grassy verge in lay-by (SS 9249 3046), 30 Mar, GEL, det. AJR. [2] Taunton, grassy road verge on Bindon Rd (ST 207 250), 31 Mar, SJL, conf. AJR. First and second records for VC5.

Taraxacum euryphyllum – [1] Hawkcombe Woods, in woodland beside stream (SS 8639 4549), 13 May, GEL, det. AJR. [2] Hawkcombe, grassy verge of bridleway opposite The Hunting Lodge (SS 8767 4576), 19 May, GEL, det. AJR. First and second records for VC5 and Somerset.

Taraxacum haworthianum – Bossington, in S-facing neutral coastal grassland (SS 9012 4791), 23 May, GEL, det. AJR. First record for VC5.

Taraxacum kernianum – Willett Hill, edge of track through woodland (ST 0982 3392), 12 Apr, JW, det. AJR. First record for VC5 and Somerset.

Taraxacum obliquilobum – Hawkcombe, garden path of Higher Combe (SS 8839 4584), 29 Apr, GEL, det. AJR. First record for VC5 and Somerset.

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