

## ATLAS FLORA OF SOMERSET PROJECT 1993

Work commenced in 1987 on the somewhat daunting task of gathering data for Somerset's first Atlas Flora. Every tetrad (2 km x 2 km square) on the Ordnance Survey maps of Somerset has now been visited at least twice. Perhaps surprisingly, many additional records still continue to be added to our computerised database. It is interesting what changes the seasons bring and what different plants appear within the space of a couple of weeks or even days. Often a different recorder, walking maybe just a few yards away from the route originally taken, can find several different species. Even walking with or without the sun in one's eyes or on the other side of the road makes a great difference.

Of course nature never stands still. Although we have discovered some new species for the county, some plants have obviously been lost, sometimes due to natural causes and sometimes due to man's activities. Conversely many plants thought to have been extinct in the county have been rediscovered, often in their original sites.

*Leersia oryzoides* Cut-Grass is a Red Data species; this means it is nationally rare and protected by law. Unfortunately it has declined and may even be lost to the county. It had been known to grow in several sites on the banks of a four-mile stretch of the Bridgwater and Taunton Canal since 1959, when it was first discovered by Captain and Mrs R. Roe. In 1992 two clumps were still in evidence. Unfortunately in 1993 the erection of a handrail along a short stretch of the bank wiped out one population and the other clump could not be traced – probably crowded out by coarser vegetation.

One scarce plant that does seem to be increasing along the Bridgwater and Taunton Canal is *Callitriche truncata* Short-leaved Water Starwort. This had been thought to be extinct in the canal but is now extremely abundant in places, especially nearer Taunton. It

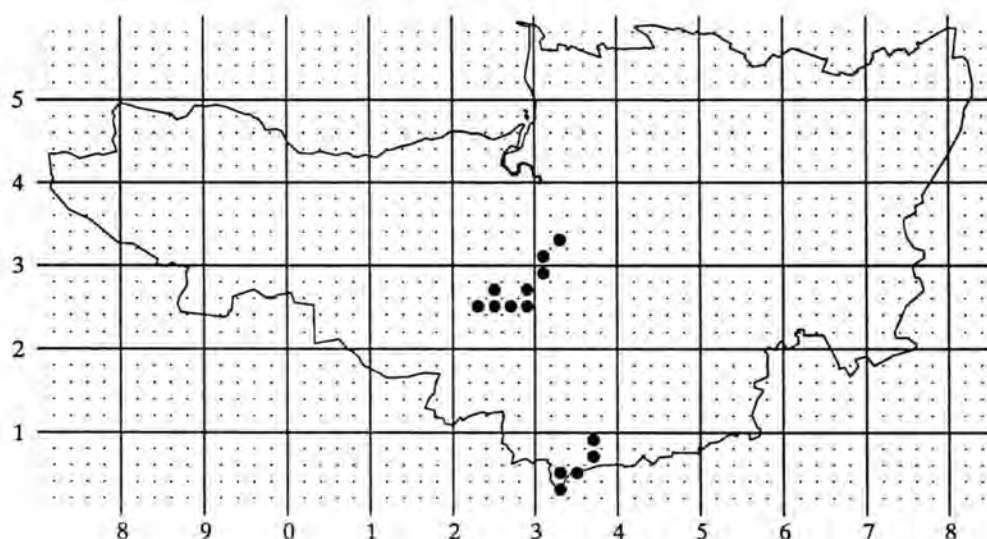
*Callitriche truncata*

Fig. 1

is also to be seen in the River Axe and the ponds in the Cricket St Thomas Wildlife Park, near Chard, where it was first noticed in 1993 (Fig. 1).

The spring of 1993 started well with the re-discovery of a colony of *Hermodactylus tuberosus* Snake's-head Iris at Stogumber. This must have been the same site the Revd E.S. Marshall saw in 1914, when it was the first county record. Captain Roe's Flora (1981) states it was last recorded in 1950. Since then all three past sites in the county have been re-located, plus a further five. This plant is easily overlooked as it flowers in early spring and its grasslike leaves are difficult to pick out when mixed with other vegetation and by high summer they have withered and disappeared below ground.

The first new county record for 1993 was *Sambucus racemosa* Red-berried Elder. A single tree was found in Postlebury Wood, near Trudoxhill. This was quite striking in appearance in April with its cream coloured panicles of flowers contrasting beautifully against a carpet of Bluebells. This is quite rare in southern England, although well naturalised in woods in the north.

*Ornithogalum pyrenaicum* Spiked Star of Bethlehem is found to be locally common in the extreme north-east of the county. It was a most unexpected find growing in the base of a hedge in Lydford Lane, which runs between Lydford on Fosse and Babcary, and some way from any habitation. This is approximately twenty miles south of its normal range, shown dramatically in the distribution map (Fig. 2). Some years ago it was recorded at Nunney which was the most southerly record until a single plant was discovered in Summerleaze Wood, Higher Alham, ten years ago and as an introduction in Home Covert, Alford.

Clubmosses have a sad history in Somerset. *Lycopodiella inundata* Marsh Clubmoss was last recorded in the county in 1850. *Diphasiastrum alpinum* Alpine Clubmoss has not been seen since 1927. In the case of *Huperzia selago* Fir Clubmoss, at the time of

*Ornithogalum pyrenaicum*

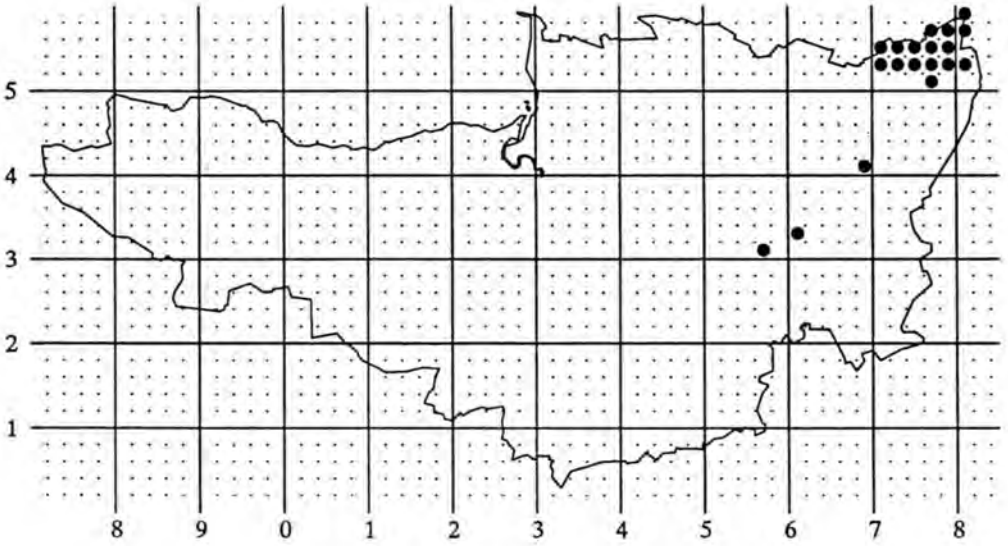


Fig. 2

*Trifolium glomeratum*

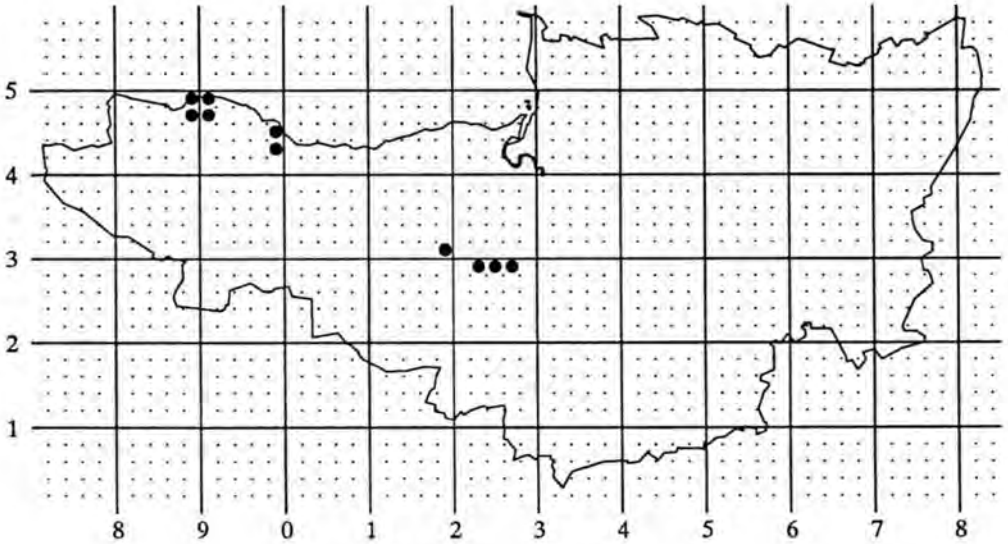


Fig. 3

Captain Roe's Flora (1981) the only recent record was 1970 when it was seen on Exmoor, near Pinkworthy Pond; but it has now been recorded in three sites, all on Exmoor. *Lycopodium clavatum* Stag's-Horn Clubmoss has in the past been reported on the Brendon, Quantock and Blackdown Hills and on Blackdown on Mendip. In more recent times it has only been known on Exmoor, although in 1970 it was found near Yeovil where it is thought to have been introduced during forestry operations. It has, however, not been seen in this site for several years. In 1993 a very small quantity was re-found on the Brendons. The only Clubmoss that looks likely to increase significantly in the county is *Selaginella kraussiana* Mossy Clubmoss, which is an introduction established in several nurseries. An excellent example of this Clubmoss can be seen in Nettlecombe churchyard.

*Trifolium glomeratum* Clustered Clover was first noted in Somerset in a list of flowering plants of the Minehead and Dunster area compiled by the Revd W.H. Colman in 1849. No further mention of this species is made until 1914 when the Revd E.S. Marshall found it at West Monkton. It was next reported in 1916 at Dunster and Bossington. There was a further long gap in the records until 1993, when it was re-located in four sites near West Monkton. Having re-located the clover in Somerset, further searches were carried out in the Minehead, Dunster and Bossington areas, where it was found in five sites, growing in great abundance – in some cases thousands of plants! Unexpectedly, another site was discovered at Cothelstone. Nearly all the sites were on thin natural grassland, where the dominant grass was *Vulpia bromoides* Squirrel-tail Fescue (Fig. 3). Other associated species seem to be *Trifolium subterraneum* Subterranean Clover, *Trifolium striatum* Knotted Clover, and often *Ornithopus perpusillus* Bird's-foot. This small plant has obviously been overlooked all these years. This makes us wonder what other 'extinct' Somerset plants are out there for us to find.

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(Note. Paul and Ian are now the Somerset County Botanical Recorders for vice county 5 and vice county 6 respectively and hold the county records. Copies of the complete list of vascular plant records for 1993 are available and can be obtained from the Honorary Editor, Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society.

All the maps were produced using DMAP, a computer program for distribution and coincidence mapping developed by Dr Alan Morton, Department of Biology, Imperial College, Silwood Park, Ascot, Berks SL5 7PY).