

Ecology in Somerset: Somerset Dandelions (*Taraxacum*) 2020 update

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SOMERSET DANDELIONS (*TARAXACUM*) – 2020 UPDATE

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Our studies of the *Taraxacum* flora of Somerset were hampered somewhat in 2020 by the impact of COVID-19. The main Dandelion-collecting season runs from early March to the middle of May; gathering specimens outside of these times is not recommended because many of the key diagnostic features enabling species to be identified are only readily visible in the spring. Unfortunately, during the first lockdown we were restricted to essential journeys and instructed to ‘stay at home’, and even those obsessed with Dandelions, like us, still struggled to class ‘Dandelion-hunting’ as an *essential* activity! Equally, it was clear that the *Taraxacum* flora of our home patches—GEL on Exmoor, JW around Old Cleeve/Watchet, and SJL in Taunton—had already been fairly thoroughly surveyed, so the law of diminishing returns predicted that there would be only modest rewards for our efforts in 2020. With each year’s passing it becomes progressively harder to find anything that we haven’t recorded already.

Nevertheless, despite lockdown restrictions, one of us (GEL) still managed to collect 50 specimens from the far west of the county which, when examined by the national referee (AJR), were found to encompass 27 taxa, including four new to Somerset—and one, amazingly, new to Britain. JW’s 34 specimens from the Old Cleeve/Washford/Watchet area produced 24 taxa, of which two were new to VC5 (S. Somerset). Distracted by other priorities and frustrated at being restricted to his local patch, SJL collected just a single specimen which, at the time of writing (April 2021), is yet to be determined.

We list below, in alphabetical order, the six taxa for which our records in 2020 represented county and/or VC5 ‘firsts’, plus notes on significant records for a further four species. In every case, voucher specimens have been retained and will be deposited in the Somerset/SANHS herbarium in Taunton (TTN).

Three of us (GEL, SJL and JW) produced a draft checklist of the Dandelions of Somerset in December 2020, an updated pdf version of which can now be accessed via the ‘publications’ page of the Somerset Rare Plants Group website at <https://www.somersetrareplantsgroup.org.uk/>. With the new species added in 2020, and following one or two corrections to the previous list, the *Taraxacum* flora of Somerset now stands at 160 species: 146 in VC5 and 92 in VC6 (N. Somerset).

Taraxacum angulare – Ellicombe, on grassy roundabout of A39 (SS 9835 4484), 13 Mar, GEL, det. AJR; first record for VC5 and Somerset. A very sparsely distributed species, thought to be an introduction, the BSBI database (as at April 2021) has records of it from just 21 10-km squares in Britain, but with a cluster of records straddling the Welsh border in Monmouthshire and Gloucestershire; other than these, the Ellicombe record appears to be the first for SW England.

Taraxacum angustisquameum – Old Cleeve, Claydowns Hill, in field gateway (ST 0444 4188), 12 Apr, JW, det. AJR; first record for VC5, and the first for Somerset since 1992.

Taraxacum berthae – Stoke Pero, on road verge E of Cloutsham Farm where road crosses stream within woodland (SS 9744 4303), 12 May, GEL, det. AJR; first record for VC5 and Somerset. A native species with a predominantly ‘western’ distribution centred on NW England and Wales; a second record for SW England, following John Day’s from Shallowford Common (S. Devon) in 2016.

Taraxacum euryphyllum – North Hawkwell, on verge of lane through old woodland (SS 9261 3981), 18 May, GEL, det. AJR; a third record for VC5 and Somerset, to add to the two made in 2019 (Leach *et al.* 2020).

Taraxacum inclinorum – Cloggs Down, in remote area of unimproved grassland, beside stream (SS 8329 3194) (Fig. 1), 17 May, GEL, det. AJR; first record for Britain. A species otherwise so far only recorded from Ireland, and previously assumed to be an Irish endemic (Richards and Doogue 2017). Likely to be a rare species in Britain, and quite possibly threatened, it is currently listed in the GB Red List as ‘Data Deficient’ while its distribution is elucidated (Leach 2021).

Taraxacum insigne – Ley Hill, in short grassy heathland (SS 8893 4521), with *T. brachyglossum*, 21 Apr, GEL, det. AJR; second record for VC5 and Somerset, and first for Exmoor area.

Taraxacum nitidum – Old Cleeve, in driveway of ‘Torcross’ (ST 0481 4182), 3 Apr, JW, det. AJR; first record for VC5, and the first for Somerset since 1992 when it was recorded from VC6 in Bristol by Peter Rooney (det. AJR).

Taraxacum retzii – Cleeve Hill SSSI, in short



Fig. 1 *Taraxacum inclinorum*, collected from Cloggs Down, Exmoor; voucher specimen to be held at SANHS/Somerset County Herbarium (TTN) (Photo: Graham Lavender)

rabbit-grazed turf (ST 0563 4268), 19 Apr, JW, conf. AJR; second record for VC5 and Somerset of a species listed until recently as ‘Data Deficient’ on the GB Red List, but now amended to ‘Least Concern’ (Leach 2021) following several new records. *T. retzii*

is a very local plant of sandy heaths, dry grassland and dunes, known to occur in fewer than 20 10-km squares in Britain—all of them S of a line between the Wirral and the Wash. The two Somerset records are the only ones from SW England. Also recorded from the Channel Islands and France.

Taraxacum ronaë – Mansley Combe, on S-facing slope in well-grazed open moorland (SS 9026 4057), 12 May, GEL, det. AJR; Chetsford Water, on open moorland in very short acidic grassland (SS 8553 4229), 15 May, GEL, det. AJR. Until now, the presence in Somerset of this recently described species was based on material gathered in 1984-5 at Chelmsine/Ruggin (ST 18 18) that was determined at the time as *T. drucei* and then later re-determined as *T. ronaë* by Margetts (2007). Thus, GEL’s records of *T. ronaë* in 2020 are the first for VC5 and Somerset since Len Margetts described the species. *T. ronaë* is a British-and-Irish endemic. On the advice of AJR, *T. drucei* has been removed from the Somerset list.

Taraxacum stictophyllum – Hawkcombe Woods, in oak woodland, beside ford across stream (SS 8637 4552), GEL, det. AJR; first record for VC5 and Somerset. A mainly northern species; very few records S of a line between the Wash and the Bristol Channel, and this appears to be the first in that area since 1987.

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