

## SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

### ATLAS FLORA OF SOMERSET PROJECT 1994

Somerset has produced some interesting records in the last few years. *Listera cordata* Lesser Twayblade is one of the most remarkable. Although this has been recorded intermittently on Dunkery Beacon, Exmoor, since 1849, the only known extant site in recent years was a few miles away in a small quarry on Winsford Hill. In 1994 an extensive search was carried out on the moors to try to locate other likely sites. This proved fruitful: not only was it rediscovered on Dunkery Beacon but one site on a north-facing slope above Nutscale Reservoir produced a very large population. Hanny Combe was another new site, again on a north-facing slope, where it was growing amongst the sphagnum moss beneath the heather (Fig. 1).

The *Listera* was not the only exciting Exmoor find in 1994. Haddon Hill produced two new county records: *Gaultheria procumbens* Checkerberry, and the North American *Vaccinium uliginosum* Bog Bilberry. The *Gaultheria* is well naturalised, covering an area

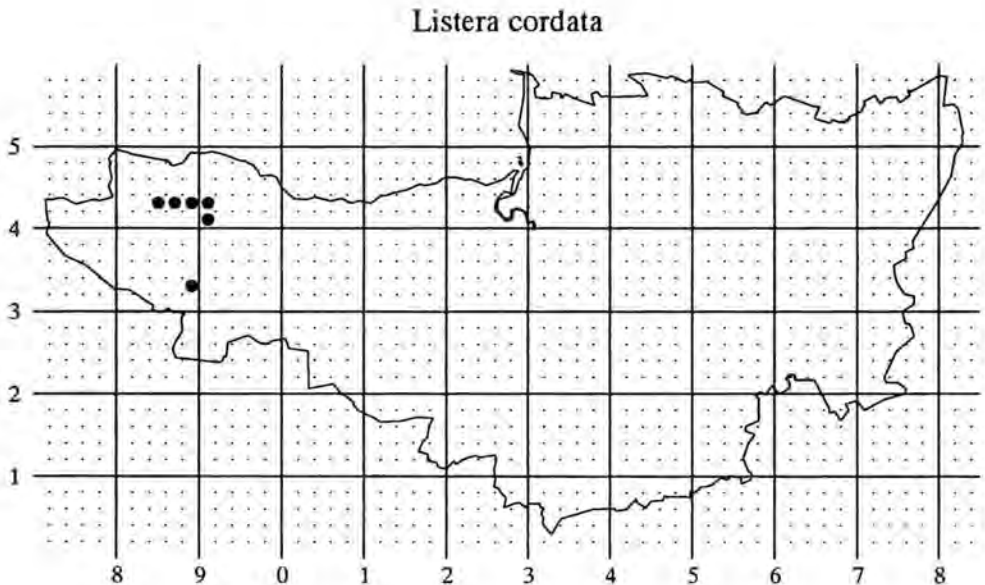


Fig. 1 *Listera cordata*

40 m by 20 m. It is obviously thriving in this situation, where it creeps by underground rhizomes amongst the heather, forming dense clumps of glossy green foliage up to 15 cm high. White to pink-tinged bell-like flowers are followed by striking blood-red berries. In contrast, the *Vaccinium uliginosum* was struggling to survive, being nibbled constantly by the Exmoor ponies and Red Deer. Efforts have been made to protect it in order to enable it to flower and set fruit; hopefully these efforts will encourage it to spread. This is quite a remarkable find and there is every reason to suppose that it is native even though the nearest site is thought to be in County Durham.

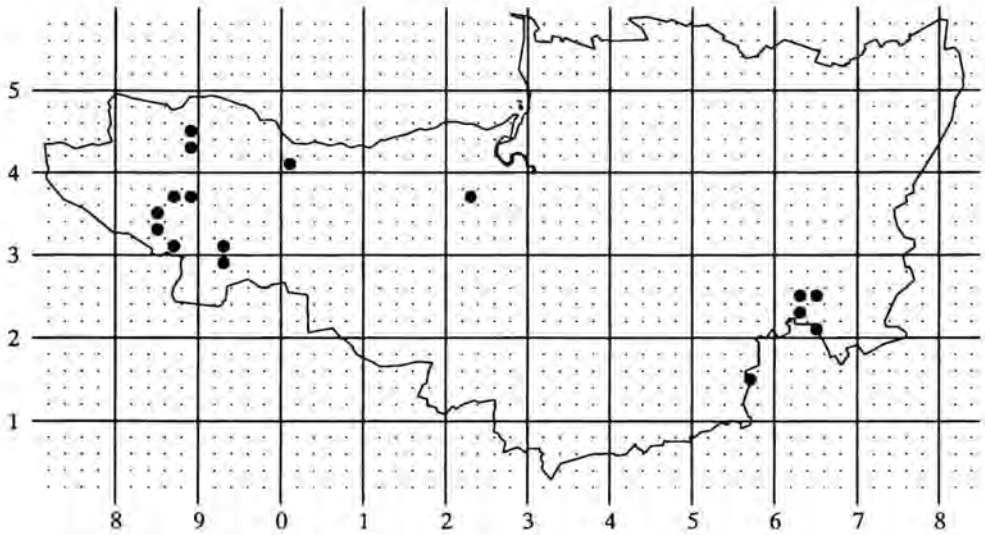
Another good find on Exmoor was a prolific colony of *Gymnocarpium dryopteris* Oak Fern on the damp, deeply shaded, rocky banks of the River Quarme, where it grows with *Phegopteris connectilis* Beech Fern and *Dryopteris aemula* Hay-scented Buckler-fern. Within the county only an extremely small number of plants still survive precariously at Landacre, where Oak Fern has a long history, while the other Exmoor record is from the Exe valley, last reported in 1918.

Across the other side of the county, in the South Cadbury and Corton Denham area, there were some very old records for *Saxifraga granulata* Meadow Saxifrage. The only known site in recent years is on Cadbury Castle, where it is plentiful under the trees on the west side. Endeavours to rediscover it at some of the older sites resulted in its being found at Corton Down (The Beacon), where it was first reported in 1878, and at Poyntington Down (now in Dorset); it was abundant at both sites. It is surprising that it has not been reported here recently as the details in the old Floras were so precise. In the mid 1980s a new site was found at Compton Pauncefoot, on a north-facing slope below Roundhill Covert. Not far away it has a long history in Newton Wood, between Yeovil and Stoford, but has declined in recent years; this could be due to the increase of more vigorous species. In this part of the county it is a native species; elsewhere it is thought to be a well-established garden escape. It occurs in two churchyards, Spaxton and Withycombe, and on several streambanks on Exmoor where it is naturalising well. The longest-known of the Exmoor sites is at Horner where it was first reported in 1937. The double-flowered variety *flora pleno* is found in the churchyards and in some of the Exmoor sites (Fig. 2).

*Ribes alpinum* Mountain Currant, a rare native of the north of England, is distinguished from other *Ribes* by an erect inflorescence and long bracts, which are longer than the pedicels. It was first noted in Somerset in 1891 in a very wet lane in the parish of Penselwood, but no report has been made since that time. Repeated searches in the early 1990s failed to locate it and it was not reported again in the county until 1992, when it was found at Welsh's Green, a small damp wood to the north of Wells. It is very plentiful here and the shrubs have obviously been established for many years. Not far away, in a wooded area on the side of Tor Hill, there are a few shrubs that have probably been planted at some time.

This *Ribes* is also found in a hedge along a lane on the edge of Coker Court Park, East Coker, where it is particularly easy to see in early spring when it produces fresh green leaves, before the majority of the hedgerow species have broken into leaf. Its insignificant, greenish-yellow flowers blend well with the foliage and even its red fruits are very sparse and much smaller than the cultivated species of currant. The only other known site in Somerset is a patch along a track at Rowberrow Warren; this is most probably a garden relic as there are remains of a ruin at the spot. It is surprising that all four of the above sites are beside public footpaths and must just have been overlooked.

An unexpected find near Bury was *Sorbus devoniensis* Devon Whitebeam, an endemic to the British Isles, which is widespread in Devon and very local in Cornwall, the Isle of Man, south-east and north-east Ireland. It is very local in the area east of Bury, occurring in several small woods and hedgerows. It was first found in 1993 and the identification subsequently confirmed in 1994 by Mr P.J.M. Nethercott.

*Saxifraga granulata*Fig. 2 *Saxifraga granulata*

1994 was a good year for unusual aliens. Bridgwater Docks produced an unusual umbellifer *Trachyspermum ammi* Ajowan, which was a new county record. With the completion of the Cannington bypass, amongst the many interesting weeds coming up on the verges were *Crepis nicaeensis* French Hawk's-beard – last reported in 1883 – *Crepis setosa* Bristly Hawk's-beard, and *Senecio vernalis* Eastern Groundsel. The latter is an erect webby-pubescent annual with large yellow flowers, similar to those of Oxford Ragwort but bigger. The entrance to a chicken farm near Burrowbridge produced two beautiful specimens of *Xanthium strumarium* Rough Cocklebur – only the second record for vice county 5.

1994 was botanically one of the county's most rewarding years. We hope that even more exciting finds will be made in the coming years.

IAN P. GREEN, PAUL R. GREEN and GERALDINE A. CROUCH

(Both 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.)