

SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

NORTHERN YELLOW-CRESS *RORIPPA ISLANDICA* AT CLATWORTHY RESERVOIR (V.C. 5)

Practical conservation at a county level tends, quite reasonably, to pay much attention to rare species. Many of these are only slightly different in physical or habitat characters from much more common species. It is therefore important that a county-based conservation publication should present this information rather precisely when a rare taxon is newly discovered locally.

In the 1970s *Rorippa islandica* (Oeder ex Murray) Borbás (Northern Yellow-cress) was considered to be nationally rare in Britain, being known at that time from just five localities. Surveys in the 1980s and 1990s began to show that the species was more frequent than previously realised, and in the 3rd edition of the British *Red Data Book* (Wigginton 1999) its status was reassessed as 'Lower Risk – Nationally Scarce', with records from 1987 onwards for 23 10km squares in Scotland (mainly Orkney) and South Wales (in the Afon Teifi and neighbouring catchments). The map of its distribution in the *New Atlas* (Preston *et al.*, 2002) shows records from 1987 onwards for 60 10km squares in Britain and Ireland – 25 in Ireland, 17 in Scotland, 15 in Wales and three on the Isle of Man – but not a single record in England.

On 29th September 2001 the Somerset Rare Plants Group held a field meeting in the Brendon Hills at Clatworthy Reservoir (S. Somerset, v.c. 5). The purpose of the meeting, led by I.P.G., was to assess populations of the locally rare *Alopecurus aequalis* (Orange Foxtail) and the Nationally Scarce *Elatine hexandra* (Six-stamened Waterwort). Towards the southern end of the reservoir we came upon a small yellow crucifer – clearly a *Rorippa*, and probably just the common *R. palustris*, although the original finder (I.P.G.) felt that it had the 'jizz' of *R. islandica*. The two taxa can be extremely difficult to tell apart. The plant now called '*islandica*' was only fairly recently separated from '*palustris*' (Jonsell 1968); before that, both species had been included under the one taxon, named (rather confusingly) '*R. islandica*'. We estimated that the



Rorippa islandica

Clatworthy colony comprised at least 1000 plants, growing thickly along the reservoir shoreline in the drawdown zone. Voucher specimens were sent to Dr T.C.G. Rich, BSBI referee for the Brassicaceae, who soon confirmed that the Clatworthy plants were indeed *R. islandica*.

This record is a 'first', not just for Somerset but for England too. *R. islandica* is an easily overlooked species and is undoubtedly still under-recorded; we suspect that it may yet be found at other sites in south-west England. Anyone wishing to search for this plant would do well to become familiar with the characters that help to distinguish it from *R. palustris*. A particularly good 'jizz' character is that the fruits of *R. islandica* are held to one side (secund), whereas in *R. palustris* they are usually found to be spreading all around the stem. Readers are referred to Chater and Rich (1995) for an excellent review of the plant's distinguishing characters and a useful account of its ecology and life cycle.

This taxon has too many stations in the north and west for it to have attracted any national protection, e.g. as a Biodiversity Action Plan species. This raises the interesting question of whether a species with a single station in a county, and some distance from others, merits some sort of protection by those interested in local conservation.

REFERENCES

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