

FLOWERING PLANTS AND FERNS, 2023

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2023 has been another relatively quiet year for botanical records. Two non-native species are reported for the first time. However, I am delighted to report that Hampshire botanist Nick Aston has been looking at our Glassworts (*Salicornia* spp.) in saltmarshes. These are a group of critical species which we usually record as aggregate species. Experts often disagree on the precise naming of some collections but, with the assistance of Martin Rand (Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland's (BSBI) referee for *Salicornia* and *Sarcocornia* for SE vice-counties of Britain) we now have some accurately named species. Additionally, Paul Stanley has been recording Dandelion microspecies, a very unrecorded group, and has found some interesting and surprising taxa.

Random surveys this year have shown an alarming lack of arable species in sites which in the recent past have held a rich flora. This would appear to be a country-wide problem, as across England, BSBI county recorders have reported declining arable plant floras. Reasons for this are related to current agricultural practices. In particular, the focus on 'no-till'; planting of cover crops; and the widespread use of glyphosate to kill everything off before direct drilling, which is increasingly used with maize crops for biofuel production. Other previously rich sites are currently under grassland.

The list below covers new records and other interesting records. The records have been divided into those of native species and archaeophytes (plants associated with man's activities that are known or suspected to have occurred in this country since at least Medieval times), and those of non-native species (neophytes), arranged alphabetically by their current Latin name. Nomenclature follows Stace (2022); some of the Latin name changes may be unfamiliar to botanists. I am grateful to everyone who submits their records; all of them are valuable and all records have been stored, whether reported here or not, and have been submitted to the BSBI.

Natives and Archaeophytes

Sneezewort

Achillea ptarmica

Always rare and localised, Sneezewort has proved to be difficult to find as a native species in all its recorded sites in recent years apart from Parkhurst Forest. It is occasionally recorded as a garden escape, usually in its double-flowered form. Therefore, it was encouraging to find a very fine show of flowering plants extending over 14m of south-facing rides, north of Tuckers Gate, SZ473898, CRP. This is a previously known site but the extent of flowering plants was exceptional (Fig.1).



Fig. 1: Sneezewort, *Achillea ptarmica*, Tuckers Gate, Parkhurst Forest.

Marsh-mallow

Althaea officinalis

A characteristic saltmarsh species but found growing as a recent colonist on the east bank of the River Medina between Island Harbour and the Folly Inn (SZ5192), AM, a previously unrecorded site. A Nationally Threatened species.

Babington's Orache

Atriplex glabriuscula

About 6 plants seen on a Botany Group meeting on shingle west of Norton Spit, SZ350897, (mo, conf. Eric Clement). This is one of our less frequent strandline Oraches.

Lesser Water-plantain

Baldellia ranunculoides

As described in the 2022 Flowering Plant report, there has been a catastrophic decline of this species on Brading Marshes and only one or two plants could be found in 2022. The situation was slightly better in 2023 when at least a dozen flowering plants were spotted growing along one southern ditch, SZ631876, LG (Fig. 2). A Nationally Threatened plant.



Fig. 2: Lesser Water-plantain, *Baldellia ranunculoides*, Brading Marshes. Photo: LG

Hybrid Bitter-ress *Cardamine x fringsii*
 The hybrid between Wavy Bitter-ress and Cuckooflower was recorded from near Whitwell village hall, SZ522776, PS conf. Tim Rich. First Island record.

Pale Sedge *Carex pallescens*
 A single plant found on a damp north/south ride in Fattingspark Copse, SZ5291, CRP. Formerly widespread here, but last recorded in 2004. Fattingspark Copse formerly had an extremely rich woodland ground flora but, due to lack of management, this has declined dramatically. Hopefully, this is being addressed by the current owner. Pale Sedge has declined or been lost from many of its ancient woodland sites due to a lack of management.

Cornflower *Centaurea cyanus*
 Six plants found in a fallow arable field on Atherfield Farm, SZ473795, NA & CRP. Last recorded here in 2020. This was encouraging to see; however no plants were found in its former stronghold of Cridmore Farm. These are both genuine arable sites. Cornflower is not infrequent as a garden escape or in wild flower mixes.

Small Toadflax *Chaenorhinum minus*
 Five tiny plants scattered on the floor of an old chalk quarry north of the Highdown Inn, Freshwater, SZ324855, NA. There have been few records of this species in recent years.

Meadow Thistle *Cirsium dissectum*
 Believed to have been lost from its last stronghold, two conservation rides in Parkhurst Forest, due to inappropriate management by the Forestry Commission. It was a delight in 2023 to discover a small number of non-flowering plants surviving in both rides, SZ473903, CRP.

Hybrid Willowherb *Epilobium x novae-civitas*
 The hybrid between American Willowherb and Great Willowherb. Found growing in Asda supermarket carpark, Newport (SZ500890) PS. The second Island record, both from the Newport area.

Broad-leaved Helleborine *Epipactis helleborine*
 Still surviving in Bunkers Copse, Rookley, where at least 100 flowering plants were found, SZ587927, SO-M.

Broad-leaved Spurge *Euphorbia platyphyllos*
 A single plant in arable field margin at Churchills Farm, Chessell, SZ401866, NA & CRP.

Broad-leaved Cudweed *Filago pyramidata*
 A single small plant found on the floor of an old chalk quarry north of the Highdown Inn, Freshwater, its only known extant site, SZ324855, NA. Numbers of this annual plant fluctuate considerably from year to year. Classified as Nationally Endangered .

Corn Marigold *Glebionis segetum*
 An incredible display in a wheat crop south of Beckfield Cross, Kingston, where it was the dominant species, SZ478817, CRP. Classified as Nationally Vulnerable (Fig.3).

Smooth Cat's-ear *Hypochaeris glabra*
 St Helen's Duver has long been known as a stronghold for this Nationally Vulnerable species. This is a difficult species to spot, as its small yellow flowers only open on sunny mornings. However, I



Fig. 3: Incredible display of corn marigold, *Glebionis segetum*, Beckford Cross.



Fig. 4: Fruiting clocks of Smooth Cat's-ear, *Hypochaeris glabra*, St Helens Duver.

was struck but how noticeable it was when in fruit (Fig. 4). During a period of dry, sunny weather, the spherical seedheads or clocks were very obvious, enabling a much more accurate estimate of the extent of the population, SZ637890, CRP. Frequent on an acid grassland slope at Heath Hill, Shorwell, SZ460822, CRP.

Field Cow-wheat *Melampyrum arvense*
 An estimate of 3,190 flowering plants at St Lawrence Bank, SZ536768, TS. The population is currently considered to be declining due to competing vegetation. A Nationally Endangered plant.

Adder's-tongue Fern *Ophioglossum vulgatum*
 A dense concentration of fertile plants in a garden meadow at the rear of a property in Kemming Road,



Fig. 5: Striking ripe fertile fronds of Adders tongue, *Ophioglossum vulgatum*, Whitwell.

Whitwell, a previously unrecorded area, SZ517778, CRP. They were seen in late June, unusually late for finding this fern, the fertile fronds looking a bit like little snakes! A large colony on a rear garden lawn in Spencer Road, Ryde, SZ587927, SO-M. Abundant in meadow at Little Thorness Farm, SZ457934, PS & ML.

Early Spider Orchid *Ophrys sphegodes*

Following last year's record flowering, only two flowering plants were found this year, both on Tennyson Down, SZ341855, RP.

Borrer's Saltmarsh-grass *Puccinellia fasciculata*

Several plants growing on Newtown seawall close to the black hut, SZ419911, NA & CRP. The first record for Newtown estuary since 1856! Classified as Nationally Threatened.

Sweet Briar *Rosa rubiginosa*

A very fine plant growing in roadside verge at Gate Lane, Freshwater, SZ341861, NA & CRP. A relatively uncommon plant on the Island (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6. Sweet Briar, *Rosa rubiginosa*, Gate Lane, Freshwater.

Burnet Rose *Rosa spinosissima*

Hedgerow north-east of Staplers, SZ525897, PS. Burnet Rose was a common plant on Staplers Heath in Victorian times but the heath has long since disappeared.

One-flowered Glasswort

Salicornia disarticulata (pusilla)

Confirmed from the saltmarsh below Town Copse, Newtown SZ428909, NA (Fig. 7).

Long-spiked Glasswort *Salicornia doliostachya*

Confirmed from saltmarshes at Newtown estuary; the Old Mill Pond, St Helens; and Western Yar estuary NA.

Common Glasswort *Salicornia europaea*

Confirmed from saltmarshes at Newtown estuary; the Old Mill Pond, St Helens; and Western Yar estuary NA.

Yellow Glasswort *Salicornia fragilis*

Confirmed from saltmarshes at Newtown estuary and the Old Mill Pond, St Helens NA (Fig.8).

Purple Glasswort *Salicornia ramosissima*

Confirmed from the saltmarshes at Newtown estuary NA (Fig. 9).

Prickly Saltwort *Salsola kali*

A few plants seen during a Botany Group meeting on the strandline on Norton Spit, SZ350897, mo. Last recorded from here in 1993.



Fig. 7: One-flowered Glasswort, *Salicornia disarticulata*, saltmarsh at Newtown.



Fig. 8: Yellow Glasswort, *Salicornia fragilis*, St Helens saltmarsh.



Fig. 9: Purple Glasswort, *Salicornia ramosissima*, Newtown saltmarsh.

Small-flowered Catchfly *Silene gallica*

A remarkable display of many thousands of plants seen in a fallow arable field on Atherfield Farm, SZ473795, NA & CRP. First recorded from this site in 2020. Recorded as Nationally Endangered (Fig.10).



Fig.10: Left: Abundant Small flowered catchfly, *Silene gallica*, fruiting at Atherfield. Right: Close-up of flower.

Dandelions *Taraxacum* spp.
 Paul Stanley has been busy recording some of the over 100 micro-species of Dandelion. The identity of all of them have been confirmed by the *Taraxacum* expert, John Richards. The following have been confirmed: *T. acutifrons**, *T. arenastrum*, *T. britannicum**, *T. chlorofrugale** *T. chloroticum**, *T. ekmanii**, *T. fulvum*, *T. lacistophyllum*, *T. nordstedtii*, *T. oxoniensis*, *T. pietii-oosterveldii**, *T. pseudoproximum**, *T. stenoglossum** and *T. tortilobum**. Asterisked species are first Island records. *T. britannicum*, *T. chlorofrugale*, *T. pietii-oosterveldii* and *T. pseudoproximum* are considered to be rare U.K. species.

Hare's-foot Clover *Trifolium arvense*
 Present in huge quantity on an acid grassland slope by a footpath at Heath Hill, Shorwell, SZ460822, CRP. Possibly the largest Island population (Fig.11).



Fig. 11: Abundant Hare's-foot clover, *Trifolium arvense*, Sandy Lane, Shorwell.

Green Field-speedwell *Veronica agrestis*
 Recorded from an arable field margin at Churchills Farm, Chessell, SZ401866, NA & CRP.

Aliens (Neophytes)

Pirri-pirri-bur *Acaena novae-zelandiae*
 Well established in the plant propagation area at Ventnor Botanic Garden, SZ549770, CRP.

Bear's-breech *Acanthus mollis*
 Established. Lake cliffs SZ593834; secondary woodland adjoining St Helens west green, SZ624892, BG.

Monk's-hood *Aconitum napellus*
 Two long-established clumps in secondary wood near Sibbecks Farm, Whitwell, SZ507791, but away from habitation. CRP (Fig.12).

Wild Leek *Allium ampeloprasum* var. *babingtonii*
 Casual. 4 plants on Bathingbourne Lane, SZ5483 and 2 plants east of Perreton Farm, SZ536857, PS.

Orange Foxtail *Alopecurus aequalis*
 Casual. This is a scarce native plant but the location of a number of plants in a seepage at the base of greenhouses at Medina Garden Centre, Wootton, SZ527906, PS, suggests that these may have been accidentally introduced with plant material.

Green Amaranth *Amaranthus hybridus*
 Casual. Arable field near Grange Chine, SZ423820, NA.

Lesser Quaking-grass *Briza minor*
 Casual. Dormouse Drive, Staplers, Newport, SZ508885, PS.

Swedish Cotoneaster *Cotoneaster x suecicus*
 Casual. The hybrid between Tibetan and Bearberry Cotoneasters. Found during a Botany Group meeting along the upper shore between Fort Victoria and Norton Spit, SZ345898, conf. Eric Clement.

Rough Horsetail *Equisetum hyemale* ssp. *affine*
 Casual. At rear of houses at Totland, pushing up through concrete drive, SZ325865, PS. A native species not previously recorded from the Island but it is a popular marginal plant for planting in garden ponds.

Wall Bedstraw *Galium parisiense*
 Established. Ashley Way, Brighstone, SZ423828, PS; Busy Bee garden centre, Ryde, SZ6090, PS; Sylvan Drive, Carisbrooke, SZ488891, SB.

Giant-Rhubarb *Gunnera* spp.
 Established. In 2015, two samples of naturalised *Gunnera* were collected for a research project investigating the precise identity of large-leaved *Gunnera* growing in the UK and sent to Dr Dawn Edwards, Senior Botanist at RHS Garden, Wisley. We have now received a report of the findings.

It turned out to be an interesting, but complex project, and it was found that what has previously been identified in the UK as *Gunnera manicata* is either *G. tinctoria* or a hybrid between *G. manicata* and *G. tinctoria*, which probably arose not long after the introduction of the two species into cultivation in Europe. The research also produced the unexpected result that genuine Brazilian *G. manicata* appears to have been lost from cultivation not long after its introduction, with the hardier hybrid being mistakenly thought to be *G. manicata* ever since. These results are based on data using verified wild origin material of the two species involved. In a paper published in 2022, the hybrid *G. x cryptica* was described and a paper published in 2023 set out further evidence of its hybrid origin. Other researchers have also found this replacement of *Gunnera manicata* by the hybrid in mainland Europe.



Fig. 12: Monk's-hood, *Aconitum napellus*, Sibbecks.

DNA investigations have shown that the samples collected were:

Sample 1 - Rocken End ledge, St Catherine's Point - *Gunnera tinctoria* (Fig.13).

Sample 2 -Flowers Brook cliff, west of Ventnor - the hybrid *G. × cryptica* (Fig.14).



Fig.13: *Gunnera tinctoria*, Rocken End ledge.



Fig.14: *Gunnera x cryptica*, Flowers Brook.

Gunnera tinctoria is listed in Schedule 9 of the amended UK Wildlife & Countryside Act, 1981 (England and Wales). However, since the project started, it has been listed as a species of Union concern under the EU Invasive Alien Species Regulation (2014). This legislation has been retained in UK law, and species listed as of Special Concern are banned from sale among a range of other restrictions. Arising from the work to clarify the taxonomy of *Gunnera manicata*, we have recently been advised by Defra that, because it contains genetic material of *G. tinctoria*, the hybrid *G. × cryptica* also comes within the scope of this legislation which will have implications for the horticultural industry and plant collections in the UK.

English Iris

Iris latifolia

Casual. Clump of three flowering plants at entrance to Knighton sandpit, SZ572864, GT. Not previously recorded outside gardens on the Island (Fig. 15).

Round-fruited Rush

Juncus compressus

Casual. This is a nationally threatened native plant not previously recorded from the Island but the location in a seepage at the base of greenhouses at Medina Garden Centre, Wootton, SZ527906, PS,



Fig.15: English Iris *Iris latifolia* at the entrance to Knighton sandpit
Photo: GT



Fig. 16: Round-fruited rush *Juncus compressus* at Medina Garden Centre
Photo: PS

together with other unexpected species suggests that these may have been accidentally introduced with plant material (Fig.16).

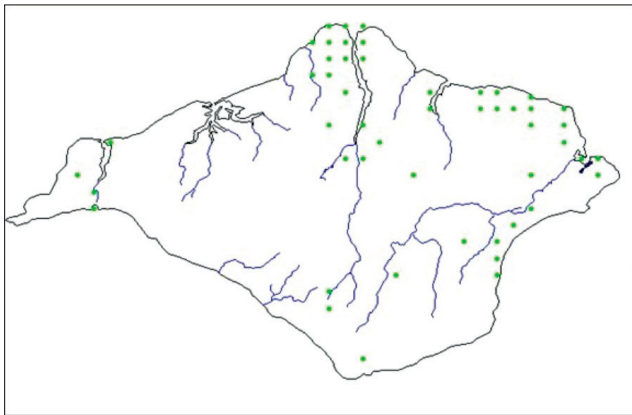
Jersey Cudweed

Laphangium (Gnaphalium) luteoalbum
Established. Jersey Cudweed is a recent arrival to the Island (first recorded in 2018) but it has spread and is on its way to becoming an widespread alien species. Paul Stanley has recorded Jersey Cudweed from 35 x 1km squares in 2023, far in excess of previous records (Fig. 17).



Fig.17: Above: Jersey Cudweed, *Laphangium luteoalbum* at Ryde .

Below: Distribution map of Jersey Cudweed, 2023.



Blue Pimpernel *Lysimachia (Anagallis) foemina*
Casual. One plant in Forest View Garden Centre SZ481898, PS conf. Eric Clement.

Small Tree-mallow *Malva multiflora*
Casual. One plant at edge of compost area, Lynn Bottom, SZ531882, PS & ML.

Bermuda-buttercup *Oxalis pes-caprae*
Casual. One plant growing in waste ground in a garden in Easton Lane, Freshwater. Not planted so must be a relic of previous cultivation, SZ343864, TSl.

Oak-leaved Goosefoot *Oxybasis (Chenopodium) glaucum*
Casual. This is a nationally vulnerable native plant but the location of a number of plants in a seepage at the base of greenhouses at Medina Garden Centre, Wootton, SZ527906, PS, together with other unexpected species, suggests that these may have been accidentally introduced with plant material.

Southern Beard-grass *Polypogon maritimus*
Casual. About 200 plants in Heytesbury Road, Hunnyhill, Newport, SZ496896, PS.

Corn Buttercup *Ranunculus arvensis*
Casual. (EN) Two plants growing on disturbed soil in a garden in Brighstone, SZ426825. Origin unknown, PS.

Spanish Stonecrop *Sedum hispanicum*
Established? Three patches on kerb edge in car park at Seven Acres, Parkhurst, SZ496905, PS.

Red Nightshade *Solanum villosum*
Casual. One plant by outfall building at Egypt Point. Cowes, SZ489966, PS.

Twiggy Mullein *Verbascum virgatum*
Casual. Four plants on south facing bank of Ryde Canoe Lake, SZ602926, NA.

Vervain (cultivar) *Verbena officinalis* var. *grandiflora*
Casual. Four plants in gutter in Victoria Road, Yarmouth. SZ356895, PS.

References

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Recorders

AM Anne Marston
BG Botany Group
CRP Colin Pope
GT Geoff Toone
LG Luke Gaskin (RSPB)
ML Mark Larter
mo many observers
NA Nick Aston
PS Paul Stanley
RP Roger Powley
SB Sue Blackwell
SO-M Stephen Oakes-Monger
TSl Tim Slade
TS Tony Stoneley

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