

FLOWERING PLANTS AND FERNS, ISLE OF WIGHT 2024

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2024 has proved to be a productive year for botanical recording, following a run of relatively poor years. Undoubtedly, a contributing factor has been the high levels of rainfall for much of the growing season. A BSBI weekend was held in early June, to show visiting members some of our rich flora.

The list below covers the new 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). 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

Hybrid Horsetail *Equisetum x rothmaleri*
The hybrid between Field Horsetail and Marsh Horsetail was recorded from Warden Point landslip (SZ324878) PS, conf. Alan Leslie. It was previously recorded from nearby Brambles Chine in 2007, but the site was lost by 2017 due to cliff movement.

Mousetail *Myosurus minimus*
A remarkable record of thousands of plants on waste ground used as a carpark at Shide (SZ503881) AM (Fig.1). Classified as vulnerable in England.



Fig. 1: Mousetail, *Myosurus minimus*, growing in quantity on unused carpark at Shide. Photo: Keith Marston

Rue-leaved Saxifrage *Saxifraga tridactylites*
One plant on wall in Dover Road, East Cowes (SZ501957). This plant appears to be showing a modest increase in sites in recent years, in common with the trend in other places in England.

Slender Tare *Ervum gracile* (formerly *Vicia parviflora*)
At least 15 plants on slumped cliffs at Forelands (SZ647869), a traditional site known since 1952 but not recorded from here recently. Six plants at Lynn Bottom Tip (SZ535885) PS & ML. Classified as vulnerable in England.

Heath Milkwort *Polygala serpyllifolia*
Recorded in small quantity from a site on St Catherine's Down (SZ495784) PS. This is the first record from this heathland site, although it would be expected from here. The Southampton botanist John Rayner recorded Common Milkwort (*P. vulgaris*) from here in 1928, and possibly earlier. No other records of either species from St Catherine's Hill.

Dropwort *Filipendula vulgaris*
A large, poorly flowering clonal patch to the northwest of the Tennyson Monument on Tennyson Down (SZ324853) mo, seen during the BSBI weekend. A rare chalk grassland plant on the Island.

Round-leaved Dog Rose *Rosa tomentella*
One bush at Cranmore (SZ395900) PS & ML. A rare plant with us, often associated with historic heathland sites. Last recorded from the Cranmore area in 1999.

Sweet Briar *Rosa rubiginosa*
One plant in verge of Military Road at Compton Chine (SZ370851) PS.

Spear-leaved Willowherb *Epilobium lanceolatum*
Numerous plants at Halberry Lane, Newport (SZ507899), one plant at Totland (SZ329878) and two at East Cowes (SZ503958) PS. One of our rarer willowherbs.

Sea Knotgrass *Polygonum maritimum*
A single small plant was found amongst *Zostera* debris on the small beach at Bouldnor (SZ374901) PS, AL & PH (Fig. 2). It was in its first year and appears to have been washed away by a high spring tide subsequently. Sea Knotgrass appeared for the first time on the Island on the shore at Thorness Bay where it increased over a number of years before finally disappearing after 2002. It has not been seen on the Island since, but there are a few flourishing colonies on the Hampshire coastline which have no doubt provided a seed source. Classified as vulnerable in England.



Fig. 2: Sea Knotgrass, *Polygonum maritimum*, a single small plant on the strandline at Bouldnor.

Photo: Paul Stanley

Triple Hybrid Dock

Rumex obtusifolius x *crispus* x *sanguineus*

The triple hybrid between Broad-leaved Dock, Curled Dock and Wood Dock was recorded from a weedy field east of St Rhadegund's path, St Lawrence (SZ531765) by visiting botanist Geoff Kitchener. First Island record.

Hybrid Sea-spurrey

Spergularia marina x *rupicola*

The hybrid between Lesser and Rock Sea-spurrey was recorded from Warden Point, Colwell (SZ324877) PS. There were numerous plants on a seawall, with both parents. There is one previous Island record, in 2017, from Bonchurch.

Long-stalked Orache

Atriplex longipes

Rear of saltmarsh below Firestone Copse (SZ550909) PS, conf. Alan Leslie. The third Island record.

Hybrid Orache

Atriplex glabriuscula x *prostrata*

A single plant of the hybrid between Babington's and Spear-leaved Orache was recorded from Bouldnor beach (SZ374901) PS, AL & PH. There is one previous record, in 1999 from Whale Chine.

Early Gentian

Gentianella amarella ssp. *anglica*

This year intensive counts were carried out on National Trust sites by Paul Davies (National Trust warden seconded to a Natural England species recovery programme) and his team of volunteers. The overall impression was that 2024 was a fairly average year for the species. However, there was a surprise count of around 22,365 plants on Chillerton Down (SZ480836) on 23rd May, far higher than previous counts on this site and the highest count of all monitored sites this year. A previous count on this site by Sue Telfer in 1994, considered to be an exceptionally good year for the species, was less than five thousand plants. It may be that improved management by the National Trust has contributed to this increase.

Weasel's-snout

Misopates orontium

Five robust flowering plants found at the Garlic Farm, Newchurch (SZ555865) CP & DT (Fig. 3). They were growing on the side of a ditch in sandy arable ground and brought to the surface in the construction of a sustainable grey water treatment system, which has released a long-buried seed source. Historically, it is likely that this would have



Fig. 3: Robust plant of Weasel's-snout (*Misopates orontium*) in field at Newchurch Garlic farm. Photo: Dave Trevan

been a frequent arable 'weed' in the Newchurch area. In 1922, the Society found plants at the side of the arable field which is now the Wildlife Trust's Martin's wood reserve.

Two plants were found on disturbed ground in the nursery area at Ventnor Botanic Garden (SZ549770) CP & NA. It is not grown at the Garden, but there is a historic record of it in arable fields at the top of the cliff from 1823.

Weasel's-snout is now a rare and declining plant on the Island. It is classified as vulnerable in England.

Wild Clary

Salvia verbenaca

Several plants on waste ground near The Monument, Bembridge Point (SZ642888) CP & NA. There has been a scatter of records of this local plant from around Bembridge Harbour, but this is the first since 2011.

Hybrid Cat's-ear

Hypochaeris x *intermedia*

After intensive searching during a BSBI weekend, just two plants of this hybrid were found amongst large quantities of both parents on St Helen's Duver (SZ637890) MS, mo (Fig. 4). First record from this site.



Fig. 4: Flowers of Cat's-ear (*Hypochaeris radicata*) (left), Smooth Cat's-ear (*H. glabra*) (right) and the hybrid *H. x intermedia* (centre) at St Helen's Duver. Photo: Sam Thomas

Dandelions

Taraxacum spp.

Paul Stanley has continued his investigation of Dandelion micro-species, a poorly recorded group of the Island's flora. This year he has recorded the following 25 taxa, all confirmed by national expert A. John Richards. They range from frequent and widespread species to some which are local and rare. *Taraxacum amplum** Newport SZ4990; *T. boeckmanii** Mottistone SZ4083; *T. brachyglossum** SZ6389, SZ4975, SZ5485 & SZ4990; *T. dilaceratum** SZ4993; *T. discretum** SZ4084; *T. duplidentifrons** SZ4084; *T. exacutum** SZ4990; *T. fulviforme* SZ4084 & SZ3387; *T. glauciniforme* SZ4183; *T. hamatum** SZ4084; *T. hamiferum* SZ4290; *T. incisum** SZ4582; *T. lacistophyllum* SZ4383; *T. lamprophyllum** SZ4990; *T. latisectum** SZ3286; *T. leucopodum** SZ3286; *T. oxoniensis* SZ4383, SZ4184 & SZ4083; *T. palustre* SZ6389; *T. proximum* SZ4989; *T. pseudoproximum* SZ6291; *T. pulchrifolium** SZ4990; *T. rubicundum* SZ4990; *T. subundulatum** SZ4990; *T. subxanthostigma** SZ5088; *T. tumentilobum** SZ4990; and *T. undulatum** SZ4990. Those with an asterisk are first Island records.

Cornflower

Centaurea cyanus

One large plant at the margin of a barley field at Ramsdown, Chillerton (SZ478829) CP (Fig. 5). In the

early 2000s, Cornflower was frequent in fields in the general area but a change in arable cultivation has meant that it has been rarely seen recently. Several plants were found at the Garlic Farm, Newchurch (SZ555865) CP & DT, growing in sandy arable ground, arising from seed brought to the surface in the construction of a sustainable grey water treatment system. There are historic records of Cornflower as an arable 'weed' in the Newchurch area.



Fig. 5: Cornflower (*Centaurea cyanus*) in a barley crop at Chillerton. Photo: Colin Pope

Hairy-fruited Crowsfoot *Valerianella eriocarpa*

This rare plant seems to have declined in its sites on thin soil on the lower chalk, so it was a surprise to find hundreds of plants scattered over a sandy field at Hill Heath, Alverstone (SZ572856) NA (Fig. 6). Twentieth century botanists knew these fields for their specialised acid sandy soil annuals. They were regularly surveyed but Hairy-fruited Crowsfoot was never recorded from here.



Fig. 6: Hairy-fruited Crowsfoot (*Valerianella eriocarpa*) in a sandy field at Alverstone. Photo: Nick Aston

Sea Holly *Eryngium maritimum*

On the shore northwest of White Ledge, Forelands (SZ654872) GT. Although well-known from St Helens Duver, this is the furthest east this species has been recorded.

Broad-leaved Helleborine *Epipactis helleborine*

A total of ten flowering plants at Branstone Farm Park, Apse Heath (SZ556838) AM & DT. First record from this site but Broad-leaved Helleborine is being increasingly recorded from new sites.

Bird's-nest Orchid *Neottia nidus-avis*

Two spikes in Bunkers Copse, Rookley (SZ503846) RA. Never common on the Island, this is the first

record from this site since 1995, and the first Island record since 2021 after which it has failed to reappear at its well-known Ventnor site. It has decreased nationally and is now classified as vulnerable.

Frog Orchid

Coeloglossum viride

Four good specimens in the usual site on Afton Down (SZ367851) RP and thirty nearby on the north side of the down (SZ365858) SOM. This is the highest count at this traditional site since 2012. Classified as vulnerable in England.

Lizard Orchid

Himantoglossum hircinum

A robust vegetative plant was found on a road verge in December at Dodnor (SZ502916) (PS. Fig.7). This is the first Island record for ninety years. Specimens were found near Havenstreet in 1933 and 1934, at a time when it was appearing widely in England. The species is currently exhibiting a resurgence with plants appearing widely across southern and eastern England.



Fig. 7: The first Island Lizard Orchid, *Himantoglossum hircinum* for 90 years. Photo: Jillie Pope

Early Spider Orchid

Ophrys sphegodes

Recorded this year from above Freshwater Bay where there was a single plant and a tight cluster of four plants (SZ341855) RP. Unfortunately, they became badly damaged by salt winds. None were found elsewhere on the downs towards the Needles headland this year, but a surprise find was a single plant on Mottistone Down (SZ418844) RL, raising the possibility that there may be other scattered plants on the West Wight downs.

Dwarf Sedge

Carex humilis

A single small patch of this rare early-flowering downland sedge was found on West High Down (SZ311850) PS. A second substantial clump was located on Mottistone Down, 60m west of the first patch found in 2013 (SZ415845) CP.

Borrer's Saltmarsh-grass

Puccinellia fasciculata

Recorded from Bonchurch seafront (SZ577778), a new site PS. Classified as Near Threatened in England.

Small Cord-grass

Spartina maritima

The saltmarsh island populations on the MOD land at Clamerkin, Newtown estuary were revisited in 2024 for the first time since 1999 (SZ429915) CP & NA (Fig. 8). The plant remains frequent here. It occurs in quantity over some 7ha of saltmarsh making this by far the largest population of this native saltmarsh grass in southern England. Its survival here is by virtue of the fact that these saltmarsh islands are

inaccessible to grazing livestock. Classified as endangered in England.



Fig. 8: Small cord-grass (*Spartina maritima*) on Clamerkin marshes, Newtown estuary. Photo: Colin Pope

Aliens (Neophytes)

Australian Tree-fern

Dicksonia antarctica

Four or five large plants on the north facing bank of Madeira Road, Totland, leading down to the beach (SZ323870) CP & NA. They looked to be well established amongst rank natural vegetation, but it transpired that they were originally planted by the Council as small plants acquired by Ventnor Botanic Garden.

Stinking Hellebore

Helleborus foetidus

Two plants on inaccessible silty bank that floods regularly, Fattingspark Copse (SZ5291) LD. They must have arisen from propagules brought down in the Palmers Brook, but they were remote from any gardens.

Strawberry Saxifrage

Saxifraga stolonifera

Large, well-established patch of the form *tricolor* at the edge of a woodland clump in the middle of Osborne Golf Course (SZ519953) JW (Fig. 9). First Island record. This plant is rarely reported as an established alien with most of the few records coming from western Britain. It is possible that the plants at Osborne were originally planted by a previous head groundsman who was a keen gardener.



Fig. 9: Strawberry Saxifrage (*Saxifraga stolonifera*) well established on the golf course at Osborne.

Photo: John Wilmott.

Crimson Clover

Trifolium incarnatum ssp. *incarnatum*

Several plants on Ventnor western cliffs, (SZ556771) RS (Fig. 10).

Woolly Clover

Trifolium tomentosum

Numerous plants in Cook Avenue, Newport (SZ509898) PS. Otherwise only known from a carpark at Nodes Point campsite.

Hybrid Cockspurthorn

Crataegus x lavalleei

Two old multi-stemmed small trees on scrubby verge at Upper Adgestone Road (SZ596865) CP with large, orange fruits. Originally determined as *C. persimilis*. Only Island record.

Hybrid Alder

Alnus glutinosa x *cordata*

A single self-sown tree at Swainston (SZ439879) PS & ML, confirmed Alan Leslie. First Island record.

Black Poplar

Populus nigra ssp. *betulifolia*

The true native Black Poplar has only ever been known from a handful of scattered trees on the Island and its truly native status has always been questionable. In 2024, Mark Simmons from the Isle of Wight National Landscapes office sent material from three of the trees to Forest Research, Roslin, for DNA fingerprinting. The samples were from the tree at Flowers Brook, Steephill; the tree by the east bank of the river Yar at Roud and the gnarled pollard at Chilton Farm. All were confirmed as ssp. *betulifolia*. Stuart A'Hara replied that all three were male trees of the clone CL 28, known as the Manchester Poplar which is a very common and widely planted cultivar across the UK.

Asian Bittercress

Cardamine occulta

In flowerbed at Ryde Esplanade (SZ594979) PS. First Island record. An eastern Asian species which has become invasive in many countries. It is very similar to the native Wavy Bittercress, *Cardamine flexuosa*.

Red Orache

Atriplex hortensis var. *rubra*

Several plants on waste ground at Bembridge Point (SZ643887) CP & NA. Second Island record.

Japanese Knotweed variety

Reynoutria japonica var. *compacta*

On waste ground by the shore at Bembridge Point (SZ643887) CP & NA.

Four-leaved Allseed

Polycarpon tetraphyllum

Recorded this year from a drive in Totland (SZ320862), gravel in a garden centre in Freshwater (SZ342870) and Ventnor Botanic Garden (SZ546770), all PS.

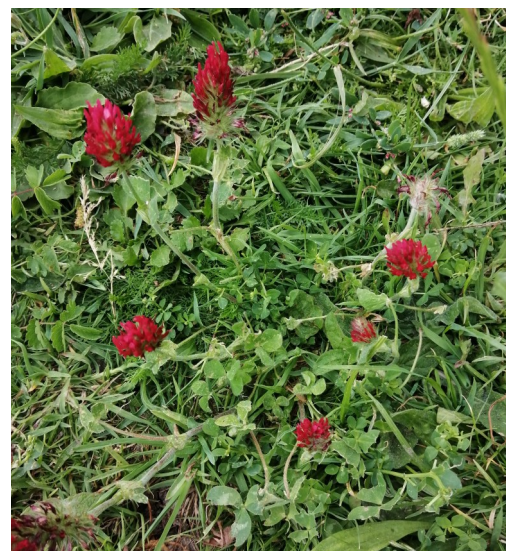


Fig. 10: Crimson Clover *Trifolium incarnatum* ssp. *incarnatum* on Ventnor west cliffs. Photo: Roger Silsbury

Greek Sea-spurrey *Spergularia bocconeii*
On track down to Thorness Bay with *S. marina*
(SZ453931) PS (Fig. 11).



Fig. 11: Greek Sea-spurrey (*Spergularia bocconeii*) on track at Thorness Bay. Photo: Paul Stanley

Spring Sowbread *Cyclamen repandum*
Many plants on a road verge at Quarr (SZ453931) CP.

Ivy-leaved Toadflax *Cymbalaria muralis*
White flowered plant at Easthill Road, Ryde (SZ601921) CP (Fig. 12). First Island record for this white flowered form which is likely to be under recorded.



Fig. 12: White flowered form of Ivy-leaved Toadflax (*Cymbalaria muralis*) at Appley, Ryde. Photo: Colin Pope

Hybrid Monkeyflower *Erythranthe (Mimulus) x robertsii*
In a ditch at SZ503832, near Rookley PS.

Broussa Mullein *Verbascum bombyciferum*
One plant on waste ground at Staplers Hill (SZ508894) PS & ML. First Island record.

Jo-jo *Soliva pterosperma*
Recorded from Totland (SZ321869) PS.

Golden Tickseed *Coreopsis tinctoria*
Several plants on waste ground Bembridge Point (SZ643887) CP & NA. First Island record.

Valdivia Duckweed *Lemna valdiviana*
Ponds by Stag Lane, Dodnor (SZ498918) PS

Yard Grass *Eleusine indica*
Six plants in gravel of Garden Centre, Afton, Freshwater (SZ342870) PS. First Island record.

References

Stace, C. (2022) *Concise Flora of the British Isles*. C&M Floristics. Suffolk.
Stroh, P.A. et al (2014) *A Vascular Plant List for England*. BSBI. Bristol.

Recorders

AL Alan Leslie
AM Anne Marston
BG Botany Group
DT Dave Trevan
GK Geoff Kitchener
GT Geoff Toone
LD Luke Davis
ML Mark Larter
mo Many observers
MS Mark Spencer
NA Nick Aston
PD Paul Davies
PH Paul Harmes
PS Paul Stanley
RA Robin Attrill
RL Robin Lang
RP Roger Powley
RS Roger Silsbury
SOM Stephen Oakes-Monger

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