

SPREADING BELLFLOWER (*Campanula patula*) - AN ENIGMATIC TAXON IN WALES

Campanula patula has recently come to the fore as a species of conservation concern. Previously, it was classed as Scarce, being found in 44 hectads in Britain, but this simple classification masks the extent of the decline in this species. The *New Atlas* map indicates that it has been lost from 69 hectads before 1970, from 12 between 1970 and 1986, and is currently recorded from only 37 hectads - a 68% loss. However, current figures (from BSBI Vice-county Recorders, Plantlife Wales and English Nature) indicate that the total British population is only about 330 individuals. Since a continuing decline is also identified, this species is now categorised in the New Red Data List with the IUCN category of Endangered.

The decline of *C. patula* is even more evident in Wales. Of the 30 documented sites below, 15 have 1987+ records. However, of these, just 3 (in **bold**) have records since 2000.

VC	Locality	Grid Ref	Year	No of plants	Recorder
Mons	The Hatterels - Pandy Station	SO325.226	2003	1	Groucutt, M., Sheridan, G.
Mons	Cefnila	SO36.00	1935		Rickards, R.W.
Mons	Llansoy	SO4.0	1987		Evans, T.G.
Mons	Lydart	SO49.08	1998		
Mons	The Hendre	SO4.1	1987		Evans, T.G.
Mons	Tregare	SO4.1	1985		
Mons	Penrhos	SO41.11	1987		
Mons	Skenfrith,nr	SO4.2	1894		Parkinson, C.
Mons	Redbrook,Wye Valley	SO5.0	1987		
Mons	'Priory Grove Wood'	SO5.1	1940		Lewis, R.
Mons	Fiddler's Elbow	SO52.13	1992	c.10	
Mons	Upper Hael Wood	SO530.077	2000	2	
Mons	Reddings Inclosure	SO533.136	2003	4	Dines, T.D.
Mons	High Meadow Woods	SO541.132	1986		Evans, T.G., & Kitchen, M & C.
Mons	Coed-y-paen	ST33.98	1837		Conway, C.
Mons	Llangybi,nr	ST37.96	1805		Forster, E.
Mons	Gwernddu Wood	ST402.976	1987		Pollard, T. & J.
Mons	Shirenewton	ST4.9	1987		Evans, T.G.
Brecs	Crickadarn, nr	SO084.422	1984		Jervis, A.S.
Brecs	Llyswen	SO1.3			
Brecs	Llanigon	SO219.382	1989		Soan, H.
Rads	Glasbury on Wye	SO165.398	1970		Pugh, M.R.
Rads	Unknown	SO2.4	1500		anon
Rads	Dolyhir-Stanner	SO2.5	1945		Gough, T.W. & Sandwith, N.Y.
Rads	Gladestry	SO2.5	1987		
Rads	Radnor	SO2.5	1924		
Rads	Discoed	SO268.636	1951		
Rads	Knighton, Little Cwmgilla	SO268.725	1965		Richards, P.
Rads	Knill, wood	SO287.615	1977		Port, P.J.
Monts	Corndon Farm	SO307.948	1998	Few	Jones, R.A., Teearu, T.

If anyone can update or add records to this list, please let me know.

Campanula patula is generally regarded as a plant of sunny, well-drained banks in woodland glades, on tracks and roadsides and on rock outcrops. Reproduction is by seed which needs disturbance for germination. However, the seed is long-lived, allowing the plant to reappear after long absences; it was first recorded at Pandy Station (The Hatterels, Mons.) for example in 1868 - a gap of 135 years between records! Although it has been known at Corndon Farm (Mons.) on-and-off for at least 20 years, many populations are transient.

Most populations are also very small; of the 13 population counts we have, 11 are for less than 4 plants. This makes monitoring of populations very difficult. The largest known is of about 20 plants in High Meadows Wood (Mons.) in 1984, although it has been described as being “abundant” at Fiddler’s Elbow (Mons.) in the past.

In Wales, it seems that the need for disturbance is one cause of decline. At Reddings Inclosure (Forest of Dean, Monmouth), it occurs in areas that were traditionally coppiced but which no longer are. More recently it has grown on forest track-sides which are disturbed periodically by large timber-extraction machines. However, these tracks are now often “scalped” to maintain a solid surface and this may have a detrimental effect on *C. patula*. Many other sites rely on the periodic collapse of track and roadside banks. If these are now being maintained in a better condition there are fewer chances for germination. At least one road-verge site (Fiddler’s Elbow, Mons.) has been lost through the bank being planted with Birch trees about 10 years ago. Now that these have grown the verge is no longer mown and disturbed and *C. patula* has disappeared.

Since being identified as a species of Principal Importance for the Conservation of Biological Diversity in Wales (CRoW Act, 2003), *C. patula* has been added to the list of Plantlife’s *Back from the Brink* species in Wales. Plantlife Flora Guardians have surveyed sites in Monmouthshire and we are encouraging volunteers to visit both current and old sites to look for *C. patula*. It was one such volunteer that discovered the plant in The Hatterels.

We are also working closely with Forest Enterprise in the Forest of Dean (Reddings Inclosure). A volunteer work-day was held with them in September 2004 to disturb some verge sides where the plant occurred recently, and they have offered to revert some areas of woodland back to coppice in the hope of restoring some larger populations.

TREVOR DINES, Plantlife Wales Officer, c/o Countryside Council for Wales, Maes y Ffynnon, Ffordd Penrhos, Bangor, Gwynedd LL57 2LQ