

Festuca arenaria Osbeck
subsp. ***oraria*** (Dumort.) Dengler

Rush-leaved Fescue

Native

GB: Waiting List

GB Scarce

VC5 Absent?; VC6 Extinct?

A rhizomatous perennial grass of coastal sand dunes, shingle, cliff-tops and sandy places near the sea. This taxon has been variously considered within *Festuca rubra* agg., elevated to a species (*F. oraria* Dumort., *F. juncifolia* St.-Amans) or treated as a subspecies (*F. rubra* L. subsp. *oraria* Dumort.) – here nomenclature follows Stace (2010). As a result of nomenclatural confusion, it is difficult to tell whether former records were for this subspecies or for *F. arenaria* subsp. *arenaria*. White (1912) included the taxon *F. oraria* Dum., giving records for four locations in VC6: Bank of Avon above Rownham Ferry, found by Miss Atwood; Anchor Head, Weston-super-Mare, found by Mrs Gregory; Kewstoke Bay, 1901; and on sand-hills and loose sand on the shore below Brean Down. According to White, C.E. Moss stated this to be “An abundant grass in the open dune plant-associations on the North Somerset coast”. Marshall (1914) repeated these records and the statement by Moss under the taxon *F. rubra* var. *arenaria*, giving *F. arenaria* Osbeck and *F. oraria* Dumort. as synonyms. However Cope and Gray (2009) give *F. arenaria* Osbeck as a synonym of *F. arenaria* subsp. *arenaria*, which leaves it uncertain which taxon Marshall meant.

In **BM** there is a specimen collected by E.S. Gregory of “festuca rubra b. arenaria Osb. (= *F. oraria* Dum.). Sands. W.S.M. 1888”. This may be the specimen quoted by White (1912). Intriguingly, in the same folder is a specimen collected by C.C. Babington “in a wood. Culbone. Somersetsh. Jun. 1849” which may or may not be the same taxon (F.J. Rumsey, pers. comm.). Culbone Wood is on the coast in VC5; there are no other documented records for the species at all in VC5.

There have been no subsequent records for this taxon in Somerset. The distribution of this subspecies in Britain is unclear, which is why it appears on the Waiting List. The species as a whole is Scarce but of Least Concern: its distribution is mapped in Preston *et al.* (2002).