

Aster linosyris (L.) Bernh.

Goldilocks Aster

Native

GB: Least Concern

England: Endangered

GB Rare

VC5 Absent; VC6 Rare

A perennial, growing on the shallow soil of ledges on limestone sea-cliffs. Absent from VC5 and always rare in VC6, this species now occurs only at Uphill and Brean Down. The earliest record for Somerset is a specimen in **BM** collected by Dr Wollaston in 1813 at Uphill. Murray (1896) reported this species as lost and did not mention the Uphill site. The site was refound in 1904 by Druce, who reported seeing *Aster linosyris* “on a low range of carboniferous rocks in the neighbourhood of Weston-super-Mare, but not in the published locality”; he recorded about a hundred plants (Druce, 1904). This record was mentioned cryptically by White (1912) as a newly discovered site. It persists here within an enclosure on a rocky ledge at the edge of a quarry. Clearing of scrub resulted in a fine display of flowering shoots in 2007 and a small population was found outside the enclosure; however the population remains critically small and constantly in danger from encroaching scrub.

Aster linosyris was formerly known from two other sites at Weston-super-Mare, Worle Hill and Birnbeck Island; only the latter was listed by Murray (1896). The earliest record for Worle Hill was a specimen collected in 1830 by W. Christy Jun. from “rocks on Worle Hill above Worle village”; the last record was made by Rev. L. Jenyns in 1857, after which it was believed to have been lost to quarrying (White, 1912). At Birnbeck Island, it apparently once grew in some quantity as there are numerous records from the 1850s; here, however, it was lost to building, the last record being from 1856, near a spot where a flag-staff formerly stood on the hill just above Anchor Head (White, 1912).

In 1965, a new location was discovered, “confined to a small area, but present in substantial quantity, some 500 flowering stems being observed” (Willis, 1966). It was later revealed that this site is the south side of Brean Down, where it grows on inaccessible cliff ledges, visible from below at low tide. In 1988, Ro FitzGerald recorded over 500 flowering spikes; in 2014 the population was counted again, with over 500 flowering spikes seen. This largest population in Somerset appears to be stable and relatively unthreatened due to its inaccessibility.

In 1955 this species was one of seven rarities of the Avon Gorge or Mendip limestone which were planted experimentally at Burrington Combe and Goblin Combe. Two plants were still present in 1987 in Burrington Combe, but none was found that year in Goblin Combe, although it had been seen at some time during 1980-82 (Hope-Simpson, 1987). There have been no subsequent records from either site.

In Britain, *Aster linosyris* is found at only four other sites: Berry Head in Devon and three locations in Wales. It is believed to have been lost recently from its most northerly site, at Humphrey Head in Lancashire. Sites in Somerset are now the most northerly in England.

VC6

Brean Down	SSSI	ST28285894	2004	BJL, MJ	Small clump 15-25m up S-facing vertical cliff
Brean Down	SSSI	ST28375892	2014	HJC, FJR	On cliff ledges 10-20m up S-facing vertical cliff
Brean Down	SSSI	ST28385891	2014	HJC, FJR	On cliff ledges 10-20m up S-facing vertical cliff
Brean Down	SSSI	ST28395890	2014	HJC, FJR	On cliff ledges 10-20m up S-facing vertical cliff
Brean Down	SSSI	ST28395891	2014	HJC, FJR	On cliff ledges 10-20m up S-facing vertical cliff
Brean Down	SSSI	ST28415890	2014	HJC, FJR	On cliff ledges 10-20m up S-facing vertical cliff
Uphill Cliff	SSSI	ST316582	2007	SRPG	55 shoots counted in enclosure
Uphill Cliff	SSSI	ST31615822	2013	SRPG	9 shoots on S-facing rocks cleared of scrub
Uphill Cliff	SSSI	ST31615823	2007	HJC, RDR	35 shoots on rocky ledges of cliff outside enclosure



Aster linosyris at Uphill (2007). Photo: HJC