

***Agrostemma githago* L.**

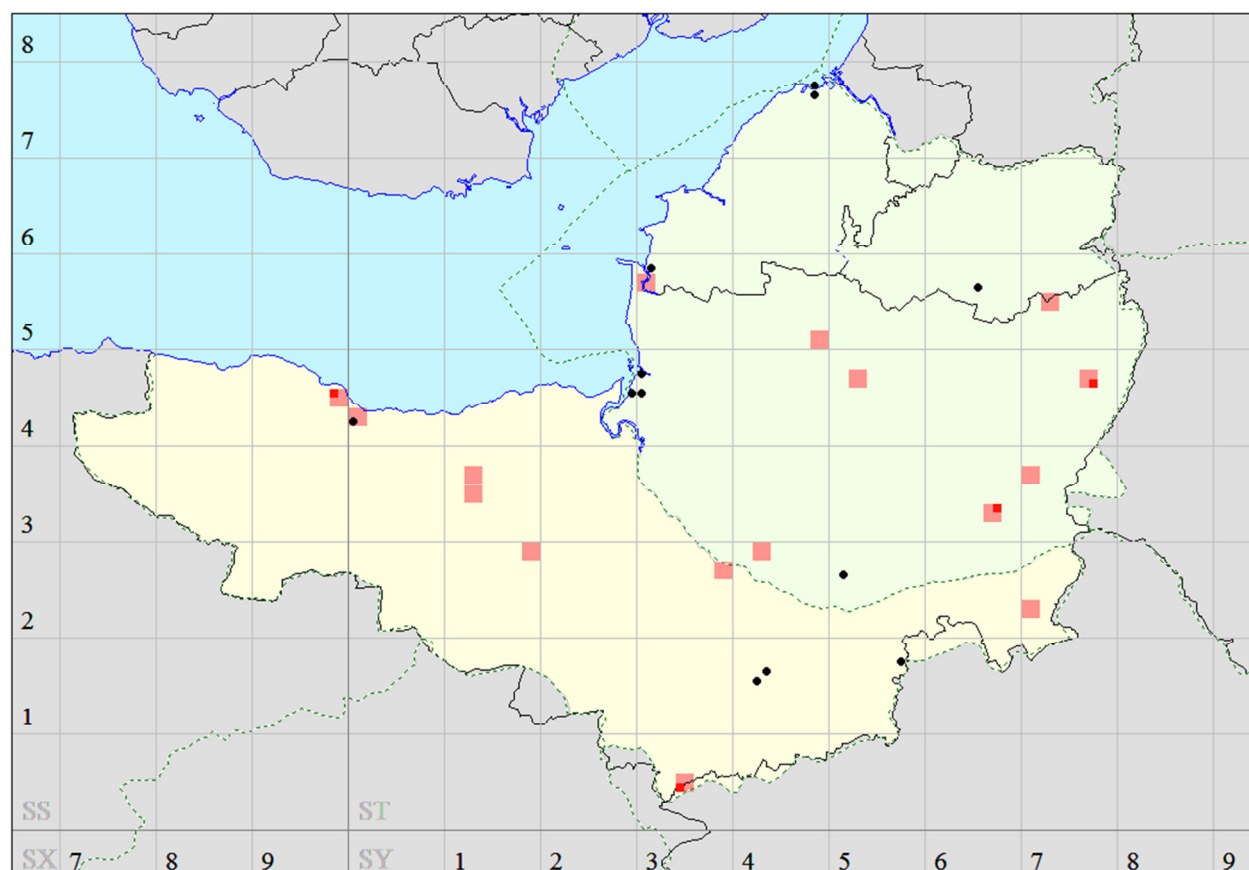
Corncockle

Archaeophyte

GB & England: Waiting List

VC5 Not Scarce; VC6 Not Scarce

An annual plant of arable fields, tolerant of various soil types. This species was included in earlier editions of the Red Data Book (Perring & Farrell, 1983; Wiggington, 1999) but may now be extinct as an archaeophyte due to more efficient seed cleaning, the use of broad-spectrum herbicides and inability to compete within highly fertilised cereal crops. Seeds have a very short longevity in the soil seed bank, usually less than six months unless buried deeply. Although the possibility of germination from long-buried seed sources cannot be ruled out (Stroh *et al.*, 2014), most recent records for this species are the result of its popularity as a component of many annual “wild flower” seed mixes, and its presence in recent times can usually be traced to a sown mixture. In Somerset the fortunes of this species exemplify this situation. It was described as common in cornfields around Bath by Babington (1834) and as not uncommon around Bristol by Swete (1854), whereas Murray (1896) considered it a rather rare colonist in cornfields and White (1912) described it as occurring sparingly. Roe (1981) stated that Corncockle became increasingly scarce after 1940 and by the time of his flora was a very rare casual, with only three recent records. Based on records since 1987, this species is not considered scarce in either VC5 or VC6; however all recent records are almost certainly of plants which have originated from sown seed mixtures.



Distribution of ***Agrostemma githago*** in Somerset, mapped using MapMate. Black dots are post-2000 records; red squares are 1987-1999 records.