

***Althaea officinalis* L.**

Marsh-mallow

Native

GB: Least Concern

England: Near Threatened

GB Scarce

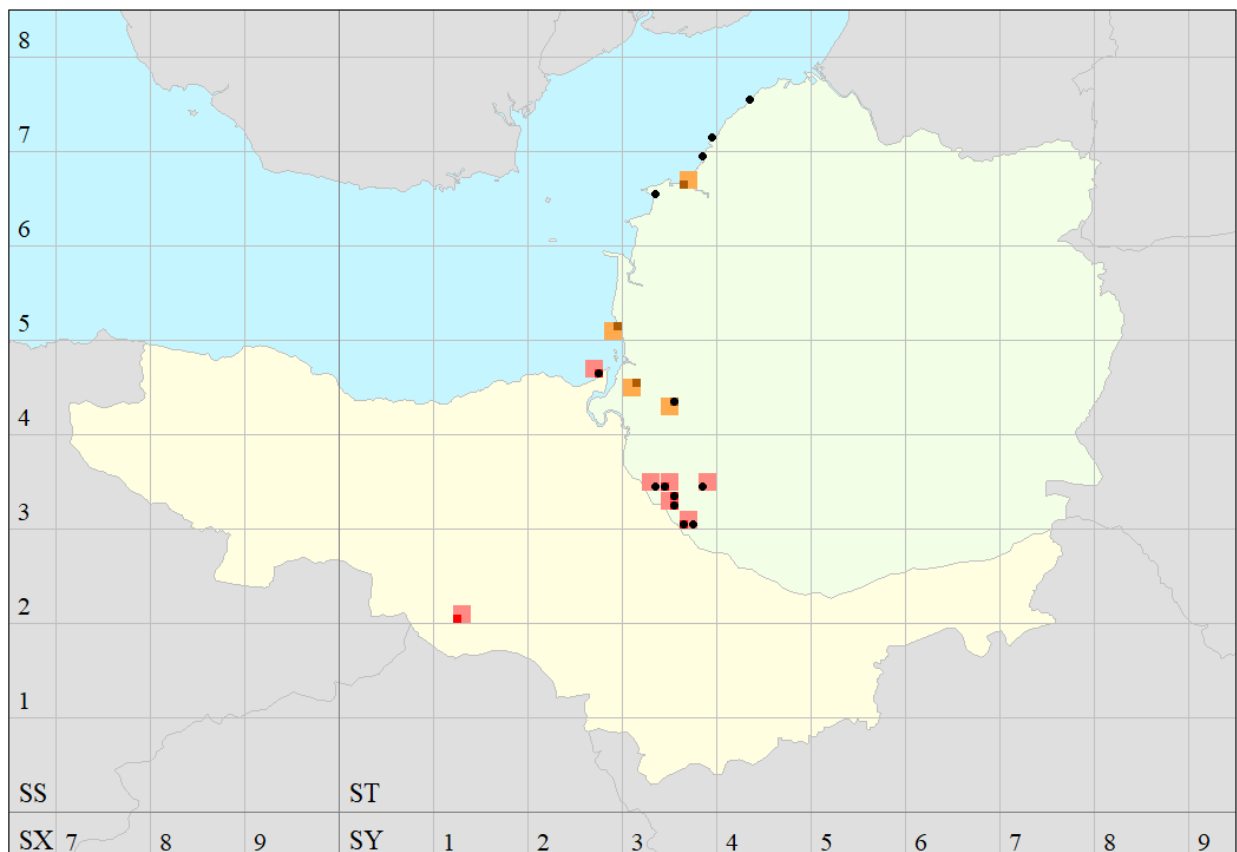
VC5 Lost; VC6 Scarce

A perennial herb usually found in coastal grassland and saltmarshes, or on the banks of brackish ditches near the sea; also occasionally as a relic of cultivation. In Somerset it grows inland beside rhynes on the Levels, which were once brackish; indeed, it was first noted by Turner who wrote in his herbal of 1551 "I have sene it growing in Somersetshire a myle from Wells towards ye Mere" (White, 1912). In VC5 first found by J.V. Morley in 1967 at the edge of a reed bed at Steart. Although seen here as recently as 2012, it is now feared lost from this site, swamped by reeds. The only other VC5 record was from an allotment in Wellington. In VC6 *Althaea officinalis* grows at scattered sites at the coast, and inland on the Levels. Formerly abundant on the edge of a saltmarsh at Portishead (White, 1912), it is now restricted in that area to Redcliffe Bay, where known since 1915. In 1984, two large clumps were found by Robert Cropper on the sea wall near Kingston Seymour; however by 1986 the site had been destroyed during rebuilding of the sea wall. In 2014 a single plant was found north of this site towards Clevedon, at the back of a narrow strip of saltmarsh. In 2002 Robert Cropper found two plants at the edge of Sand Bay, in a small slack: numbers have fluctuated but in 2018 there was a large population of seedlings. In Clevedon, plants were found in 2019, self-sown from a nearby flower-bed. Further south this species was formerly known near the coast between Brean and Berrow, at Burnham, Brent and Dunball, but was last seen at Burnham-on-Sea by E.J. Hamlin in 1950 and further inland at Huntspill by Rev. A. Beddow in 1978. Recorded at East Huntspill in 1937, it is still to be found on Huntspill Moor. Away from the coast, the best population in Somerset is at Southlake Moor, alongside Burrow Hill Drove and at three other sites on the moor. Murray (1896) included records for Westonzoyland, Middlezoy and the Sedgemoors: a single plant was found on King's Sedgemoor in 2015. It is also known from two sites near Westonzoyland and two sites on nearby Weston Level. *Althaea officinalis* has declined throughout its British range and been lost from some historic sites in Somerset but persists at others; it is probably now lost from VC5. Sites in Somerset are at the south-west edge of its distribution.



Althaea officinalis at Southlake Moor (2010). Photo: HJC

VC5					
Wellington		ST129208	1993	MEH	Neglected allotments near stream
Stear	SSSI	ST27754652	2012	BSBI, WFS, SRPG	At edge of reedbed, being swamped by reeds
VC6					
Sand Bay	SSSI	ST33136540	2016	HJC	1 pl in front of N end of row of alders
Sand Bay	SSSI	ST33146539	2016	HJC	Hundreds of young plants in front of alders
Sand Bay	SSSI	ST33166527	2016	HJC	1 large plant at edge of alders
Woodspring Bay (N)	SSSI	ST38686970	2014	CML, EJMcD	1 pl at the back of narrow strip of saltmarsh
Clevedon		ST39797111	2019	MAW	8 at edge of pavement, seeded from planting
Redcliffe Bay	SSSI	ST43707565	2014	CML, EJMcD	1 large plant and several young plants
Huntspill Moor		ST35784386	2016	EJMcD	5 clumps at edge of ditch on N side of road
Bull Horn Drove		ST33263489	2008	RSC	1 flowering clump beneath the pylons
Weston Level		ST35303255	2019	JP	2 fruiting spikes on NE side of drove
Weston Level		ST35393248	2008	RSC	A single outlier
Weston Level		ST35323393	2008	RSC	Single clump
Westonzoyland		ST34443446	2008	RSC	Single clump
Southlake Moor	SSSI	ST361304	2018	SJP, DG	c.50 plants on S side of Burrow Hill Drove
Southlake Moor	SSSI	ST36413006	2018	SJP, DG	2 plants on side of Tapping Wall Drove
Southlake Moor	SSSI	ST37073076	2008	SJP, JMcG	1 plant at edge of moor
Southlake Moor	SSSI	ST37343062	2010	HJC, EJMcD, SJP, JP	1 in corner of field, N side of Chantry Drove
King's Sedgemoor	SSSI	ST383346	2015	SJP, SP	1 plant by E side of track



Distribution of *Althaea officinalis* in Somerset, mapped using MapMate.
 Black dots are post-2000 records; red squares are 1987-1999 records;
 sepia squares are pre-1987 records