

***Cephalanthera rubra* (L.) Rich**

Red Helleborine

Native

GB & England: Critically Endangered

Schedule 8

Section 41

GB Rare

VC5 Lost; VC6 Lost

A perennial rhizomatous orchid of beech woodlands on calcareous well-drained slopes. In VC5, found by J.C. Collins in 1836 (or 1835) near Merridge. He wrote "One specimen, and one only, I discovered near Hawkridge Water, on the Quantocks" (Murray, 1896). The record was included by Murray in his flora because it was accepted by Watson and Hooker, however Murray himself had little faith in it. Marshall (1914) gave it more credence, believing that confusion with any other orchid was unlikely and Miller (1933) wrote "It is almost impossible that Collins in 1836 could have been mistaken as to this most unmistakable plant". Despite diligent searches of limestone outcrops in the area, there have been no further records in VC5. Roe (1981) stated that there had been "other reports of this very rare plant having been seen in the county", yet there are no other records listed in his card index, implying that they were unsubstantiated or closely guarded secrets. In June 1870 this species was collected by W.A. Watkins from "near Somerton". His specimen (in **RNG**) bears a note which says "This is the larger of two specimens I have from here. In the other plant there are four leaves four flowers and an unopened bud". There is an undated specimen in **MANCH** labelled "Nr. Bath? Mr Russell", with an added comment "The specimen attached refers to the locality Nr. Bath? I doubt the honesty of this". A manuscript list of plants made by Miss A.E. White of Bath includes an entry for this species in 1939, at Shockerwick, which is at the extreme northeast edge of VC6; nothing more is known about this record. In Britain this rare orchid has dwindled to just a few plants at three scattered sites in southern England: in Hampshire, Buckinghamshire and Gloucestershire.