

***Cystopteris fragilis* (L.) Bernh.**

Brittle Bladder-fern

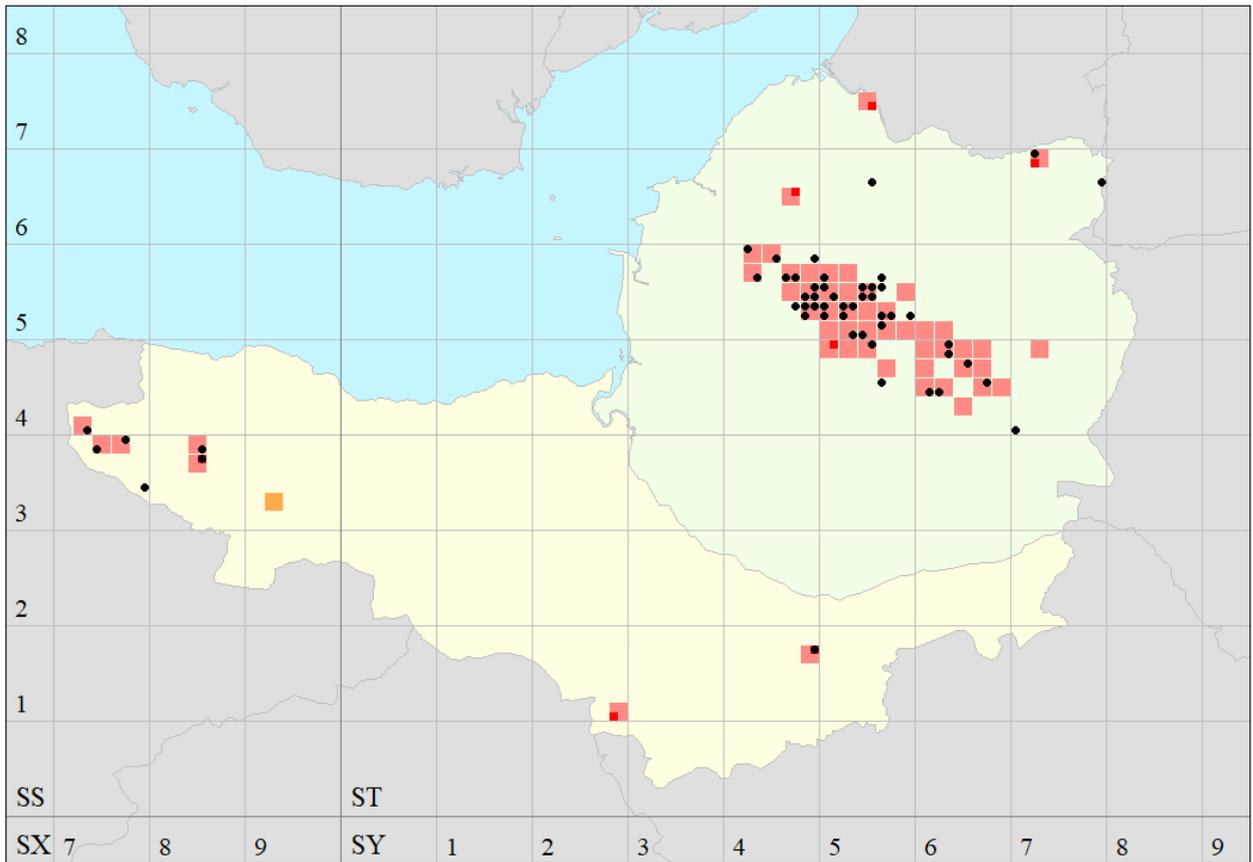
Native

GB & England: Least Concern

VC5 Scarce; VC6 Not Scarce

A perennial fern of shaded rocks, cliffs, ravines and walls, usually on basic substrates, especially limestone. In Somerset, fairly common on the carboniferous limestone of the Mendips, but only in scattered localities elsewhere. In VC5 reported by Murray (1896) to have been at Dulverton churchyard, but there were no subsequent records. Marshall (1918) reported it extinct at Dulverton, but "Fine and typical near Exford, at 1050 feet"; it is still found at two sites at Exford, on walls in the churchyard and at Court Farm. In 1937 it was recorded by H.S. Thompson in quantity by the River Barle west of Simonsbath: it still survives on stonework at Cornham Ford and in 1970 was found by John Keylock on stonework of another bridge nearby, at Moorland Way Cottage. In 1995 Ian Green found it on a wall outside the toilets in Simonsbath, where it was last seen in 2011. In 1969, R.G.B. and I.G. Roe recorded this fern at Bridgetown (SS93G) but although it was refound on a garden wall in 1982 by Caroline Giddens, it has not been seen since. It has also been lost from a garden in Porlock, where it was recorded in 1930 by N.G. Hadden; however it was found at a new site in the south of Exmoor by Graham Lavender in 2016, on old walls of Sherdon Farm. Away from Exmoor, *Cystopteris fragilis* was recorded on a wall near Thurloxton, last seen in 1918. In 1966, it was found at Whitestaunton by N.D.G. Campbell and was recorded here again in 1993 by Ian Green on the churchyard wall, but there are no recent records. It was also recorded in 1932 on a wall at Montacute House, where it persists. All sites for VC5 have thus been on the stonework of bridges and walls.

In VC6 Murray (1896) recorded this species as common on the Mendips; Green *et al.* (1997) regarded it as "locally common" on the Mendips, which is still the case, although there are few recent records for the east Mendips. Away from the Mendip Hills, there are few records. Around Bath, Babington (1834) listed three sites: old stone quarries on Hampton Down, rocks above Bathford and a wall near the top of Widcombe Hill. It was still to be found on rocks in Bathampton Wood (Hampton Down) until 1978 but is now believed to be lost from this site; however it persists at Brown's Folly Reserve (rocks above Bathford) and is also found north of Bath, on rock outcrops on Lansdown, where it was first recorded by L. Blomefield (Murray, 1896). In 1981, Rob Randall recorded a single plant at the Roman Baths in Bath (Randall 1982). In the Bristol area, Swete (1854) knew this fern from Dundry and Nightingale Valley, Leigh Woods, where it was found by G.H.K. Thwaites. It is still to be found at Dundry, sparingly about ancient quarry pits as described by White (1912), but is no longer in Leigh Woods where it was last seen by Clive Lovatt in 1984. White (1912) listed several other sites, including Stanton Drew, Stanton Prior, Chew Magna, Bishop Sutton and between Yatton and Congresbury: there are no recent records from any of these. It is, however, still reported to be present at Goblin Combe, which may be the site given by White (1912) as "formerly fine and plentiful under fir-trees near Brockley", although the most recent record was made in 1998. This fern is found in Scotland, Wales and Ireland and in northern and western England. It has been lost from some lowland sites, especially those on man-made structures, due to cleaning or demolition; the Mendip Hills represent a stronghold for this species in southern England.



Distribution of *Cystopteris fragilis* in Somerset mapped using MapMate. Black dots are post-2000 records; pink squares are 1987-1999, either 1km or tetrad records; sepia squares are pre-1987 records



Cystopteris fragilis at Upper Lansdown (2017). Photo: HJC

VC5					
Moorland Way		SS73504005	2016	GEL	6 ferns on N side of bridge by cottage
Cornham Ford	SSSI	SS74863860	2014	GEL	6 at base of bridge support
Simonsbath		SS77373943	2011	HJC, AMP, FJR	11 plants on walls outside Gents toilets
Sherdon Farm		SS79033491	2019	GEL	Hundreds on outbuildings of abandoned farm
Court Farm Exford		SS856379	2008	JP	5 tufts on low N facing garden wall
Exford Church		SS857384	2010	CJG	4 plants on wall leading to church door
Whitestaunton		ST280105	1993	IPG	4 plants on N side of N wall of churchyard
Montacute House		ST49991719	2017	JP	6 plants low on projecting footings of wall



Cystopteris fragilis at Black Rock, Cheddar (2009). Photo: HJC