

Erica cinerea L.

Bell Heather

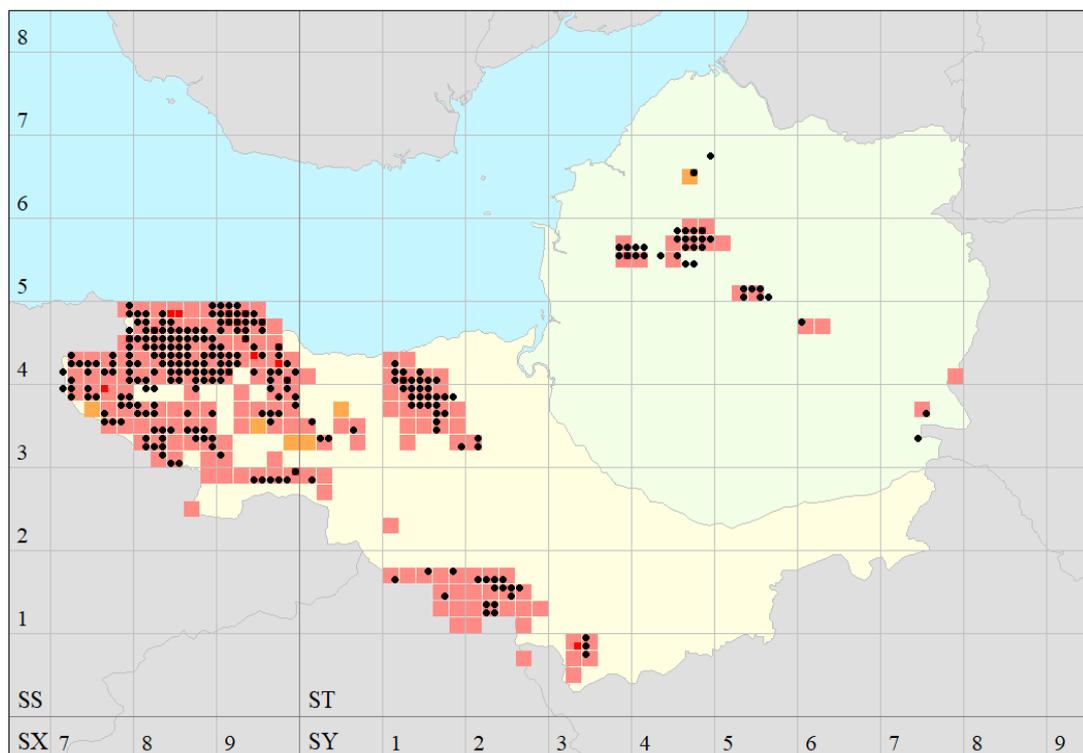
Native

GB: Least Concern

England: Near Threatened

VC5 Not Scarce; VC6 Not Scarce

A low shrub of acidic soils on dry heathland and occasionally in open-canopy woodland, also found on limestone heath on calcareous substrates. In VC5 this species is widespread on the Devonian sandstones of Exmoor and the Quantocks and on the Upper Greensand of the Blackdowns. It also occurs on heathland around Chard and at Langford Heathfield, although there are no post-2000 records for that site. In VC6, *Erica cinerea* is almost restricted to the limestone heaths and outcrops of Devonian sandstone on the Mendips, and the Upper Greensand ridge in the east of the county. Outlying populations occur on limestone heath above Goblin Combe (ST477652) and in a heathy field near Backwell Hill (ST49706792). Swete (1854) listed Leigh as a location; however White (1912) wrote that around Bristol “The invasion of human feet over all spaces available for sports or recreation is mainly responsible for the diminution or disappearance of ericetal plants from those Downs and Commons that are readily accessible to people” and there have been no recent records from the Bristol area of VC6. Roe (1981) noted that this species was scarce on the peat moors; there were no records for the peat moors in Green *et al.* (1997) and there have been none subsequently. *Erica cinerea* has declined in southern England through loss of habitat. Murray (1896) wrote that this species was “Very common, and generally distributed in the county”; this is certainly not the position in Somerset now.



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