

***Ophrys x pietzschii* Kümpel ex F.J. Rumsey & H.J. Crouch Bee-fly Orchid**

Native

VC5 Absent; VC6 Rare

A rare hybrid orchid of tall stature found on calcareous soils. Discovered growing as a natural hybrid (*O. apifera* x *insectifera*) for the first time ever in Leigh Woods [ST5574] VC6 in 1968 when M. Flower, I.D.R Stevens and M.C. Whiting found four flowering spikes on the floor of an old limestone quarry; up to eight were seen in subsequent years, although until 1976 they were thought to be an aberrant form of *O. insectifera* (Willis, 1980a). Now considered extinct at that site, last seen in 1992 or 1993 (Willis, 1999). A second site in VC6 was discovered in 2003, when Simon Andrew found three plants on an embankment beside the A303, with both parent species present. The number of plants steadily rose to 16 in 2010, dipped to 9 in 2011, but increased to 31 in 2012. Subsequently they have been monitored and mapped every year, with numbers peaking at 39 in 2014, but decreasing to 21 in 2019. It appears that hybridisation is ongoing at this site (Rumsey *et al.*, 2012), however the site has become more scrubbed which may have led to loss of plants, although the scrub does protect them from trampling. In 1998 this hybrid was discovered near Arundel in West Sussex (VC13), again on a bank above a road verge. No plants have been seen there since 2001. It is now also known from sites in Gloucestershire and Dorset; the single site in Somerset is thus the middle one of three current locations in England.

VC6

Maperton Ridge ST666269 2019 HJC, FJR 21 plants on steep bank, N side of A303



Ophrys x pietzschii at Maperton Ridge (2012). Photo: HJC.