

***Carex depauperata* Curtis ex With.**

Starved Wood-sedge

Native

GB & England: Endangered

Schedule 8

Section 41

GB Rare

VC5 Lost; VC6 Rare

A loosely tufted perennial of dry deciduous woodlands, wood margins and disturbed lane banks on calcareous soil. In VC5 only recorded once, by F.A. Lees “in a hazel thicket or steep bank of a wood near Templecombe” (Murray, 1896); it has never been re-found there. In VC6, first recorded in 1860 by T.B. Flower from a wood between Axbridge and Cheddar, the site subsequently said to have been destroyed (Murray, 1896). In 1911 it was re-found by H.W. Pugsley in what was believed to be the same place, where it extended thinly along a grassy bank for at least 100 yards (White, 1912). A photograph taken by J.E. Lousley in 1937 (**RNG**) shows the plant on an open, flowery bank (Rich & Birkinshaw, 2001). The site gradually became overgrown: by the late 1950s only one plant survived on a shaded bend of the lane, where continually disturbed by farm vehicles. The numbers increased slightly during the next two decades, and in 1974 Robert Cropper found six plants. Concerned for their conservation, he began to monitor them annually, augmenting the population with plants grown from cuttings (Rich & Birkinshaw, 2001). The situation remained precarious, but site management since the 1990s, with occasional tree felling and scrub control, has resulted in an increased population, with plants on the bank seeding onto the track. Numbers fluctuate in response to shading and management of the site, which has recently been undertaken by the Species Recovery Trust. Annual management and monitoring since 2012 resulted in the population rising to over 100 plants in 2017, with 126 recorded by Anne Cole in 2019.



Carex depauperata Wood Lane, Cheddar (2012). Photo: FJR

In 1977, plants grown at Bristol and Cambridge University Botanic Gardens were introduced to two sites in Cheddar Wood. At one site, which was heavily shaded, the plants were soon lost; however, at the other site, a clearing in the wood, plants were still present in the 1990s, with two plants found by Tim Rich in 1995, four in 1996 and nine in 1999 (Rich & Birkinshaw, 2001). The last record for the woodland clearing was in 2000, when Liz McDonnell recorded six plants. An introduction of 100 plants in 1988 to an un-grazed field at the margin of Cheddar Wood (Rich & Birkinshaw, 2001) has proved more successful, although numbers of plants fluctuate according to management. In 2007, only four plants were seen and the site was overgrown. Following clearing, eleven mature plants and a few seedlings were found in 2015. The site is now managed by the Species Recovery Trust and Somerset Wildlife Trust.

In 1886, a single immature plant was collected by H.S. Thompson in Leigh Woods, but was not recognised at the time. When identified, the precise locality could not be recalled (White, 1912): it has never been re-found in Leigh Woods.

Carex depauperata has always been extremely rare in Somerset, and has only ever been recorded from thirteen sites in Britain and one in Ireland. It is now only found in Somerset, at two sites in Surrey (one a re-introduction) and at a recent re-introduction site in Dorset (see www.speciesrecoverytrust.org.uk). Sites in Somerset are the most westerly.

VC6

Cheddar, Wood Lane	ST44435462	2015	SBG	1 clump on bank, N side of lane
Cheddar, Wood Lane	ST444546	2015	SBG	35 pl on bank, 45 on track, and many seedlings
Cheddar, Wood Lane	ST444546	2019	ATC	c. 120 clumps, with 6 on opposite side of track
Cheddar Wood (edge)	SSSI ST44545500	2015	SBG	11 pl and a few seedlings at edge of wood
Cheddar Wood	SSSI ST446551	2000	EJMcD	6 plants



Carex depauperata Wood Lane, Cheddar. Photo: FJR