

***Cicuta virosa* L.**

Cowbane

Native

GB & England: Least Concern

GB Scarce

VC5 Absent; VC6 Lost

A perennial herb of marginal aquatic sites, for example pond margins and ditches, also found in marshy fields and fens. In Somerset, first recorded by Sole (in Collinson, 1791) in old turf pits on Burtle Moor, and in the vicinity of Shepton Mallet. Specimens were collected by Thomas Clark from the east side of Catcott Drove, just south of Burtle Moor, in 1831, 1850 and 1858; around 1855 it was also found at nearby Shapwick Moor by C.E. Broome. The last record for the peat moors was in 1888, when H.S. Thompson recorded “perhaps a dozen” in a rhyne near Shapwick Station (White, 1912). There are records for a few other localities in VC6: Burnham, many years ago, and at Easton in 1880, recorded by Miss M.W. Mayow (White, 1882); boggy ground near Shepton Mallet, found by Blackstone (Turner & Dillwyn, 1805) and in the canal near Bathampton, seen by Dr Heneage Gibbes (Babington, 1834). White (1912) remarked that it was one of his deepest disappointments that he never saw this species during innumerable excursions to the peat moors: the last record for Somerset was Thompson’s 1888 sighting. This species has been lost from many former sites in lowland England, probably due to drainage and also eradication (it is poisonous to cattle). Somerset sites were at the south-western edge of the distribution of this species in Britain.