

Daphne mezereum L.

Mezereon

Native/Alien

GB & England: Vulnerable

GB Scarce

VC5 Lost; VC6 Lost

A small deciduous shrub of calcareous woodland and fen. The only published record for VC5 was for "Woods about Exford", made by Miss Gifford in 1868, but Marshall (1914) declared that it "seems to need verification" and it has not been included in subsequent floras. In **BM**, there is a specimen labelled "Corfe near Taunton" from Herb. Boswell-Syme, mounted on a sheet which also bears one of Marshall's specimens of *D. x houtteana*. There are no further details on the label. In VC6 the oldest record is for Compton Martin Wood, listed by Rutter (1829). There were several nineteenth century records in woods around Bath: Brass Knocker Wood, by Davis (Babington, 1834), and nearby woods at Claverton, by Jelly (Babington, 1939); Charmy Down and nearby Hunterwick Wood, by L. Blomefield (Murray, 1896); also "by the Juniper on Bathford Hill", by Dr Harper (White, 1912). Elsewhere, *Daphne mezereum* was recorded in a hedgerow between Stanton Drew and Knowle Hill, by D. Fry in 1887; in a hedgebank near Wells by Miss Livett and in a thicket on Cadbury Camp by Mrs Gregory in 1900, all of which may have been bird-sown escapes from gardens. A single bush was found in Eaker Hill Wood, near Chewton Mendip, by Rev. B.W. Tucker in 1917, but it was last seen there in 1926. The best known locality was in woods at Churchill Batch, where it grew on a steep rocky hillside and also nearby in "Daffodil Valley" below Shipham (White, 1912). White saw about a dozen specimens at Churchill Batch in 1883, but only one plant in 1885; it was subsequently believed to have been eradicated (White, 1912; Marshall, 1914). In 1915 however, Mrs Cecil Sandwith found two non-flowering plants; it persisted until 1954, when E.F. Payne reported that all plants had been dug up and the culprit seen (Roe, 1981). The native status of this species has been in doubt for over a century and it is now considered Native/Alien. In Somerset, White (1884) believed that at Churchill Batch "the shrub has unquestionably the appearance of a genuine native"; Murray (1896) concurred that "the station certainly looked a natural one" and Marshall (1914) declared that "evidence favours its being aboriginal in woods on calcareous soils, and thence removed into gardens – not *vice versa*". Sites in Somerset were at the southwest edge of the supposed native range mapped in Preston *et al.* (2002).