

***Orobanche elatior* Sutton**

Knapweed Broomrape

Native

GB & England: Least Concern

VC5 Extinct; VC6 Rare

A perennial parasitic on *Centaurea scabiosa*, found in calcareous grassland, on road verges, railway banks and in quarries. In Somerset, this species has always been rare, with recent records from only three sites. In VC5, only recorded once, in Haygrass Lane, Taunton, by F. Clarke in 1953 (Roe, 1981). In VC6, three locations were given by Babington (1834): by the roadside between Swainswick and Tadwick, on a bank near the canal locks at Combe Hay and in a lane leading from Weston to Lansdown, the last found by Dr Heneage Gibbes. This species was recorded again near the last locality, by J.G. Baker in 1884 and seen regularly on oolite above Weston (Kelston slopes) by T.H. Green, perhaps as recently as 1941 (Roe, 1981). In 2014 a single specimen was found in a field at Langridge, apparently growing on *Centaurea nigra*. This site is close to Babington's "between Swainswick and Tadwick". In 2015 at least eight plants were present in the same field. White (1883) included a record for a field near Clevedon Beach, made in 1834 (specimen in Herb. Powell); Murray (1896) added a record for Cheddar, where one specimen was found by Richards in 1883; and White (1912) reported one plant found at Portishead by Mrs Gregory in 1904. There have been no further records for any of these sites. A record for this species growing plentifully on Brean Down was dismissed as an error for *O. hederæ* (Murray, 1896). In 1989, Liz McDonnell discovered two spikes of this species in a field on Hellenge Hill, near Bleadon, where it was seen again in 2010. In 2018 two spikes appeared in a garden at Greendown, where *Centaurea scabiosa* had been grown from seed. *Orobanche elatior* has suffered a gradual contraction of its range, largely due to habitat loss (M.J.Y. Foley in Preston *et al.*, 2002). The sites in Somerset are at the western edge of the core range of this species.



Orobanche elatior at Langridge (2014). Photo: HJC

VC6

Hellenge Hill	SSSI	ST34955729	2010	SRPG	2 plants near gate in SW part of field
Greendown		ST580534	2018	EMcD	2 spikes on <i>Centaurea scabiosa</i> in garden
Langridge		ST738701	2015	DMacl	8 plants in arable crop of <i>Leontodon hispidus</i>



Distribution of *Orobanche elatior* in North Somerset (VC6), mapped using MapMate.
Black dots are post-2000 records