

Polygala calcarea F.W. Schultz

Chalk Milkwort

Native

GB & England: Least Concern

VC5 Absent; VC6 Scarce

A small perennial herb of closely grazed calcareous grassland. In Somerset, confined to a few sites on oolitic limestone near Bath; also found on the chalk downs of Wiltshire which lie within VC6. The first record for Somerset may have been a specimen from Sandford Hill [ST45J] collected by W.B. Waterfall, *vide* T.R.A. Briggs (White, 1881), although Murray (1896) dismissed this record as a misunderstanding after finding that Briggs had not ventured to name the specimen. In **NMW** however, there is a specimen confirmed as this species, collected by Miss Florence Whereat in Weston-super-Mare district (pers. comm. Clive Lovatt). The collection is undated, but would have been made around the same time as Waterfall's and could feasibly have been from the same site. There have been no further records from that area.

Polygala calcarea was discovered on the oolite south of Bath in 1909 by F. Samson, on a hillside opposite Fortnight Farm, near Combe Hay; it has subsequently been found at four other sites nearby. Describing the Fortnight site, White (1912) remarked "The plant grows with *Hippocrepis* in close brilliant patches which are rendered conspicuous at some distance by the beautiful bright blue tint of the flowers". Alas, it is not so conspicuous now and had dwindled to a few plants by 2007. None have been found in subsequent years. *Polygala calcarea* was discovered at a second site near Bath by H.S. Thompson in 1921, over several acres of hilly rough pasture (specimen in **BIRM**, see <http://herbariaunited.org/specimen/278042/>). The site was refound in 1982 by Dave Green, who recorded a large colony in rough pasture, at about 350 feet, above Combe Hay in Southstoke parish (Willis, 1984). A good colony persists at this site, although threatened by lack of grazing. In 1944, D.E. Coombe found populations on slopes southeast of Combe Hay and also in a tumpy field near Bloomfield Crescent, Odd Down, Bath; there have been no further records from either site. The Odd Down site was believed lost to tipping (Willis, 1984). The species is best seen in this area at a further site on a steep E-facing hillside between Southstoke and Combe Hay.

In that part of VC6 which is now Wiltshire, *Polygala calcarea* can readily be found on Knoll Hill and White Sheet Downs. Recorded at Knoll Hill by W. Galpin in 1886, it is still scattered along the south-facing slope for over 1km and is abundant on the west-facing end of the hill. At White Sheet Downs, it can be found particularly on the various earthworks and tumuli, where it does indeed form brilliant patches. In VC6, *Polygala calcarea* is at the western edge of its range, which is mostly restricted to the chalk of southern England.



Polygala calcarea at Southstoke (2009). Photo: FJR

VC6

Fortnight Farm		ST73026067	2007	HJC, FJR	3 plants on steep grassy slope
Southstoke, S of		ST74206072	2011	CVWG	Many plants on species-rich N-facing slope
Southstoke, S of		ST742607	2016	HJC, CVWG	Few pl in species-rich calcareous meadow
Southstoke, W of		ST740612	2012	HJC, DEG	Many patches in grassland on S-facing hillside
Long Knoll (W)	SSSI	ST785376	2010	HJC, GHR	Masses on W end of hill, also on NW slope
Long Knoll (W)	SSSI	ST788376	2010	HJC, GHR	Scattered on S-facing slope
Long Knoll (W)	SSSI	ST789376	2010	HJC, GHR	Scattered on S-facing slope
Long Knoll	SSSI	ST790376	2010	HJC, GHR	Thinly scattered over S-facing slope
Long Knoll	SSSI	ST791376	2010	HJC, GHR	Scattered over S-facing slope
Long Knoll	SSSI	ST792376	2010	HJC, GHR	Scattered over S-facing slope
Long Knoll	SSSI	ST793376	2010	HJC, GHR	Frequent, scattered over S-facing slope
Long Knoll	SSSI	ST794376	2010	HJC, GHR	Frequent, scattered over S-facing slope
Long Knoll	SSSI	ST795376	2010	HJC, GHR	Thinly scattered over S-facing slope
Long Knoll	SSSI	ST796376	2010	HJC, GHR	Scattered over S-facing slope
Long Knoll	SSSI	ST797376	2010	HJC, GHR	Thinly scattered over S-facing slope
Long Knoll	SSSI	ST798376	2010	HJC, GHR	Scattered over S-facing slope
Long Knoll	SSSI	ST799376	2010	HJC, GHR	Scattered over S-facing slope
Long Knoll (E)	SSSI	ST800377	2010	HJC, GHR	Scattered on S-facing slope
White Sheet Downs	SSSI	ST79813500	2010	HJC, FJR	On S-facing slope at W end of hill
White Sheet Downs	SSSI	ST79993514	2009	HJC, FJR	On steep W-facing side of earthworks
White Sheet Downs	SSSI	ST801351	2009	HJC, FJR	Abundant on S-facing slope / side of tumulus
White Sheet Downs	SSSI	ST80203509	2012	SRPG	Many plants on eastern tumulus
White Sheet Downs	SSSI	ST80363506	2019	SRPG	Many plants in fruit on Cross Dyke
White Sheet Downs	SSSI	ST804349	2010	HJC, FJR	Scattered in S edge of field N of track
White Sheet Downs	SSSI	ST80423564	2015	HJC, FJR	Small patch in flower on NW-facing slope
White Sheet Downs	SSSI	ST80433586	2009	HJC, FJR	Scattered on W side of N part of downs
White Sheet Downs	SSSI	ST80563579	2009	HJC, FJR	Scattered on E side of downs
White Sheet Downs	SSSI	ST805359	2009	HJC, FJR	On terraces above bridleway
White Sheet Downs	SSSI	ST806360	2009	HJC, FJR	Scattered in grassland on bank above track
White Sheet Downs	SSSI	ST81133550	2017	HJC, FJR	In species-rich grassland on E-facing slope
White Sheet Downs	SSSI	ST81143558	2017	HJC, FJR	In species-rich grassland on E-facing slope
White Sheet Downs	SSSI	ST81133557	2017	HJC, FJR	In species-rich grassland on E-facing slope
White Sheet Downs	SSSI	ST81133556	2017	HJC, FJR	In species-rich grassland on E-facing slope
White Sheet Downs	SSSI	ST81133554	2017	HJC, FJR	In species-rich grassland on E-facing slope



Distribution of *Polygala calcarea* in North Somerset (VC6), mapped using MapMate
 Black dots are post-2000 records, red squares are 1987-1999, monad or tetrad records;
 sepia squares are pre-1987 monad or tetrad records