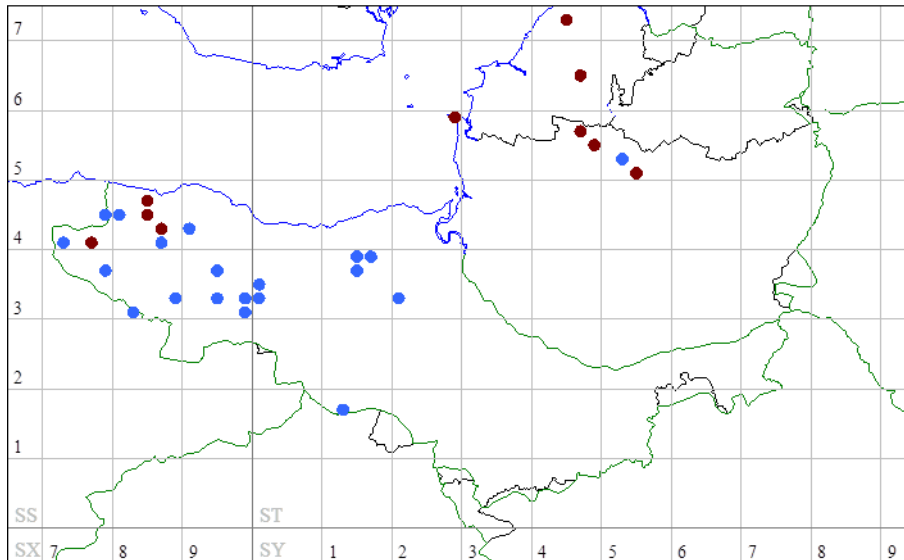


VC5 *Botrychium lunaria*

If you don't like horror stories, stop reading now as the story of *Botrychium lunaria* in VC5 is not a good one. No pictures to brighten the narrative as there simply aren't any records in the last 5 years for VC5. The last record for VC5 is a single plant on a verge side on Exmoor in May 2015 but more on that site later.

Botrychium lunaria (Moonwort)



Let's start with the Mapmate map, usual key, red post 2000 and blue pre 2000. Whereas VC6 seems to have lost one site, in VC5 it is devastation, worse even than the Vascular Plant Red List for England report of a 31% decline for what is now a vulnerable rated taxon. The only question remains as to how much recording effort has been put into finding it at its old sites and perhaps this highlights a failure of our recording system. We have no quantitative measure of zero records built into Mapmate and DDb so at best we rely on anecdotal evidence.

Moving on to Land Combe near the border with VC4, many of you will remember it as the only site of *Ophioglossum azoricum* in Somerset and possibly a few from the SRPG meeting at the site in 1999. At that meeting *Botrychium lunaria* was recorded as 50 plants. It's a good site of ancient grassland, lightly grazed by sheep and deer. The only fly in ointment might be that Natural England sprayed the Rhododendrons a few years back on the opposite side of the combe and may have been some drift? The *Ophioglossum azoricum* however remains in good numbers in hundreds or possibly thousands, they are extremely difficult to count but Jean, Ian and I put them at 500-1000 in 2018. The *Botrychium lunaria* are almost adjacent to the *Ophioglossum*, except they seem to have disappeared. We could not find them in 2018 and indeed I have been to site a number of times prior to that without a single sighting.

Another prime site from records would appear to be Preyway Head again on Exmoor at SS7740. In June 2011 Fred and Helena recorded "hundreds" in four locations at the site. I

have been back with Ian and on my own on numerous occasions but failed to find a single plant in recent years. Admittedly the recent springs have been very dry but these are areas of high rainfall even when other areas are suffering. If anyone wants to drop in on the Preyway site it's an excellent choice as it has parking and just a few minutes of level walking.

The other type of site is the road verge where *Botrychium lunaria* has been recorded in the past in a fair number of sites including on the Quantocks.

Taking one site up Porlock Hill at Hawkcombe Head, it's an easy one for me as it's within walking distance from home and it also has a pull in spot for a car opposite the road verge site. As a consequence I will visit it multiple times a year. In 1998 recorded as 100 plants, 2011 recorded as 6, 2013 recorded as 3 and I am fairly confident it has not shown itself since.

The last site I will mention is also a road verge opposite the turning to Nutscale reservoir, again an easy site to visit with a walk of perhaps 3m (that's metres not miles), in its glory days you probably didn't need to get out of the car. One plant recorded by Caroline Giddens May 2015 and that's to the best of my knowledge the last record for *Botrychium lunaria* in VC5.

I certainly hope that's not the last record for this RPR plant in VC5. I will certainly be visiting some of the old sites next year and if anyone else is interested I can supply details of sites to search. Just noticed on RPR its down as "not scarce" in VC5, whilst it may be premature to put it as extinct I think possibly "rare" is a better description as we enter the new date class post 2020?

Graham

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