

***Rhynchospora alba* (L.) Vahl**

White Beak-sedge

Native

GB: Least Concern

England: Near Threatened

VC5 Rare; VC6 Lost

A perennial herb of wet peat in open areas of acidic heaths, bogs and mires. In VC5 known to Murray (1896) on the Blackdown Hills near Sampford Point and above Blagdon, and also at Chard Common. Recorded by E.S. Marshall in a bog on Buckland Hill in 1916 and by W. Watson on Britty Common in 1924, but no longer found at any of these sites. Within VC5 now only known from Yarty Moor, where first recorded in 1991 by John Keylock. Found by E.S. Marshall in 1915 on wet heaths near Churchstanton (VC3 but administrative Somerset). Green et al. (1997) included records for three sites in that area: Ringdown Common, recorded in 1958 by A.D. and O.M. Hallam, Southey Moor and Munty Nature Reserve at Willand, both found by Ian Bolt in 1987. There has been no subsequent record for Willand and the last record for Southey Moor was in 2006. Still known at Ringdown Common and also at Brimley Hill Mire, where found by Somerset Botany Group in 2009. In VC6, described by Murray (1896) as common in many parts of the peat moors, also recorded by D. Fry in boggy places on Blackdown (Black Down, Mendip). In 1927 reported by Dr Downes from the Mineries bog on Mendip. There have been no further records for Black Down or the Mineries. On the peat moors, found at Shapwick Heath in 1915 by E.S. Marshall and on Shapwick Moor in 1931 by H.S. Thompson. In 1974, Robert Cropper re-found this species at Shapwick Heath, at Canada Farm, where it was seen in 1975 and 1976, but then feared lost until 2009, when one small patch was found. Not seen at Canada Farm since 2010, despite many searches: the site has become drier and colonised by *Myrica gale*. In 1947 found at Street Heath by P.J.M. Nethercott, last seen there (ST464394) in 1975 by Robert Cropper, but this site has also dried out due to adjacent peat extraction. Recorded in 1965 at Westhay (ST462442), by R.G.B. Roe, but gone by 1974. In lowland Britain *Rhynchospora alba* has declined due to drainage, peat extraction and afforestation; this decline has occurred in Somerset where this species is now feared lost from VC6.

VC3 Somerset

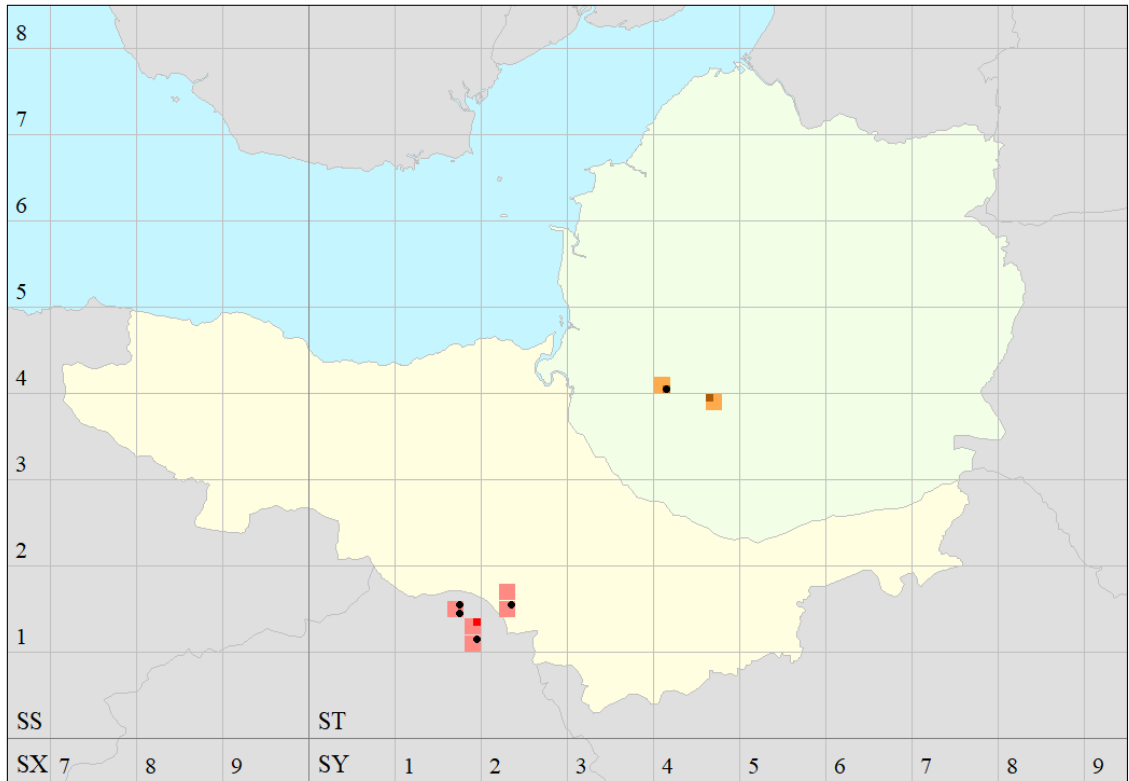
Brimley Hill Mire		ST17481414	2019	GEL, ITS, JW, TW	Patch of 50 plants near <i>Frangula</i>
Brimley Hill Mire		ST17491404	2019	GEL, ITS, JW, TW	Locally frequent in large area of mire
Southey Moor	SSSI	ST192111	2006	DJA	
Ringdown Common	SSSI	ST178154	2012	RENS, LJMM	In rich <i>Molinia</i> grassland

VC5

Yarty Moor	SSSI	ST23481578	2020	HJC, FJR	Many patches in flush
Yarty Moor	SSSI	ST23481579	2018	SRPG	Small population in mire
Yarty Moor	SSSI	ST23501578	2020	HJC, FJR	Tiny patch in flush near S end of site
Yarty Moor	SSSI	ST23531588	2020	HJC, FJR	Large patches in super bog on slope
Yarty Moor	SSSI	ST23551587	2020	HJC, FJR	Many plants in flush in glorious bog
Yarty Moor	SSSI	ST23591598	2020	HJC, FJR	Small patch in flush at bottom of slope

VC6

Canada Farm	SSSI	ST41554090	2009	SRPG	7 plants in middle of field
Canada Farm	SSSI	ST41564092	2010	HJC, EJMcD, SJP	21 pl in depression in centre of field



Distribution of *Rhynchospora alba* in Somerset, mapped using MapMate. Black dots are post-2000 records; red squares are 1987-1999 records; sepia squares are pre-1987 records



Rhynchospora alba at Yarty Moor (2020). Photo: HJC