

***Asplenium obovatum* Viv. subsp. *billotii* (F.W. Schultz) Sennen & Mauricio**

Lanceolate Spleenwort

Native

GB & England: Near Threatened

VC5 Rare; VC6 Absent

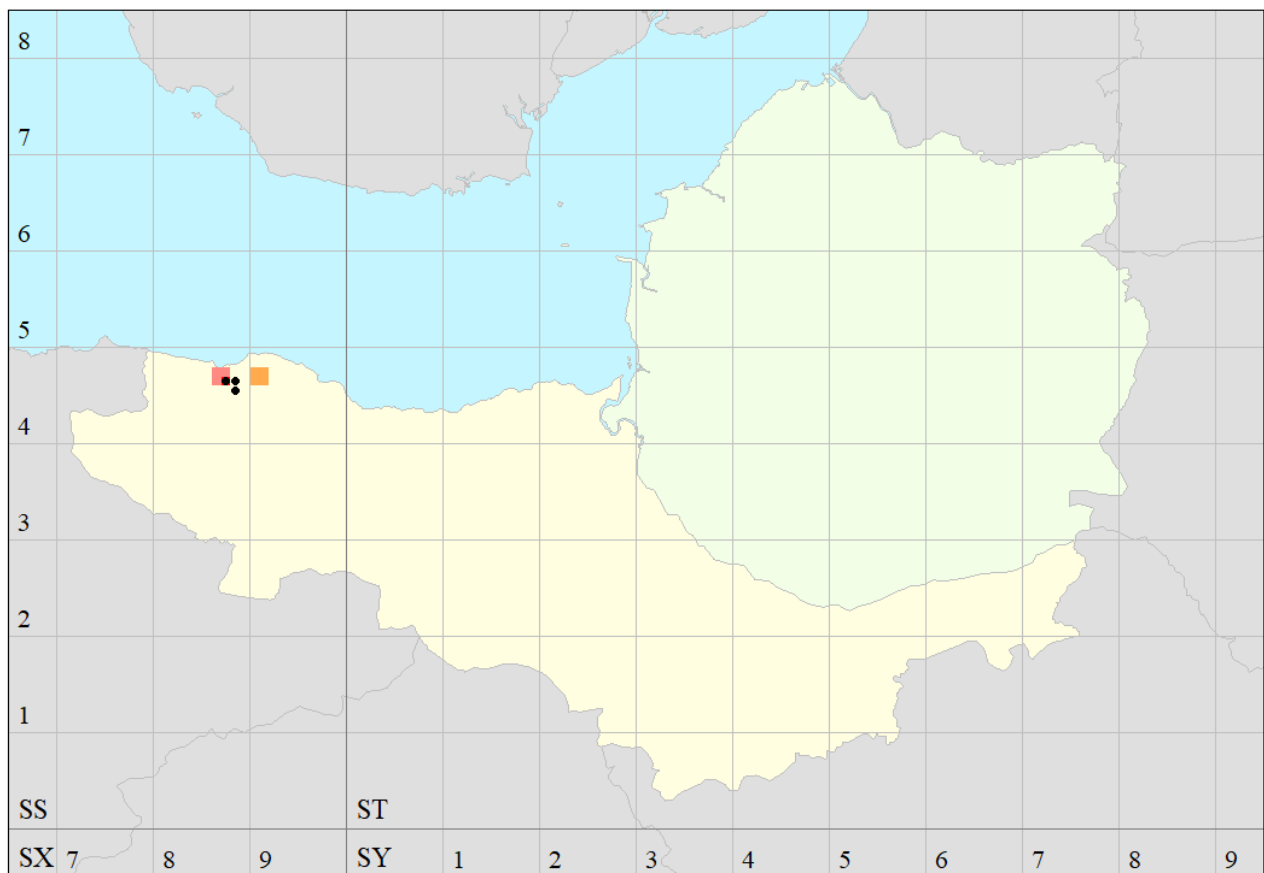
A perennial evergreen fern of acidic rock crevices and stone walls, found mostly near the sea. In Somerset this fern has an exciting history, having been considered extinct for about 150 years before being refound recently. It appeared in Colman's 1849 list of plants seen within ten miles of Minehead and Dunster (Watson, 1874), and there is a specimen in **TTN** collected from Selworthy by Miss I. Gifford in about 1850 (Roe, 1981). Miller (1933) considered Colman's record to be "almost certainly an error" and Roe (1981, 1986) and Green *et al.* (1997) listed the species as extinct. In 1999, Paul and Ian Green found this species growing on an old wall on Porlock Hill. 109 clumps were counted in that year, 112 in 2003, 120 in 2005 and several hundred in 2009. In 2017, Graham Lavender counted 200-300 plants on the wall on Porlock Hill, but also, amid great excitement, found plants on other walls in nearby Halse Combe and Hawkcombe. In 2022 the number of plants in the main colony at Hawkcombe was much reduced, from about 300 plants in 2017 to only 100 in 2022, possibly due to summer droughts. In VC6, White (1912) noted that there had been several reports of this spleenwort however he had never seen a Somerset specimen, although it has been known from Glen Frome in Bristol (VC34) since about 1835. It is unlikely to occur in VC6 due to lack of suitable substrate. This species is mostly distributed around the coast of southern Ireland and western Britain, where it is found particularly in the southwest peninsula. The Somerset site is at the eastern edge of the main area of distribution.



Asplenium obovatum at Porlock Hill (2009). Photo: FJR

VC5

Porlock Hill	SS879463	2017	GEL	Total 200-300 pl on stone wall, NW side of road
Porlock Hill	SS879464	2017	GEL	Total 200-300 pl on stone wall, NW side of road
Hawkcombe	SS88194598	2017	GEL	11 plants in wall, 50m from larger colony
Hawkcombe	SS88304602	2022	GEL	100 plants on S-facing section of stone wall
Hawkcombe	SS88314603	2017	GEL	1 plant on slope below stone wall
Hawkcombe	SS88334596	2021	GEL	1 plant on wall just below footpath, near gate
Hawkcombe	SS88404617	2017	GEL	1 isolated plant on stone wall, near larger colony
Halse Combe	SS88284624	2017	GEL	2 plants on stone wall, 100m from larger colony
Halse Combe	SS88294637	2021	GEL	c. 40 plants on stone wall adjacent to footpath
Halse Combe	SS88324634	2020	GEL	40 plants on 30m stretch of wall, edge of footpath
Halse Combe	SS88334632	2018	GEL	2 plants on wall by footpath, 30m from main colony



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