

SCORZONERA HUMILIS L. IN WARWICKSHIRE

By J. G. HAWKES AND J. B. PHIPPS

A third locality has been found recently for one of Britain's rarest plants, *Scorzonera humilis* L.

This species was previously known in the British Isles from two localities in east Dorset* where it occurs in marshy fields. We have now discovered a small colony of five plants in a meadow in the Earlswood region of Warwickshire, some 10 miles south of Birmingham.

On the continent the species occurs from the northern Mediterranean to south Scandinavia, and from Portugal eastwards to central Russia and the Caucasus. It is therefore quite widespread and apparently common in Europe, and one might have expected it also to be quite frequent in the southern part of England.

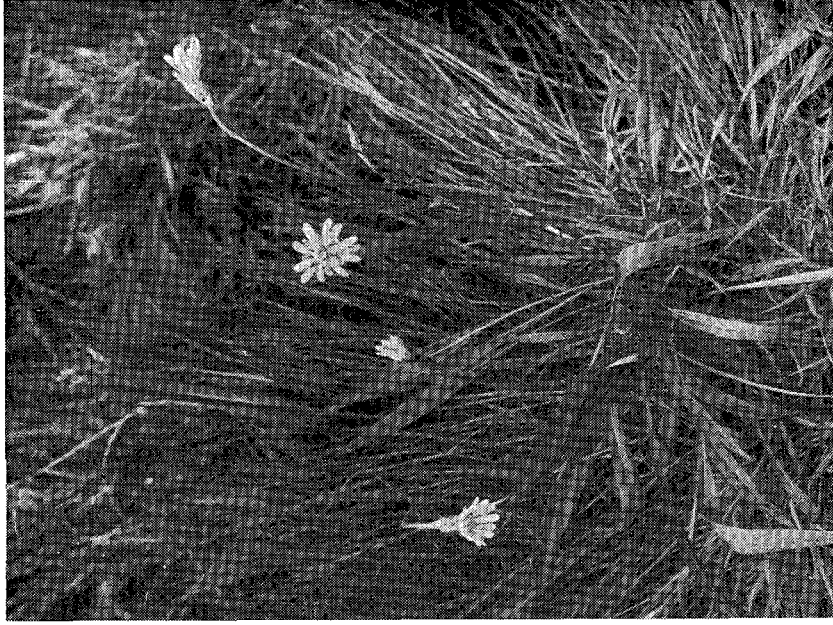
In Warwickshire *Scorzonera humilis* was found with all the appearance of being perfectly native in a damp, old meadow on a sandy clay soil. Other plants found in this field include *Alopecurus pratensis*, *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, *Holcus lanatus*, *Hypochoeris radicata*, *Lotium perenne*, *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, *Plantago lanceolata*, *Polygala vulgaris*, *Ranunculus acris*, *R. repens*, *Rumex acetosa*, *Trifolium pratense* and *Veronica chamaedrys*.

The general aspect of the plant is common to many rosette Compositae, with long pointed leaves resembling at first glance those of *Plantago lanceolata*. The pale yellow flowers are similar in colour to those of *Hieracium pilosella*, though of course rather larger.

In reviewing the distribution so far recorded of *Scorzonera humilis* in Britain and comparing it with that for continental Europe one cannot avoid the conclusion that the species might indeed be more widely distributed here than has previously been realised. In the Warwickshire locality careful search revealed the presence of only five plants in the one field, and none in adjacent fields. However, many collectors undoubtedly overlook the yellow-flowered Liguliflorae, and it is quite possible that this species may be found, on more intensive study, to be more common than was thought previously. The locality in which it was found is not apparently specialised and must be mirrored in thousands of places in the British Isles. Furthermore, since a distance of some 130 miles separates the Dorset and Warwickshire stations it would be of great interest to see whether a continuous, if sparse, distribution existed between them.

**Rep. Bot. Soc. & E.C.*, 1915, 202; *Ibid.*, 1927, 309.

PLATE 4.



SCORZONERA HUMILIS IN WARWICKSHIRE.

Photos: J. F. Woolman.

The find was made whilst one of us (J.B.P.) was recording for the Flora of Warwickshire revision, sponsored by the University of Birmingham and the Birmingham Natural History and Philosophical Society. In this work a complete list of species, together with habitats and frequencies, is made for each of the 1 km. National Grid squares in the county, so that many regions, especially meadows and botanically "uninteresting" areas are now being surveyed, virtually for the first time.

Whilst the discovery of this rarity would normally have been largely a matter of chance, it was made far more likely in this instance because of the intensive methods in use in the Flora of Warwickshire revision. It is greatly to be hoped that botanists in other parts of Britain will be able to make an intensive search for this interesting species in habitats of the type indicated so that its distribution may be worked out in some detail for this country.