

SPIRANTHES ROMANZOFFIANA IN SOUTH DEVON

ANONYMOUS

On the 8th July 1957, during the B.S.B.I. mapping meeting at Launceston, Mr. and Mrs. P. C. Hall and Mrs. B. Welch were listing on the south-west side of Dartmoor. In a bog with *Anagallis tenella*, *Drosera rotundifolia*, *D. intermedia*, *Hypericum elodes*, *Pinguicula lusitanica*, *Scutellaria minor*, *Narthecium ossifragum*, *Scirpus setaceus*, *Carex demissa* and *C. echinata*, there was a single spike, about four inches tall, with two greenish-white flowers open, the buds being in three rows with the characteristic twist of a *Spiranthes*. About 300 yards away three more were found with no flowers open. These three were within a yard of one another on a "lawn" of *Molinia*, associated with *Anagallis tenella*, *Drosera rotundifolia*, *Erica tetralix*, *Narthecium*, *Potentilla erecta*, *Succisa pratensis* and *Viola palustris*. This area was heavily grazed by ponies and cows and the tips of the lower leaves had been bitten off. The flowering spike was carefully cut, the two lowest leaves being left. On 12th July the area was searched again; two cows were grazing on the "lawn" and one of the three young spikes had been broken off. Within a couple of yards of them, the leaves of three more orchids (probably *Spiranthes*) were found, one non-flowering and two with the spikes bitten off, each with two yellowish-green, flat, more or less horizontal leaves. The broken-off spike was kept in water, and opened one flower on 15th July. The lower lip had three green lines.

The specimens were sent to Kew and Mr. V. S. Summerhayes reported as follows:—"The plants are clearly referable to *Spiranthes romanzoffiana* Cham. So far as can be judged from the data available the specimens from Dartmoor are intermediate in certain respects between the populations occurring in southern Ireland and those in northern Ireland and Scotland. The leaves are relatively short and almost flat as in the southern Irish plants but they are only about half as broad. The spike is not so dense as in the Co. Cork plants, but on the other hand is denser than in northern individuals. The flowers are greenish-white with no tinge of yellow. On the whole the plants are closer to those from southern Ireland but show definite differences. They provide further evidence that the various populations of *S. romanzoffiana* occurring in Britain are merely different variants of one variable species.

There seems no reason for thinking that the species is other than native in this new locality. The habitat is not unlike that in which the species occurs in some British localities, though in others a more neutral soil reaction would seem probable. The occurrence of this western Scottish and Irish species in the south-western peninsula is paralleled by the discovery several years ago on the north Cornish coast of *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* subsp. *hebridensis* which has a distribution in Britain very similar to that of *S. romanzoffiana*. It appears that further search might reveal the occurrence in this area of other plants with similar western distributions, for example, *Neotinea intacta* and *Ericaulon septangulare*."