

## Short Note

### THE DISTRIBUTION OF *CAREX ERICETORUM* POLL. IN BRITAIN

*Carex ericetorum* is a plant of open, generally calcareous heaths. It ranges from the eastern Pyrenees and southern Alps to Norway and northern Russia, and extends well into Siberia. Like the related *C. montana* L., it reaches its north-western limit in England, but its distribution here, as in the rest of Europe, is more northern and eastern than that of its ally.

In Britain this sedge has a curious history. A specimen gathered near Cambridge in 1833 (not 1838 as originally stated) was not correctly determined until 1861 (Sowerby 1863). Subsequently a specimen sent in 1829, as *C. pilulifera* L., to Sir W. C. Trevelyan from Mildenhall Heath, West Suffolk, was found to be *C. ericetorum*, and it is probable that Sir J. Cullum's '*Carex montana*' from Newmarket Heath in 1775–76 was also this species (Bennett 1910). By the end of the nineteenth century it had been discovered in half-a-dozen more places in East Anglia and was regarded as very much a plant of that region. A new chapter opened in 1944, when E. C. Wallace found it in Yorkshire, and it is now known in a dozen northern and north-western localities. It is highly probable that it occurs in many more but has been passed over as *C. caryophyllea* Latourr., its regular associate in almost all its British stations. When in flower the two are instantly distinguishable, for the purplish, slim, more regularly cylindrical male spike, and the rounded female glumes of *C. ericetorum*, purple with a broad, scarious, often ciliate margin, are very different from the tawny, markedly clavate male spike and acute, unbordered female glumes of *C. caryophyllea*. In the vegetative state I have so far failed to find any certain distinctions. In northern populations the leaves of *C. ericetorum* tend to be broader than those of *C. caryophyllea*, coarser in texture (often with a distinctly rugose surface), of a darker and duller green, and with a broader and more regular scarious margin; but these characters are not so evident in the south.

*C. ericetorum* requires a higher lime-content in the soil than does *C. caryophyllea*, and in East Anglia is found only in the more calcareous patches of the Breck. It is as sensitive as is *C. montana* to disturbance of the woody rhizomes, and has evidently been lost in some of its old sites as a result of agricultural improvement or of trampling by more frequent visitors. All known British stations have been surveyed since 1970 and are listed below, the present numbers of the sedge in each being indicated by the letters A = 1 to 20, B = 21 to 100, C = 101 to 1,000, D = over 1,000. Where the plant has not been refound, the date of, and authority for, its last known sighting are given. The authenticity of the specimens cited is confirmed by me.

W. Suffolk, v.c. 26: 52/7.6, Risby (B); 52/7.7, Icklingham (B); Eriswell, Foxhole Heath, main area ploughed c. 1960 but the sedge lingers on roadsides (B); Elveden, Weather and Horn Heaths, to 1917, **BIRM, BM, CGE, K, OXF**; 52/7.8, Lakenheath Warren (D); 52/9.8, Knettishall Heath (B).

W. Norfolk, v.c. 28: 52/7.8 and 7.9, Weeting Breck (D); 52/7.9, Foulden Common (B); Cranwich (Petch & Swann 1968), apparently extinguished by scrub; 52/7.9 and 8.9, Grimes Graves (C); 52/8.8, Jubilee Wood, Croxton, 1968, Miss D. M. Maxey in Breckland Survey; may be the same as Santon, 1880, **BM**; Thetford, 1947, **CGE, K**; 52/8.9, Bodney Warren (B); 52/9.8, Garboldisham, Devil's Dyke, 1975 (E. L. Swann *in litt.* 1977), relict from a larger colony ploughed c. 1965; 53/7.0, Gooderstone Common (B); 53/8.0, Cockley Cley (Petch & Swann 1968), apparently destroyed by disturbance of the road-verge; may be the same as 'near Swaffham', 1924, **BIRM, CGE, OXF**; 62/0.8, East Harling, destroyed by pig-farming c. 1970.

Cambs., v.c. 29: 52/4.5, Gogmagog Hills, to 1892, **BIRM, BM, CGE, K, OXF**; 52/5.5, Fleam Dyke, 1965, **CGE**; West Wrattling (A); 52/6.6, Newmarket, Devil's Dyke (A); may be the same as 'Newmarket Heath', 1904, **OXF**.

S. Lincs., v.c. 53: 43/9.4, Ancaster (A).

N. Lincs., v.c. 54: 44/9.1, Broughton (A).

Derbys., v.c. 57: 43/5.7, Markland Grips (A).

W. Lancs., v.c. 60: 34/4.7, Silverdale, 7 places (A, A, A, A, B, B, B).

- S. W. Yorks., v.c. 63: 43/5.8, Anston Stones (A); 44/4.1, unlocalized and unconfirmed record, 1950. C. M. Rob, in Biological Records Centre almost certainly refers to Wentbridge below; 44/5.0, Brodsworth (A); 44/5.1, Wentbridge (B).
- Mid-W. Yorks., v.c. 64: 44/3.4, Hetchell Craggs (Tennant 1959) last seen c. 1976 (S. Warburton *in litt.* 1978); Linton Common, 1946 (Lousley 1950), site built on c. 1965; 44/3.6, Burton Leonard (B); 44/4.4, Jackdaw Crag Quarry, 1946 (Shaw 1947), quarry enlarged and site destroyed c. 1965.
- N. W. Yorks., v.c. 65: 35/8.2, Cronkley Fell (D).
- Co. Durham, v.c. 66: 35/8.2, Widdybank Fell (C); 35/8.3, Cow Green (B), site submerged c. 1970; 45/3.3, Thristlington (Heslop-Harrison 1954), a doubtful record never confirmed and site now threatened by quarrying.
- Westmorland and Furness, v.c. 69: 34/4.7, Arnside, 2 places (B, C); Hazelslack (B); 34/4.9, Scout Scar (C); 35/5.1, Long Scar Pike (B); 35/6.1, Orton: in 1967, having just seen the sedge at Scout Scar, I gathered a single stem on the lowest terrace of Orton Scar. This was determined by A. C. Jermy, who commented (*in litt.*): 'good ericetorum . . . besides the character of ciliate glumes the darker colour of the ♂ glumes is a good indicator'. Unfortunately the specimen was not preserved and the plant has not been refound despite repeated search of the terraces, which are heavily cropped by sheep; but the record is in some sense corroborated by the discovery of the sedge in 1978 in Crosby Gill (C).

## REFERENCES

- BENNETT, A. (1910). *Medicago sylvestris*, *M. falcata*, *Carex ericetorum* and *Psamma baltica* in England. *Trans. Norf. Norw. Nat. Soc.*, **9**: 16–25.
- HESLOP-HARRISON, J. W. (1954). Plant record in *Vasculum*, **39**: 24.
- LOUSLEY, J. E. (1950). *Wild flowers of chalk and limestone*, p. 172. London.
- PETCH, C. P. & SWANN, E. L. (1968). *Flora of Norfolk*, p. 242. Norwich.
- SHAW, G. A. (1947). Plant record in *Naturalist, Hull*, **1947**: 24.
- SOWERBY, J. (1863). *Supplement to English botany*, t. 2971. London.
- TENNANT, D. J. (1959). Plant record in *Naturalist, Hull*, **1959**: 25.

R. W. DAVID