

the
species
recovery
trust

2023/24 Data Assessment

Woodsia ilvensis

Oblong Woodsia

NATURAL
ENGLAND

This project is part funded by
Natural England

(c) Arthur Haines, Native Plant Trust

Summary

Status: Britain's rarest native fern. Endangered, Schedule 8, Priority Species (NERC Act). Less than 100 clumps left in natural populations.

Distribution: Discovered up to 180 years ago in Northern Britain - Cumbria, Snowdonia, southern & central Highlands of Scotland

Habitat: cracks and crevices in basic rocks & screes, above 500m altitude.

Threats: Accelerated decline attributed to over-collection by Victorians ('Pteridomania') in 1800s. Other factors include: climatic change (acid rain, warmer, wetter winters, colder springs & sudden temperature fluctuations), excessive drought, landslips, grazing, sterility, enforced inbreeding, & lack of appropriate habitat, which have led to failure of natural regeneration.

Conservation: Close monitoring of native sites. Series of reintroductions: sites in Teesdale and southern Scotland. Further studies & ex-situ populations at various locations, including a large ex-situ collection at RBGE.



Historic Site Appraisal

Remaining Native Sites: 5 main locations - Snowdonia (2 localities), Lake District (1 site), Moffat Hills (2 sub-sites), Glen Clova (3 sites), Cairngorms (1 site). Historically, some of these sites were of considerable size, but these have considerably declined in the last 150 years. All but one site (Lake District) have no more than 4 clumps.

Reintroduction sites: 4x sites - Northern England (Teesdale NNR) & Scotland (Southern Uplands, SSSI)

Analysis of all known historic sites					
Area	County (2 figure grid ref)	First recorded	Last recorded	Notes	
WALES					
Snowdonia (2 localities)	Merionethshire (SH71)	1837	1967		
	Cwm Idwal, Caernarvonshire (SH54, SH65, SH66)	1828	2023 (SH54)	2 localities, which together support 5 native sites with mature plants - very small numbers of clumps	
NORTHERN ENGLAND					
Teesdale (2 sites)	North-west Yorkshire (NY82, NZ10)	1840 (NZ10), 1835 (NY82)	2019	Historically native in Teesdale (NY82), but all populations went extinct. 2x introductions made following extinction	
	County Durham (NY82)	1797	2023	Site 1: 64 plants introduced in 1999 Site 2: 50 plants introduced in 2000	
Lake District (historically 9 sites)	Westmorland (NY30, NY31, NY40, NY41)	1854	Pre-1938	Historic native populations - now extinct	
	Wasdale, Cumberland (NY10, NY31)	1898	2023	Native. Good population - 71 clumps	
SCOTLAND					
Moffat Hills (historically 5-7 sites)	Moffat Hills, Dumfriesshire (NT11, NT01,	1848	2023	A once thriving collection of native populations ('hundreds'), brought to the brink of extinction via construction of the Caledonian Railway, whereby enhanced access to the area resulted in over-collecting in the 1800s ('Pteridomania'). This saw the Moffat Hills sites decline to just 1 plant by 1909. Two small populations have been found since, and these persist today. 1999 & 2003: 2x reintroductions	
Glen Clova (historically 3 sites)	Angus (NO27)	1824	2019	Mossy rock clefts. Three sites with small numbers.	
Cairngorms	East Inverness-shire (NN89)	1985	2023	Native (3 clumps) - 1 site	

Reintroductions

Four introductions have been made by RBGE:

Teesdale (Northern England): 2x Introductions in 1999 & 2000.

2 sites with northern & southern aspects. South-facing site planted - 64 plants - in 1999 in rock crevices & scree - scree plant survival was highest. North-facing scree site planted in 2000, 48 out of 50 plants survived (2003).

No native Teesdale plants left, so the introduced populations were sourced from spores from all surviving British populations (providing the opportunity to outcross). 2023 - introductions still present, although a decline in clump numbers has been seen

Moffat (southern Scotland): 2x Introductions in 1999 & 2003

Site 1: Grey Mare's Tail Nature Reserve. Steep-sided gully - plants sited on north & south facing sides in crevices & scree. 129 plants introduced. 75 alive after 4 years.

Site 2: Carrifran Valley. Predominantly south-facing. 60 plants introduced.

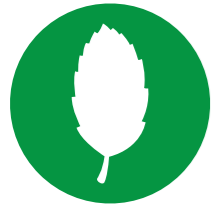
All plants were derived from locally sourced spores from the nearest populations (which were both extremely small). 2023 - introductions have persisted, although a decline in clump numbers has been seen

Natural Regeneration of introduced populations: no additional recruitment over decades

Conclusions...



This species is being cared for by various organisations including RBGE & BPS



This species is monitored regularly, and a reintroduction program was established in 1999 by RBGE



It is evident that this species is well looked after, and SRT will not be taking this forward in the near future



If anything changes, SRT would be happy to include this species into our recovery program



Image: Roger Golding

References...

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The Species Recovery Trust is a charity set up to tackle the loss of some of the rarest species in the UK.

There are over nine hundred native species in the UK that are classed as under threat, with several hundreds more currently widespread but known to be in significant decline. The countryside is now bereft of many species that were a familiar sight a mere generation ago.

A small number of these species are on the absolute brink of existence, poised to become extinct in our lifetimes; our goal is to stop them vanishing.

Our aim is to remove 50 species from the edge of extinction in the UK by the year 2050. In addition we are reconnecting people with wildlife and the natural world through training programmes and awareness raising.



A photograph of a forest floor in spring. The ground is covered with a dense carpet of small, purple-blue bell-shaped flowers (bluebells). Several large, weathered tree stumps and fallen logs are scattered across the scene, some covered in moss. The background is filled with tall, slender trees with fresh green leaves, suggesting a young forest or woodland. Sunlight filters through the canopy, creating dappled light on the ground.

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