

***Andromeda polifolia* L.**

Bog Rosemary

Native

GB: Least Concern

England: Near Threatened

VC5 Absent; VC6 Extinct

A dwarf shrub of damp peaty soils. In Somerset, formerly found only on the peat moors and on Black Down on the Mendips, both in VC6. White (1912) stated that this species was “formerly in some quantity, but now extremely rare”, quoting earlier records for Glastonbury and Burtle turf moors, peat bogs at Wedmore, Panborough Moor between Wedmore and Wells and the peat bog at Shapwick, where it was once considered very abundant. It had clearly declined by the end of the nineteenth century. Murray (1896) found it only near Shapwick railway station. White wrote that he “used to find it amongst heath, edging some of the main droves, where the original land-surface had been temporarily preserved; but those spots no longer hold it”. He blamed turf cutting for the decline of this species. Mrs C.I. Sandwith and N.Y. Sandwith saw this species on the peat moors for the last time in August 1920, south of the railway between Shapwick and Ashcott stations, after which it was considered extinct in that area for fifty years. In 1970, during a survey of Westhay Moor for the Somerset Trust for Nature Conservation, J.K. Hibberd recorded *Andromeda polifolia* in flower in six out of twenty-five random quadrats. Doubt has surrounded this record, with Roe (1981) clearly accepting it, yet Green *et al.* (1997) stating “This is believed to most probably be an error”. Following correspondence with the finder and others, Professor A.J. Willis wrote that an “error of determination in 1970 seems unlikely” and believed that “changes in the area since 1970, including peat cutting, might well have led to the loss of the plant” (Willis, 1991). In letters, J.K. Hibberd explained that he only encountered about six plants, all specimens found occurring as individuals, and the approximate location of the plants was given by C.G. Trapnell of Somerset Trust for Nature Conservation as ST453437. No plants have been seen on Westhay Moor since.

Away from the peat moors, *Andromeda polifolia* has only been found on Black Down. White (1912) believed that the inclusion of this species in a published list of Mendip plants was an error, asserting that “It certainly does not grow in any of the upland bogs”. It must have been with great excitement that Mrs C.I. Sandwith found this plant on Blackdown in 1914 and escorted J.W. White to see a fragile plant in flower on 4 November. The plant was last seen at this site in 1928 and subsequent searches have been unsuccessful (Willis, 1991). This species is found on raised bogs in central Wales, northern England, southern Scotland and Ireland, but has declined as a result of drainage, afforestation and peat cutting. Former sites in Somerset were its most southerly locations.