

***Pilularia globulifera* L. Pillwort**

Native

GB: Near Threatened

England: Vulnerable

UKBAP & Section 41

GB Scarce

VC5 Absent or Extinct; VC6 Extinct

A small rhizomatous fern found on wet mud or in shallow water at the margins of non-calcareous, nutrient-poor ponds. The history of this species in Somerset is unclear: there are three records, each mysterious to some extent. In his list published in Collinson (1791), W. Sole included a record of *Pilularia* in “wet places on Black and Maiden Downs”. Although there is a Black Down on the Mendips (VC6), there is a Maiden Down at the Devonshire end of the Blackdowns in VC5, and Polwhele also listed a record for *Pilularia* in Devon in 1797 in “wet places on Blackdown” (Keble Martin & Fraser, 1939). Capt. Roe considered it most likely that Sole’s record was for the Blackdowns in South Somerset; however Marshall (1917) stated that “Sole does not seem to have worked in the south-western districts ... I think that his record of “Blackdown” refers to the Mendips, and not to the range south of Taunton”. No further records exist for VC5 and it is unclear whether *Pilularia* occurred there.

Miller (1933) listed *Pilularia globulifera* as extinct, stating that the last certain record was for the Somerset Coal Canal, Monkton Combe, made by H.F. Parsons in 1875. It is likely that the record was in fact made before 1875 for in that year, Parsons read a paper to the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society on the Flora of the Eastern Border of Somersetshire. It is believed that when the paper was deposited with the Society, it was accompanied by a species list, seen by Miller but subsequently lost (Roe, 1985, in litt.). Although Miller considered the 1875 record to be the last for VC6, his predecessor as Botanical Recorder for Somerset, E.S. Marshall, wrote of a letter he had received from Rev. B.W. Tucker telling him that “a friend ... tells me she found a specimen [of *Pilularia*] at Winscombe a few years ago” (Marshall, 1917). Although published in “Somerset Plant Notes for 1916”, the record was clearly a few years before that date. Pillwort has thus been extinct in Somerset for about a century or more, and it is uncertain whether it was ever known in VC5. This species is widely scattered but scarce in Britain and has been lost from many old sites through habitat destruction and eutrophication.