

Erica tetralix L.

Cross-leaved Heath

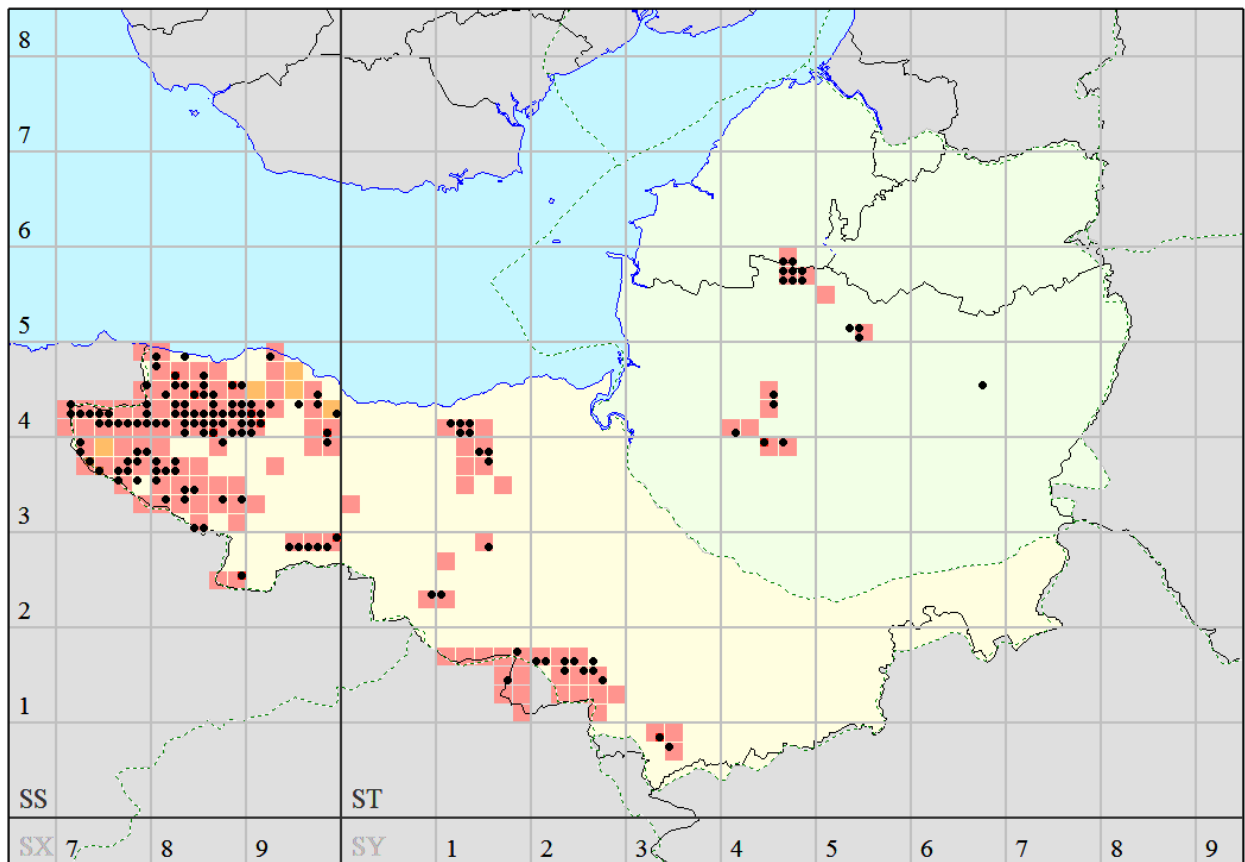
Native

GB: Least Concern

England: Near Threatened

VC5 Not Scarce; VC6 Not Scarce

A low shrub of wet heaths and moors, usually found on wet, oligotrophic organic soils. In VC5 this species is widespread on Exmoor and found in suitable wet habitats on the Quantocks and Blackdowns. It also occurs at Langford Heathfield, near Widcombe, on Ash Priors Common and around Chard. In VC6 *Erica tetralix* is restricted to locations on the Mendips and the peat moors. On Mendip it is found at sites where Devonian Old Red Sandstone outcrops: at Rowberrow Warren and Black Down, on North Hill and at Priddy Mineries, and at Downhead Common. On the peat moors, it is still to be found at Shapwick Heath, Ashcott Plot, Street Heath and Westhay Moor. Historically this species was also recorded from Leigh Woods (Swete, 1854); however Murray (1896) reported it lost from that site. In England *Erica tetralix* has suffered a marked decline due to loss of lowland heath or damage to the habitat by eutrophication, drainage or lack of grazing (Stroh *et al.*, 2014). A decline in Somerset is less apparent, as it is still to be found at all the sites given by Murray (1896); however he described it as “Common on the peat-moor” and White (1912) wrote that it was “Quite the dominant heath on the peat moors, where it grows in profusion”. This is certainly no longer the case, due to loss of habitat as a result of peat extraction and drainage for agriculture: all remaining sites on the peat moors fall within SSSIs.



Distribution of *Erica tetralix* in Somerset, mapped using MapMate. Black dots are post-2000 records; red squares are 1987-1999 records; sepia squares are pre-1987 records