Veronica serpyllifolia subsp. humifusa

Recording of *Veronica serpyllifolia* subsp. *humifusa* in Banffshire has been inconsistent and patchy. The first record, published in 1906, was made by E.S. Marshall & W.A. Shoolbred in Kirkmichael Parish. It was not recorded again until 1967/68, when M. McCallum Webster and A.J. Souter recorded it from the Inchrory and Ben Avon areas. In 1983 McCallum Webster, and others on a BSBI field meeting, recorded it from three or four locations. There were no further records until A. Amphlett found a population at Well of Lecht in 2008. The records are summarised in the table below.

Observations on the flower colour of these plants and the potentially misleading way this colour is described in many Floras was published in BSBI News 115 (pp. 39-40). The text of this article is repeated below along with the two photographs included with the article. The colour of the published photographs was inaccurate, being too purplish rather than blue.

Photographs of *Veronica serpyllifolia* subsp. *humifusa* at Well of Lecht (vc94) NJ235153, at 460m AOD, on 11th June 2010

10km Square	Tetrad	Year	Recorder	Site Name	Gridref	Quantity	Comment
		1906	Marshall, E.S. & Shoolbred, W.A.	Kirkmichael Parish	Unknown		
NJ10	NJ10T	1967	McCallum Webster, M.	Inchrory	NJ1707		Flush by River Avon.
	NJ10U	1968	McCallum Webster, M.	Inchrory	NJ1708		
		1967	Souter, A.J.	Ben Avon	NJ10		
		1967	McCallum Webster, M.	Slochd Mor, Ben Avon	NJ10SW		
NJ11	NJ11R	1983	Stewart, O.M. and McCallum Webster, M.	Muckle Fergie Burn	NJ1713		Flush
		1983	BSBI Field Meeting	Tomintoul	NJ11		
NJ21	NJ21H	2008	Amphlett, A.	Well of Lecht	NJ235151		Growing with Caltha palustris var. radicans.
		2008	Amphlett, A.	Well of Lecht	NJ236150		
		2008	Amphlett, A.	Well of Lecht	NJ236157		Small patch on path, and good stand by burn nearby.
		2009	Amphlett, A.	Well of Lecht	NJ235153		At edge of burn, by footbridge.
		2009	Amphlett, A.	Well of Lecht	NJ236157		At edge of burn.
		2009	Amphlett, A.	Well of Lecht	NJ237157		At edge of burn.
		2009	Amphlett, A.	Well of Lecht	NJ237158		At edge of burn.
		2010	Amphlett, A.	Well of Lecht	NJ235153	110	Along west side of burn.
		2010	Amphlett, A.	Well of Lecht	NJ235154	47	Along west side of burn.
		2010	Amphlett, A.	Well of Lecht	NJ236155	67	Along west side of burn.
		2010	Amphlett, A.	Well of Lecht	NJ236156	17	Along west side of burn.
NJ22	NJ22Q	2010	Amphlett, A.	Ladder Burn	NJ268205		On track, north side of burn. Single patch.
NJ23	NJ23D	1983	BSBI Field Meeting	Glenfarclas	NJ2137		
		1983	R. FitzGerald, M. & C. Kitchen, A. Silverside & O. Stewart		NJ23NW		
NJ32	NJ32J	1983	McCallum Webster, M.	Blackwater Lodge	NJ3328		By river
		1983	BSBI Field Meeting	River Blackwater	NJ32		
		1983	BSBI Field Meeting	Blackwater	NJ32SW		

Table 1. Summary of records of *Veronica serpyllifolia* subsp. *humifusa* in Banffshire.

Are the flowers of *Veronica serpyllifolia* subsp. *humifusa* ever blue?

On a number of occasions in the Cairngorms area, in north-east Scotland, I have found plants of *Veronica serpyllifolia* (Thyme-leaved Speedwell) that appeared to be subsp. *humifusa*. Procumbent rooting stems, more rounded leaves, short few-flowered glandular-hairy racemes of large flowers, all pointed to the montane subspecies. However, none of these plants had all blue flowers, and the many Floras and other references I have access to seemed most insistent on this point.

The majority of descriptions of subsp. humifusa refer to the flowers as blue or bright blue. In the "blue camp" are Hooker (3rd edition 1937), Perring and Sell (1968), Clapham, Tutin and Moore (1987) and Rose (1981, 2006). In the "bright blue camp" are Tutin et al (1972), Wigginton and Graham (1981), Blamey and Grey-Wilson (1989, 2003), Stace (1991, 1997, 2010), Sell and Murrell (2009) and Streeter (2009). The Excursion Flora 3rd edition (Clapham et al 1981) hedges its bets and describes the flowers as bluer (than subsp. *serpyllifolia*). Mary McCallum Webster (1978), who undoubtedly knew this subspecies in the field, describes them as pale blue.

References to a mountain form of subsp. s*erpyllifolia*, eg. in Stace, made me suspect that the plants I saw were not the true subsp. *humifusa*, and I did not record them as such. But, I had forgotten to look in Plant Crib! Here is described the very plants I had been seeing. I quote, "The flowers are larger (than subsp. *serpyllifolia*) and usually whitish-blue (the description of flowers as blue in some Floras is misleading). The blue corolla lobe with its dark lines encloses the rest of the corolla in the immature flower and gives the impression that the open flowers will be the same colour. When the corolla expands however the remaining lobes are white or pale blue with slatey-blue lines giving a generalised paler appearance to the flowers" (Corner 1998).

I would add to Corner's observations, that the unopened flower buds are a dark blue. Not the dark inky blue of *Veronica alpina* (Alpine Speedwell), but reminiscent of that species. The open flowers reveal that the upper corolla lobe has a blue background colour with darker lines, the side lobes with only the mearest hint of a blue background, but with dark lines, while the small lower lobe is pure white. See photos Fig. xx. The terse description of the flowers as blue or bright blue in so many Floras, referred to above, is not just misleading, but is clearly inaccurate, at least as far as British plants are concerned. Or has anyone seen subsp. *humifusa* with blue flowers? There are suggestions (Corner pers. comm.) that in European populations of subsp. *humifusa*, flower colour is highly plastic. However, on current knowledge, the form of subsp. *humifusa* in the British Isles does not have entirely blue flowers.

Recorded in 60 hectads in GB in the most recent Atlas date class, 1987 – 99 (Preston et al 2002), subsp. *humifusa* has only been recorded in 22 hectads in the decade 2000 – 09 http://www.bsbimaps.org.uk/atlas/main.php (accessed 16/6/2010). It is certainly a scarce subspecies, but one which others, if they have been consulting their Floras with care, may incorrectly have over-looked.

The accompanying photographs show the typical flower colour, and proportionately very large flowers of subsp. *humifusa*. The photographs were taken at Well of Lecht (vc94) NJ235153, at 460m AOD, on 11th June 2010, when there was a mix of flowering and fruiting plants.

Acknowledgements

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