

Dartmoor Delivery Plan for Toad Flax-Leaved St John's Wort

Description and Importance of the Species

Flax-leaved St. John's-wort (*Hypericum linariifolium*) is a bright yellow perennial flower which grows on steep rocky slopes with a southerly aspect. The plant produces large amounts of seeds which require bare earth in which to germinate. It can tolerate times of high temperature and drought, but it is a poor competitor and will not persist if open conditions start closing up.

It is a rare European endemic species restricted to the western Atlantic fringes of Britain, France, Spain and Portugal. In Britain, there are records from 21 sites in England, all but three of which are on Dartmoor, and 4 in north Wales. Flax-leaved St. John's-wort is classified as Near-Threatened in the UK on the basis of its restricted distribution. 90% of the estimated number of Flax-leaved St. John's Wort plants in Britain are found in the 18 sites on Dartmoor. These all lie along the sides of the Teign Valley, except for a single outlying population in the Dart Valley.



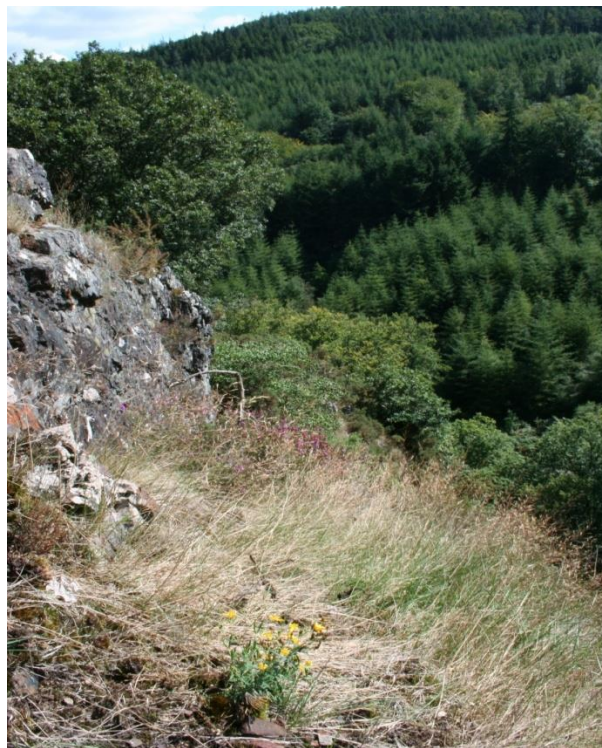
Flax-leaved St. John's-wort, copyright DNPA

Current Status on Dartmoor

All but one of the Dartmoor sites are located within the Teign valley, with the outlier being found in the Dart valley. Twelve of the sites are managed by the National Trust (NT) and Devon Wildlife Trust (DWT), but the two largest colonies and the Dart site are in private ownership. There has been very little monitoring since 2008, other than at the DWT Dunsford sites. Where there is data over the past 20 years, it generally shows significant declines in numbers since the mid 90s, with some evidence of stabilisation at lower levels taking place in the late 2000s where management has been undertaken. The two large sites held 4-5,000 plants at the last counts in 2007 and all other sites less than 200 plants.

Current factors affecting the Species on Dartmoor

The main factor affecting sites for this species on Dartmoor is encroachment of scrub, especially gorse and over-shadowing by adjacent woodland. The combined effects of shading and increased soil fertility produced by gorse can lead to the loss of suitable areas. In the Teign Valley, broom, bramble and regenerating birch and oaks can also cause similar problems, whilst the Dart Valley site is surrounded by conifers and the site is being encroached by common heather. Most sites would have formerly been surrounded by coppice management and possibly grazed sporadically by livestock, but rabbits and deer species now represent the only grazers. The potential threat of cross-fertilisation with trailing St John's-wort has not been studied or suspected on Dartmoor.



Flax-leaved St. John's-wort in its habitat, copyright DNPA

Current Initiatives on Dartmoor

A considerable amount of management work for this species occurred in the mid 2000s, but there has been very little since 2010, mainly due to DNPA having lost a number of key management agreements.

Work is carried out approximately every 4 years on the DWT sites at Dunsford.

The National Trust at Castle Drogo have carried out some gorse clearance in the past 5 years on three of the small sites that occur there.

The Woodland Trust (WT) and the National Trust have combined to purchase Fingle Woods where they plan to convert the conifer plantations back to broadleaf woodland. There is a past record (1996) of a few plants from the Wooston Castle area.

Target

- Maintain a viable population on Dartmoor, with colonies of 4000+ on two sites and 100+ plants on at least a further 8 sites

Delivery and Monitoring

Periodic management is needed at each site to prevent gorse and other shrub encroachment, as well as removing shading by adjacent trees.

Management requirements need to be discussed and agreed with landowners and/or relevant management bodies at each site.

Monitor numbers at all sites at least every 5 years, with more regular monitoring where possible, especially the two large colonies. DNPA Ecologist to coordinate and circulate findings.

Current sites	Action	Lead	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Bad Rock, Broadmoor Common	Monitoring urgently needed to assess numbers and management needs	DNPA	X			X	
Bigport Farm	Monitoring urgently needed to assess numbers and management needs	DNPA	X			X	
Hyner Rocks, Canonteign	Periodic monitoring and management required	Forestry Commission	X				
Cleft Rock, Ausewell Woods	Periodic monitoring and management required	DNPA		X			
Steps Bridge 1-4	Monitoring and management carried out every 4 years	DWT	X				X
Clifford Bridge West & East	Monitoring and management carried out every 4 years	DWT	X				X
Prestonbury Common	Periodic monitoring and management required	Natural England			X		
Fingle Br, Hunter's Path, Sharp Tor, Drewston Wood, Hunting Gate	Periodic monitoring and management required	NT		X			X
Upperton Wood	Periodic monitoring and management required	DNPA	X				
Wooston Castle	Periodic monitoring and management required	WT/NT		X			

