

the  
species  
recovery  
trust

2020 Species Report

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# Heath Lobelia

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## Partners

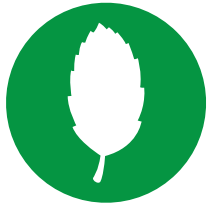
This report has been produced as a collaboration between The Species Recovery Trust (Dominic Price, Bex House, Phil Wilson and Ralph Hobbs), Devon Wildlife Trust (Jackie Gage), Cornwall Wildlife Trust (Sean O’Hea), Dorset Flora Group (Robin Walls), Dorset County Council (Annabel King), Habitat First Group (Phoebe Carter) and the Legacy to Landscapes Project (Ruth Worsley & team), who collectively make up the Heath Lobelia Steering Group, formed in 2019.



# Summary



The pandemic and associated lockdown of 2020 put severe restriction on all our work, but in the end all but 2 sites were monitored successfully.



Both Hinton Admiral and Hurst Heath have shown considerable declines after the populations were boosted by large-scale habitat management in previous years



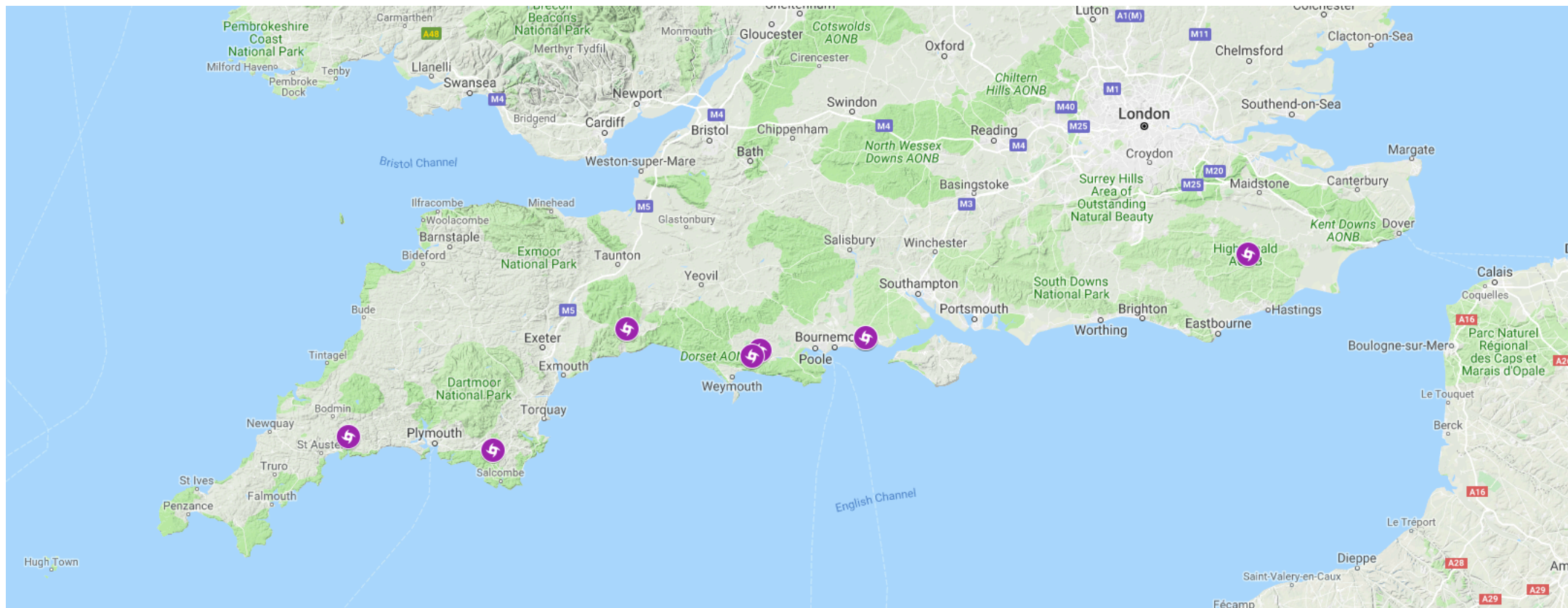
A countryside stewardship agreement is being set up to support grazing at Hinton Admiral





# Sites Summary

Site	County	2018	2019	2020	Highest recent count
Redlake Cottage Meadows	Cornwall	22	18	21	45 (2016)
Ventongimps	Cornwall	?	50	26	50 (2019)
Andrews Wood (+Stanton)	Devon	1800	2723+22	N/A	12500 (2001)
Lobelia Cottage, Kilmington	Devon	120	c. 5	112	160 (2013)
Hurst Heath	Dorset	6	350	85	2400 (2015)
Silverlake	Dorset	15	37	21	New population
Hinton Admiral	Hampshire	14	780	40	264 (1986)
Flimwell	Sussex	175	300	540	540 (2020)







## Redlake Cottage

A good count, but all but one of the plants were clustered in a single location, possibly representing a contraction in range.

## Ventongimps

26 plants recorded by Pete Gardener. Three plants in one northern location, and 20+3 in south. The vegetation is on the cusp of becoming too dense, but the plants recorded all seemed healthy.

## Andrews Wood

Sadly the extensive volunteer monitoring normally carried could not happen this year due to lockdown. DP visited the site to observe grazing in relation to commencing this at Hinton. Of particular interest was quite high levels of grazing around the Lobelia plants themselves. The population appeared to be thriving, but it is clear why this requires so many people to count them!

## Yarner Wood

Seeds were collected from 50 plants at Andrew Wood and planted at Yarner Wood at the end of September in a non-SSSI area of former heath. The site has very low soil nutrients, open sward structure and varied soil conditions and was identified as a suitable receptor site. Lobelia was known from Yarner in the 1930s, although the original site is now afforested.





## Lobelia Cottage, Shute

The site was visited in early September. 76 plants were found in the main swathe of population and 36 in the mown area nearby - 112 (similar count to 2018). John Harris, the new owner of Lobelia Cottage is very friendly and positive about having the plants in the meadow, which is fantastic news. He is also clearing a piece of land adjacent to the meadow currently covered in bramble – which he will monitor for any possible dormant Heath Lobelia.

With concern over the future of the Lobelia Cottage site, plants from seeds collected in 2018 were planted earlier in the summer at nearby locations: Shute Beacon in Shute Woods and Bettys Ground, on a green triangle of land at a road junction between Shute and Kilmington.

Now a relationship has been established with the new owner, seeds have been collected again this autumn from Lobelia Cottage, and several volunteers from Kilmington and Shute are involved in sowing them. Kilmington Common is looking like an ideal site for a potential re-introduction for the next phase of the project.

If successful a second major population will be established at Kilmington Common next summer. It is an area of publicly accessible land owned by Kilmington Parish Council and is remnant piece of the original extensive Shute Hill/Kilmington Common heathland, and very near to known locations where it still thriving in the 1960s. Plants are being successfully grown in captivity and more is being learnt about techniques for propagating them.

The Shute project has taken the opportunity to involve local communities – to raise awareness and ensure its future of their very special plant, - also known as the Flower of the Axe and strangely, the Kilmington Lily. The community engagement has evoked fascinating stories, including a response from Ian Berrill, a former resident who grew up in Kilmington in the 1940s and was sworn to secrecy by his grandfather who showed him where it grew and told him it was very rare. His grandfather was head-gardener at an estate called Coryton Park on the edge of Kilmington. The secret had been kept for over seven decades until this summer, when he shared this secret with the group. Ian was able to explain the exact location, which was the edge of Shute Woods and adjacent to the former village football field. Sadly it no longer is present in that location. The football field was one of the known sites in the 1960s survey. Ian added that the farmer commented that the hay from the football field was always the best crop of his fields. No doubt disturbance from the churned up field resulted in good populations of Heath Lobelia.

In August this year, the group also checked other former known locations and a large area of land where trees were felled two years ago, near the Lobelia Cottage. Good heathland flora is establishing but no sign sadly of Heath Lobelia. John Harris the new owner of Lobelia Cottage, has taken great interest in the population on his land, and believes he may have seen it growing at two other locations in Shute Woods. These will be checked out next summer with John. The group also learnt that the plant grows in a war cemetery in Northern France. The grandfather of one of the group's members, a soldier in WW2, is buried there.



## Hurst Heath

Numbers of *Lobelia urens* plants found:

- *Within the enclosure, 30, all badly eaten; one thin flowering spike*
- *Just outside enclosure, 15, all eaten, but secondary growth with good flowers*
- *Opposite end of original clearing, 40, most eaten but still some flowers*
- *Newly cleared area under pines, none. Continuous cover of Molinia in three years!*



The pictures overleaf show the flowers and the eaten-off stems of large plants with regrowth. Also general shots of the site. I have also listed the species seen whilst searching. Pleased to see three speckled wood butterflies, a toad and a hornet.

The site is becoming overgrown with *Molinia* and requires vigorous disturbance again, as we have in the past. Within the enclosure birch, willow and bramble are poised to become dominant. Unfortunately I do not see a lot of hope for the site unless it can be opened up to grazing by cattle. The drastic management we have done in the past has been effective, but it only lasts a few years. The *Molinia* throughout the site is not grazed and there is little browsing damage except for some stunted hawthorn and holly.



I saw a very few green fruits and no ripe fruit. The animals eating the plants cannot be deer because damage is as apparent, if not more severe, within the enclosure than without. The stems are cleanly bitten through, so voles (? Water voles would be entertaining) may be the culprits.





## Hurst Heath (cont.)

Species recorded, 23rd Sept 2020



<i>Agrostis capillaris</i>	Common Bent	<i>Hypericum pulchrum</i>	Slender St John's-wort
<i>Athyrium filix-femina</i>	Lady-fern	<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>	Holly
<i>Betula pubescens</i>	Downy Birch	<i>Juncus articulatus</i>	Jointed Rush
<i>Brachypodium sylvaticum</i>	<u>False-brome</u>	<i>Juncus conglomeratus</i>	Compact Rush
<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>	Heather	<i>Lobelia urens</i>	Heath Lobelia
<i>Carex binervis</i>	Green-ribbed Sedge	<i>Lonicera periclymenum</i>	Honeysuckle
<i>Carex flacca</i>	Glaucous Sedge	<i>Lotus pedunculatus</i>	Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil
<i>Carex panicea</i>	Carnation Sedge	<i>Molinia caerulea</i>	Purple Moor-grass
<i>Carex pulicaris</i>	Flea Sedge	<i>Myrica gale</i>	Bog-myrtle
<i>Carex remota</i>	Remote Sedge	<i>Potentilla erecta</i>	Tormentil
<i>Carex sylvatica</i>	Wood-sedge	<i>Rubus fruticosus agg.</i>	Bramble
<i>Cirsium dissectum</i>	Meadow Thistle	<i>Salix cinerea</i>	Grey Willow
<i>Cirsium palustre</i>	Marsh Thistle	<i>Scrophularia auriculata</i>	Water Figwort
<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>	Hawthorn	<i>Scutellaria minor</i>	Lesser Skullcap
<i>Deschampsia cespitosa</i>	Tufted <u>Hair-grass</u>	<i>Succisa pratensis</i>	Devil's-bit Scabious
<i>Digitalis purpurea</i>	Foxglove	<i>Viola lactea</i>	Pale Dog-violet
<i>Dryopteris affinis</i>		<i>Viola riviniana</i>	Common Dog-violet
<i>Dryopteris borreii</i>			
<i>Dryopteris carthusiana</i>	Narrow Buckler Fern		
<i>Dryopteris dilatata</i>	Broad Buckler Fern		
<i>Eupatorium cannabinum</i>	Hemp-agrimony		
<i>Festuca rubra</i>	Red Fescue		
<i>Galium palustre</i>	Marsh-bedstraw		





## Silverlake

The three enclosures at Silverlake containing Heath lobelia translocated from Hurst Heath were monitored several times throughout 2020. In May there were 23 rosettes with flower spikes (not yet flowering) in the southern enclosure (S) but no signs of plants in either of the other enclosures (C & N). In July enclosure S had 21 flower spikes in flower. Neither enclosure C or N showed any signs of Heath lobelia. In September 20 flower spikes in enclosure S had gone over and one was still in flower. Interestingly around 15 healthy looking rosettes were counted in enclosure C, while enclosure N still showed no signs of the plant.



Enclosure S has a far greater ground cover of gorse, birch seedlings and grasses than either of the other two enclosures.



## Hinton Admiral

After the huge success of 2019 when the population came back in force after scrub removal, the count this year was back down to 40 plants. The central area of the site is now dominated by a dense sward of Yorkshire Fog, and the bare disturbed ground the plants had initially thrived on had disappeared. There was also quite a high level of littering and bonfire sites present.

We will return this winter and as well as continuing to scrub clear may attempt to pull out the willow stumps to get on top of the region and create more disturbance. We have been supporting an application to put the site into CS with a bespoke grazing agreement, which is a huge step forwards represents the best hope for the site in the long-term.



## Flimwell

Following 2 years of restoration management under a Lund grant, an accurate count of flowering plants was undertaken on 27 July 2020 with 537 recorded on the managed slope (up from 300 in 2019 and 175 in 2018). A further 3 plants were also found to be hanging on within the adjacent woodland which has started to be opened up under the owner's new woodland management plan.

The continuous management effort of pulling Himalayan Balsam over three consecutive summers has paid off with this species now nearly under control. And thanks to the major scrub and bramble clearance over the past two winters, no scrub control will be needed this coming winter.



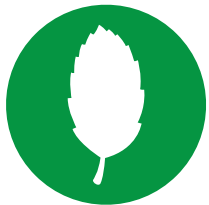


# Looking forward

Project aims 2020-2030



Ensure all sites are monitored in 2020 and sort out exact grid reference for Ventongimps



Continue to scrub clear in the Hampshire site before switching over to grazing management. Some serious thoughts about future management at Hurst Heath



Evaluate extinct sites for re-introduction. Attempt to bring the Yarner Wood re-intro into the project.



Keep coordinating the steering group committee to maintain contact between all site practitioners and in particular build links with NE work





The Species Recovery Trust is a charity set up to tackle the loss of some of the rarest species in the UK.

There are over nine hundred native species in the UK that are classed as under threat, with several hundreds more currently widespread but known to be in significant decline. The countryside is now bereft of many species that were a familiar sight a mere generation ago.

A small number of these species are on the absolute brink of existence, poised to become extinct in our lifetimes; our goal is to stop them vanishing.

Our aim is to remove 50 species from the edge of extinction in the UK by the year 2050. In addition we are reconnecting people with wildlife and the natural world through training programmes and awareness raising.





A photograph of a forest floor in spring. The ground is covered with a dense carpet of purple bluebells. Several large, weathered tree stumps are scattered across the scene, some with moss growing on them. The background is filled with tall, slender trees with fresh green leaves, suggesting a healthy woodland environment.

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