

disposition, it is easy to underestimate his personal and teaching contributions to British natural history.

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Threatened bryophytes

Acaulon triquetrum

N.G. Hodgetts

55 Norton Street, Grantham, Lincolnshire, NG31 6BX; n.hodgetts@nthworld.com

Status

Endangered (Church *et al.*, 2001); Wildlife & Countryside Act Schedule 8.

Status in Europe: Not threatened.

Description

Acaulon triquetrum (or 'triangular pygmy-moss', for those who prefer to use the English name) is a minute, bud-like, green or reddish-brown moss growing up to 1.5 mm tall, with the capsule enclosed by the upper leaves (see Figure 1). It differs from the more frequent (though still rather rare) *A. muticum* in the keeled upper leaves, which give the plant a distinctly triangular appearance from above, and the curved seta (Church *et al.*, 2001). The two species have quite a different habitat and 'jizz'.

Ecology

A. triquetrum is a winter annual, growing on bare, usually calcareous, soil close to the sea, often on

south-facing slopes and especially on cliff tops, particularly near the edge, where the open vegetation is maintained by soil slippage. It is also found near tracks and on turf-cutting scars. It was reported from mud banks at one of its former sites. Sporophytes are produced in abundance in winter and early spring (Church *et al.*, 2001).



Figure 1. *Acaulon triquetrum* on St Catherine's Down, Isle of Wight, 2002. Photo: Ron Porley.

Current status and distribution

This species, listed as Submediterranean-Subatlantic by Hill & Preston (1998), is widely distributed in the Mediterranean region, reaching its northern limit in Ukraine, Germany and England. It has also been recorded from Asia, North Africa, Macaronesia, North America and Australia (Church *et al.*, 2001). In the British Isles, it has only ever been found at a few sites on the extreme south coast of England (see Figure 2). Survey work resulting from its inclusion on Schedule 8 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 clarified its status considerably. More recent work, particularly in Dorset, has been important in establishing the current status of the species.

In Dorset, Bryan Edwards refound *A. triquetrum* at a number of sites after long gaps since the previous records, including Emmett's Hill (*ca* 3,000 plants), the Isle of Portland (*ca* 150 plants) and Lulworth Cove (*ca* 2,000 plants), and is monitoring the populations (Edwards, 2000, 2001).

On the Isle of Wight, *A. triquetrum* seems to be holding its own on St Catherine's Down (*ca* 400 plants), where it was first found in 1964, rediscovered by Tom Blockeel in 2001, and seen by the BBS in 2002 (Porley, 2002). However, it has not been refound on Afton Down since the original record (by J. Groves in December 1923).

It has apparently declined in East Sussex. There are many records, particularly from the Newhaven area, dating mainly from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but it is now known at just one Sussex site, where it is threatened (several dozen small colonies present in 1998).

A. triquetrum still needs to be refound in Devon, where it was recorded by A.E. Griffiths from

near Torquay ('St Marychurch') in the 19th century, and by H. Humphreys on Hope's Nose in 1906.

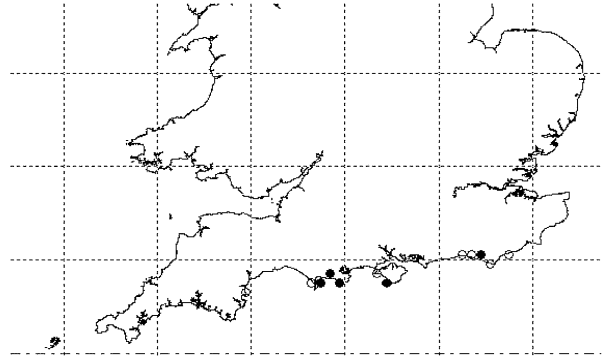


Figure 2. Distribution of *Acaulon triquetrum* in southern England. Open circles indicate pre-1980 records, closed circles indicate records from 1980-2004. Data are taken from the Threatened Bryophyte Database.

Conservation

Threats to this moss include loss of habitat to coastal ribbon development, encroachment of coarse grass, and excessive erosion. Eutrophication from dogs is a serious threat at its remaining Sussex site.

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