

How under-recorded is *Weissia wilsonii* in Britain?

Des Callaghan provides a brief update.



In 2011, when I first became involved with the monitoring of *Weissia multicapsularis* at Greeb Point, Cornwall, I was baffled as to why the species was an extreme global rarity, given that it produced sporophytes abundantly and occupied a habitat that seemed unremarkable, comprising bare patches of soil at the ends of a couple of hedgebanks. This ultimately led to some taxonomic work, resulting in the synonymy of *W. multicapsularis* under *Tortula acaulon* (*Phascum cuspidatum*) and the creation of the new name *Weissia wilsonii*, which encompassed plants previously often named as *W. multicapsularis* (Callaghan *et al.*, 2019; Fig. 1). Part of this work also included an illustrated key to *Weissia* subgenus *Astomum* in Europe, which helps to clarify the identification features of species within the group. It was apparent at the time that *W. wilsonii* may be more frequent than previously suspected, though there was no thorough review of herbarium specimens to try to uncover material that may occur in packets labelled as anything other than *W. multicapsularis*.

As part of the work I am undertaking for the new Red List of bryophytes in Britain, I took

◀ Figure 1. *Weissia wilsonii* from Greeb Point, Cornwall.
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Table 1. Specimens from BBSUK and NMW of *Weissia wilsonii* which were in packets labelled as *Weissia longifolia* var. *longifolia*.

Vice-county	Locality	Grid ref.	Date	Habitat	Coll.	Accession no.
North Somerset (6)	Butleigh	ST53	12 November 1965	Edge of field	J. Appleyard	C.2001.019.453
North Somerset (6)	Wincanton, near	ST62	8 October 1969	Stubble field	J. Appleyard	C89.19.1813
Berkshire (22)	Tubney, Black Gate Lane	SU4398	18 November 1945	Field	Unknown	C96.19.839
Glamorgan (41)	Coed Cadwgan [Cefn Mably Woods]	ST208844	February 1981	Made ground, clay, edge of woodland	G.W. Garlick	C88.29.1212
Pembrokeshire (45)	Harmeston Cross, Johnston	SM924095	4 January 2003	Cereal stubble field	S.D.S. Bosanquet	C.2004.007.334
Pembrokeshire (45)	Pen-y-holt Down, Castlemartin	SR89772 95518	2 December 2007	Damp track across heathland	S.D.S. Bosanquet	C.2010.034.186
Caernarvonshire (49)	Treborth Botanic Garden	SH552711	20 November 1975	Infrequently dug rose bed	J.G. Duckett	C.2001.019.431, C.2010.030.2595

the opportunity to try to determine how under-recorded *W. wilsonii* may be. I obtained on loan from BBSUK and NMW all vouchers labelled as *Weissia longifolia* var. *longifolia*, excluding those that I had seen previously. Duplicate collections aside, this amounted to 38 specimens. Inspection of these showed that one could not be determined, since only sterile material was present, another one contained *Weissia angustifolia*, and 28 were correctly identified as *W. longifolia*. A total of seven (18%) proved to be *W. wilsonii*, for which the details are provided in Table 1. All collection localities are previously unknown sites for *W. wilsonii* and include both historic and recent finds. Its occurrence in a rose bed at Treborth Botanic Garden, collected from there by Jeff Duckett, is perhaps not unexpected given it has been found previously among planted shrubs beside a road in Pembrokeshire by Sam Bosanquet (Callaghan *et al.*, 2019).

The evidence to date suggests that *W. wilsonii* is not a Nationally Rare species and that a significant portion of records assigned to *W. longifolia* var. *longifolia* will instead have been this species. Whether it is genuinely scarce or not remains to be seen. Hopefully this note will help to bring it to the attention of bryologists and improve the detection of this plant. Diligent searching of circum-neutral stubble fields in winter may offer a good chance of success.

References

- Callaghan, D.A., Bell, N.E. & Forrest, L.L. (2019). Taxonomic notes on *Weissia* subgenus *Astomum*, including *Weissia wilsonii* DA Callaghan, a new species from Europe. *Journal of Bryology* 41: 135–148.

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