

**SMOOTH RUPTUREWORT *HERNIARIA GLABRA*
ON THE SEFTON COAST, MERSEYSIDE**

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Herniaria glabra (Smooth Rupturewort) is a nationally rare, prostrate annual or short-lived perennial which is recorded as native in 11 eastern England hectads and as a casual in 23 hectads in England, Wales and Scotland (Preston *et al.* 2002). It was discovered on the Sefton Coast (v.c. 59, South Lancashire) by P.S. Gateley in 1988 growing on a road verge at Kenilworth Road, Ainsdale (SD 306123) and by D.H. Wrench on a similar verge at Westcliffe Road, Southport (SD 324162) in 1998.

The plant's habitat here is lightly-mown, grassy, road verges with occasional bare, sandy patches. Soils appear to be at least partly decalcified and somewhat compacted. The adjacent housing estate at Kenilworth Road was built on sand-dunes in the late 1960s and early 1970s and the road verges seem to have been only lightly top-soiled. There is a diverse fixed-dune community of associated vascular plants, a total of 57 taxa having been recorded for the Kenilworth Road site in 1999 (Table 1).

Patches of *H. glabra* at both sites were mapped by eye on large-scale Ordnance Survey maps in early summer 1999 and 2004. The plant is easy to see at this time of year, as its bright yellow-green colour contrasts with the rather droughted mown grass sward. In both years, most patches were found near the edges of verges where bare areas are more frequent due to human trampling and the effects of the mowing machinery.

The patches of Smooth Rupturewort were generally small, less than 30cm in diameter but a few, especially in 2004, were much larger, up to a maximum of about 2m².

A comparison of patch number over the two years is shown in Table 2. At both sites, the number of patches more than doubled in five years, indicating that the current management regime is beneficial for this species. These data have been incorporated into the Sefton Coast GIS.

The origin of *H. glabra* on this coast is not difficult to deduce. Its use for carpet bedding in gardens from the late 19th century onwards is described by Grant (2003). He states that it is grown from seed at Wisley each year and that seed is currently offered for sale. The many large gardens in Ainsdale and Southport offer a likely source of propagules which could be spread by the Council's mowing equipment.

Acknowledgements

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References

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Table 1. Frequency (DAFOR scale) of vascular taxa associated with *Herniaria glabra* at Ainsdale.

<i>Agrostis capillaris</i>	f	<i>Myosotis ramosissima</i>	r
<i>Aira caryophyllea</i>	la	<i>Oenothera sp.</i>	o
<i>A. praecox</i>	o	<i>Ononis repens</i>	vlf
<i>Ammophila arenaria</i>	vlf	<i>Phleum pratense</i>	r
<i>Anthoxanthum odoratum</i>	o	<i>Plantago coronopus</i>	f
<i>Anthyllis vulneraria</i>	o	<i>P. lanceolata</i>	o
<i>Aphanes arvensis</i>	la	<i>Poa annua</i>	f
<i>Arabidopsis thaliana</i>	o	<i>P. humilis</i>	lf
<i>Arenaria serpyllifolia</i>	r	<i>Populus alba</i>	r
<i>Bellis perennis</i>	o	<i>Ranunculus bulbosus</i>	o
<i>Bromus hordeaceus</i>	la	<i>Rumex acetosella</i>	lf
<i>Capsella bursa-pastoris</i>	r	<i>Sagina sp.</i>	r
<i>Cerastium fontanum</i>	r	<i>Sedum album</i>	vlf
<i>C. glomeratum</i>	o	<i>S. acre</i>	f
<i>C. semidecandrum</i>	f	<i>Senecio jacobaea</i>	o
<i>Cochlearia danica</i>	lf	<i>Sisymbrium officinale</i>	vlf
<i>Crepis capillaris</i>	lf	<i>Sonchus oleraceus</i>	r
<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>	o	<i>Taraxacum sect. Erythrosperma</i>	o
<i>Diplotaxis muralis</i>	r	<i>T. sect. Ruderalia</i>	f
<i>Equisetum arvense</i>	r	<i>Trifolium arvense</i>	o
<i>Erodium cicutarium</i>	o	<i>T. campestre</i>	r
<i>Erophila verna</i>	f	<i>T. dubium</i>	f
<i>Festuca ovina</i>	f	<i>T. repens</i>	f
<i>F. rubra</i>	a	<i>Veronica arvensis</i>	o
<i>Geranium molle</i>	f	<i>Vicia lathyroides</i>	o
<i>Hypochaeris radicata</i>	f	<i>V. sativa</i>	r
<i>Leontodon saxatile</i>	o	<i>Viola x wittrockiana</i>	r
<i>Leymus arenarius</i>	lo	<i>Vulpia fasciculata</i>	lf
<i>Lolium perenne</i>	o		

Table 2. The number of patches of *H. glabra* at two sites on the Sefton coast in 1999 and 2004.

Site	No. of patches		% increase
	1999	2004	
Kenilworth Road, Ainsdale	71	150	111
Westcliffe Road, Southport	5	12	140