

Scottish Bramble Project

The death of *Rubus referee* David Welch earlier this year and of George Ballantyne two years before has provoked the bramble community to redouble efforts to promote interest in these plants among botanists in Scotland

1. An illustrated **Handbook of Scottish Brambles** is in preparation with guidance on identification, photos and distribution maps, a key to field ID, notes on the history of bramble studies in Scotland, dispersal and distribution, ecology, nomenclature, glossary and bibliography, etc.

Sample pages from the species accounts

We have just over 50 species in Scotland

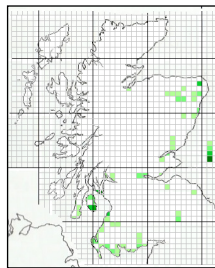
“enough to be interesting without being daunting”

David Welch

Target publication: April 2025

Rubus ulmifolius Schott

This is an easy species to identify from the combination of strong, often distoid prickles, absence of stalked glands from both stem and inflorescence, abundant pink flowers often long racemes and leaflets white-felted beneath. Our only other species with similarly white under-leaves is the cultivar *R. procerus* or *armeniacus*, sometimes called Himalayan Giant, though it has no association with that region (See p.xx). That species is mainly an occupant of urban waste-ground, and looks rather like a giant *polyanthemus*, so is not likely to be confused with *ulmifolius*. Another species whose leaves are often very pale underneath and sometimes similar in form is *dumoniensis*, which also has a smooth stem with strong prickles, but they are more slender than those of *ulmifolius* and the stem is much darker and the flowers always white. The stem of *ulmifolius* can vary from being almost glabrous to



quite well-covered with short hairs. The leaves are pedate and the leaflets rather small, often convex but rather variable in shape and serration. Petals may occasionally be white, as shown in the lower right photo. The fruits are quite small, but are said to be of good flavour and suitable for jam-making.

This is the only British bramble capable of sexual reproduction, or hybridisation with apomorphic species, though the latter is a rare occurrence in Scotland. It is not a common species here, the main Scottish populations being coastal in the south-west, though some, not necessarily established bushes occur in eastern areas, the records indicating localities where batologists have been most active. It is general on lower ground in England and Wales south of a line from Furness to Teesside, where it is often the best-fruited variety readily available in the hedgerows, but is more local in Ireland. On the continent it is widespread from the Netherlands to the western Alps and south to Italy and Spain, and it extends into north-west Africa.

R. ulmifolius likes to grow on south facing slopes near the sea, though whether it actually seeks summer warmth or winter mildness is not certain. I think the latter more likely, since higher summer temperatures are found inland, but milder winter ones on the south-west coasts where it is mainly found, growing on the raised beaches and fossil scarps. It is said to favour calcareous soils, and this seems to be borne out by its distribution in Scotland, where it grows mainly on basaltic or other relatively lime-rich rocks. One of the few brambles resistant to grazing on account of its defensive armature, it can prosper as well as blackthorn on slopes carrying stock, and is evidently tolerant of salt-laden winds.

Among the earliest brambles to be recognised as a distinct species, *ulmifolius* was named in 1818 by Schott, who knew it on the rocks of Gibraltar and in coastal thickets in Spain. It must have been named for one of the smaller-leaved elm species, certainly not for our wych elm, which its leaflets could not be thought to resemble.

Elm-leaved bramble

Series Discolores



2. We are setting up an **accessible reference library of photos** illustrating the characters needed for identification of all Scottish species

3. We are appealing to everyone to **send bramble photos for identification**

A set of 4 or 5 photos is usually enough for successful ID

You get a good record and the photos join the library to help others

We all gain a better understanding of bramble distribution

Please send photos as email attachments or share in Dropbox to Angus Hannah

butesedge@yahoo.co.uk

Angus says:

I ran a very successful pilot in vc72 this year with Chris Miles, which resulted in more than 100 new localised bramble species records for Dumfriesshire, where previous records were only hectad level other than for *R. fruticosus* aggregate.