

# First record of Rustyback Fern, Isle of Colonsay (VC 102)

Rustyback Fern (*Asplenium ceterach*) has been recorded for the first time from the Isle of Colonsay (VC 102), by Kevin Byrne



*A. ceterach* (Kevin Byrne)

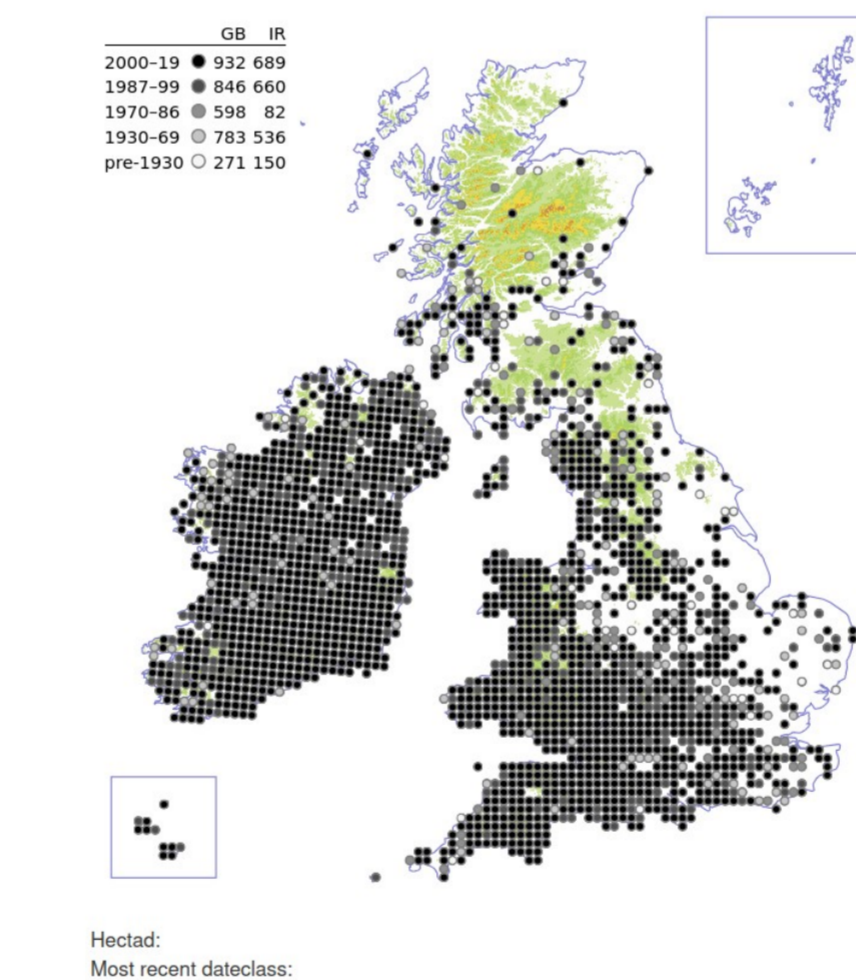
'A single specimen was found. It was located in a heap of barren limestone rock which was deposited in that position some twenty years ago. The rock had been "pecked" from the proposed location of a housing development. The rock was quite hard and fringed one of the few major limestone outcrops in Colonsay. Further searches will be made along the outcrop to see if more specimens are growing' (Kevin Byrne).



*A. ceterach* (Kevin Byrne)



Location of Colonsay in the Inner Hebrides



UK distribution of *A.ceterach* <sup>2</sup>

Rustyback is a perennial fern, which thrives on lime and grows often on crags of basic rocks. It also benefits from lime mortar in walls and therefore is found in the built environment. The sori are covered by a thick layer of scales, which are whitish at first, turning rust-coloured as the season progresses. Eventually the sporangia push through the scales to release their spores. It is desiccation tolerant <sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Merryweather, J. (2020) Britain's Ferns. PUP, Princeton, p. 168

<sup>2</sup> Stroh, P. et al. (2020) Plant Atlas. PUP, Princeton, p. 64



# *Hypolepis ambigua* is on the move!

The first UK record of *Hypolepis ambigua*, the New Zealand common Pig Fern was made on the Isle of Bute (VC 100) by Angus Hannah in 2016<sup>1</sup>. It is thought to have been there, undiscovered, for many years. Now there is a new record in Saddell Glen on the Kintyre peninsula (VC 101), made by the late Mary Gibby.



*H. ambigua* frond (Mary Gibby)



Probable *H. ambigua* sori (Ben Mitchell)



Location of the new *H. ambigua* site, Kintyre peninsula

It is thought that the original colonies on Bute may have derived from plant material imported from New Zealand many years ago. As *H. ambigua* has spread quite widely across Bute it clearly benefits from its mild, moist climate and acidic soils. The harvesting of plantation forests creates disturbance and a ready supply of open ground for the germination of spores. As it is wintergreen, it may be able to out compete bracken<sup>1</sup>.

Recently, another, as yet unverified, *H. ambigua* colony was found near Tighnabruaich, (VC 98), by the naturalist Ben Mitchell (personal communication). The site is on the mainland just to the west of Bute. The site at Saddell Glen is much further from Bute, and suggests that this species may have spread to other locations in the west of Scotland.

In its native New Zealand, *H. ambigua* is a fern of lower montane and coastal areas. It is a 'weedy' species, spreading in disturbed sites, such as forest clearings and margins, and of open grassland. It is also known to colonise urban areas and can become troublesome.

If you are visiting south-west Scotland, keep a look out for this distinctive fern, which superficially looks like bracken

<sup>1</sup> Hannah, A. (2017) Discovery of the New Zealand endemic *Hypolepis ambigua* (Pig Fern) growing wild in Scotland. New Zealand Botanical Newsletter, 127, p. 12-14

