

THE BIG STICKY CATCHFLY SURVEY

DUMYAT, OCHILS, STIRLING, 2024

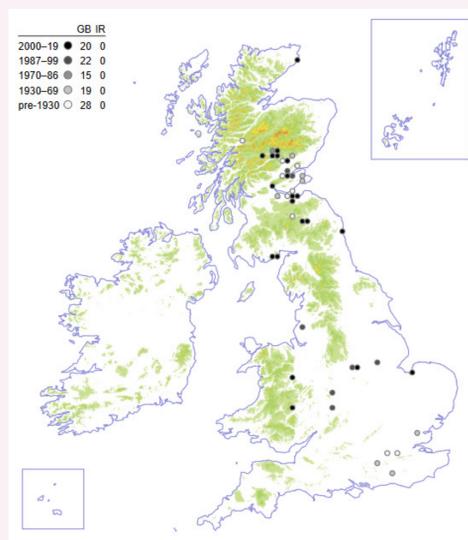
Background:

Sticky catchfly, *Silene viscaria*, is one of Scotland's rarest flowers, being mainly found on the inaccessible parts of south-facing cliffs, on largely basic igneous rocks, such as at Arthur's Seat, Edinburgh. It has declined over much of its range in the UK, with Sexton (2016) concluding that the colonies in Stirling and Clackmannanshire ('the Hillfoots') were likely the most important interbreeding meta-populations of the species in Britain now.

In 2013, a detailed survey of the Hillfoots for Sticky catchfly was led by Stuart Bence and Lorna Blackmore. This survey estimated that almost 4000 flowers were present, almost all growing on the steep Dumyat cliffs above Blairlogie. However, overgrazing by sheep and gorse encroachment threatened its conservation.

In 2024, the Future Forest Company Ltd (FFC), who have managed the Dumyat site since 2021, led and co-ordinated a repeat of the '2013 survey' in order to assess the current status of Sticky catchfly populations at Dumyat. This survey owes a big thanks to volunteers from the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI), TCV Scotland (Identiplant students), Butterfly Conservation, National Trust for Scotland and University of Edinburgh, who helped count plants.

Sticky Catchfly Population in the UK
(The Plant Atlas 2020; with permission from BSBI)



Dumyat Location Map

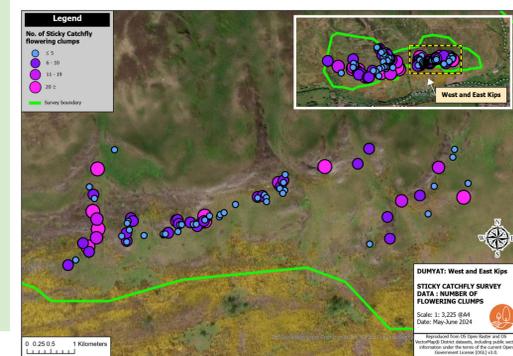
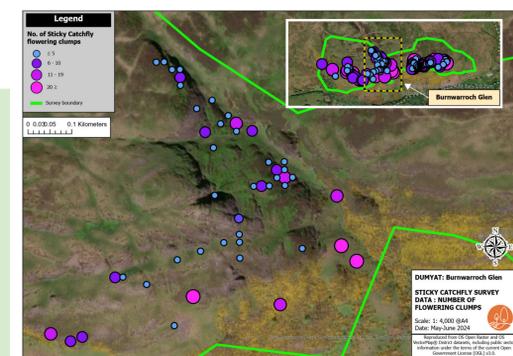
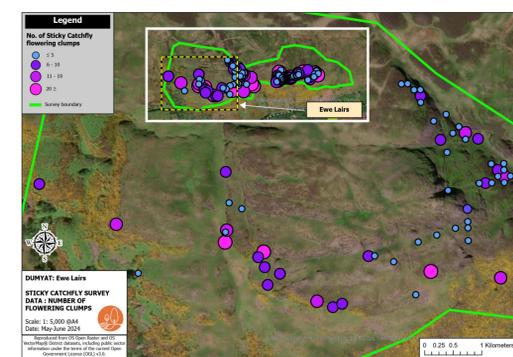
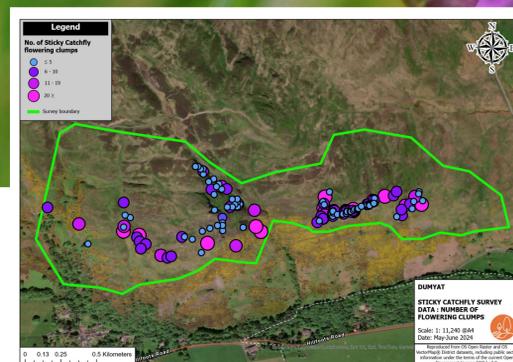


Results and Discussion:

The main survey took place on the 25th May 2024 with further surveys carried out by Lindsay Mackinlay (FFC) on 31st May and 5th June 2024 in order to cover gaps in coverage after the main survey.

The survey counted an estimated minimum of 2000 plants and 10,000 flowering stems of Sticky catchfly. This does not include several flowering plants spotted in highly inaccessible crags below the main survey area, and many non-flowering plants which were difficult to detect from a distance. This represents almost a trebling of the plant population since 2013. Many flowering plants were found in grassland at the base of, and below, crags for the first time.

This current spread in plants is considered mainly due to FFC management with all sheep being taken off the land 3 years ago and a significant reduction in the previous large roe deer population around the crags; both species like to browse the flowering stems and plants. It was estimated that only 10% of the current plants showed signs of browsing. However, there remains continued threats from gorse encroachment, (associated) fire and climate change. FFC will be monitoring the species, via sub-sampling, over the next few years in order to inform management decision-making.



References:

- Bence, S. & Blackmore, L. (2016): 'Sticky Catchfly, *Silene viscaria*'; Plant Report 2016; Forth Naturalist and Historian, Volume 39, pp.117-121
- Sexton, R. (2016): 'How Important are the Hillfoots' Populations of Sticky Catchfly (*Silene viscaria*) in a UK context?'; Plant Report 2016 Part 2; Forth Naturalist and Historian, Volume 39, pp.123-128



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