

## **PRESS RELEASE:**

**5 May 2016 – for immediate release**

### **Rare plant appears on Surrey Heathland**

A rare, tiny and unassuming plant known as Shepherd's Cress (*Teesdalia nudicaulis*) has been discovered on Thursley National Nature Reserve in Surrey.

Similar in appearance to its common relative, Shepherd's Purse, Shepherd's Cress is classified as Near Threatened and close to imminent threat of extinction. An annual plant of bare and sandy places usually associated with lowland heath, coastal sites, arable margins, mountain scree and disused railway lines, its widespread UK distribution belies the fact that it is undergoing declines across its range. Most colonies are small and isolated and its short-lived seed bank makes it vulnerable to extinction if sites become unsuitable, usually due to competition by more vigorous plants or urbanisation.

James Giles, Reserve Manager for Natural England at Thursley National Nature Reserve said: "I stumbled across the colony by chance while undertaking an invertebrate survey, and immediately told Graham Steven (Natural England Land Management Adviser) who was tickled pink. He's been hoping to find the plant at Thursley for years!"

Graham Steven said: "Shepherd's Cress is very rare in Surrey and Hampshire, so I was over the moon when I heard of James' discovery! The habitat at Thursley is ideal for the plant, but this is the first time it has ever been recorded here. I visited the site to confirm its identity and determine the size of the population. It looks as though it's confined to a single site at present, even though there is suitable habitat elsewhere."

"I also spotted other more widespread plants which were also making their first appearance at Thursley, such as small mouse-ear and spreading meadow grass. The discovery reflects well on the land management at the Nature Reserve. Now we know they're there, we will do what we can to help ensure the population thrives."

Dr Pete Stroh, Scientific Officer at the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI) said:

"Shepherd's Cress is a lovely white-flowered crucifer of sandy soils that requires periodic small-scale disturbance, bare open ground and lots of sunlight for seedling germination and establishment. Such conditions are, handily, often created by rabbits. The spread of myxomatosis in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was bad news for such a small, ephemeral species. Such is the current fate for many of our threatened and near threatened grassland plants, this time due to a lack of cutting or livestock grazing in particular, resulting in rank species-poor grassland and the invasion of scrub. In this context it's really great to hear of a new location for a wildflower that has experienced such tough times in the recent past."

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**Notes for Editors**

**For further information:**

**IMAGE ATTACHED. FURTHER IMAGES AVAILABLE ON REQUEST.**

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### **About Shepherd's Cress (*Teesdalia nudicaulis*)**

Shepherd's Cress is a native, low-growing, winter annual herb, growing up to 25cm. The flowers have pom-pom like flower heads with individual flowers a tiny 2mm across. Leaves are arranged in a basal rosette. It goes to seed very quickly – by late May there is no trace of its existence! It's a plant of free-draining, periodically disturbed shallow gravelly or acid soils typically associated with rabbit-scraped heath grassland, dune systems and sandy shorelines, arable margins and mountain screes. Its requirements make it quite localised and at risk from scrub invasion, afforestation or urbanisation.

For more information on changes in the distribution of *Teesdalia nudicaulis*, see the [BSBI species distribution map](#).

### **The Red Data List for England**

*Teesdalia nudicaulis* is classified as Near Threatened on the England Red List. The Red Data List for England is available for [downloading](#) on BSBI's website. It assesses, for the first time, the current state of England's flora measured against standardised IUCN criteria. Top findings of the England Red List show that a fifth of England's wildflower species are under threat, with the majority of these threatened species suffering a decline of 30% or more.

### **About the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI)**

The Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI) has supported the study, understanding and enjoyment of wild flowers in Britain & Ireland since 1836. We record and map what grows where and use this knowledge to assist in the conservation of our wild plants. BSBI's research, training and outreach programmes benefit professional and amateur botanists at all skill levels.

For more information see: <http://bsbi.org/>

### **About Natural England**

Natural England is the government's advisor on the natural environment. Established in 2006, our work is focused on enhancing England's wildlife and landscapes and maximising the benefits they bring to the public.

For more information see <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england> or follow us on twitter @[NEThamesValley](#)