

The Flora of Staffordshire, 2011.

Update No. 6 (February, 2018).

In the index entry on **p. 417** for “*Ulex minor* 244, 248” , “248” should be deleted.

Hieracium acuminatum (**p. 332**) was previously thought to be widespread in Britain. In the later stages of the preparation of the “Flora of Staffordshire”, following publication of volume 4 of Sell & Murrell’s “Flora of Great Britain and Ireland” and consultation with David McCosh, it became apparent that this was not the case: it is largely restricted to S. Wales. Our plants were likely to be either *H. consociatum* or *H. argillaceum*.

The vast key in Sell & Murrell is difficult to use and separates them by means of leaf shape and length of involucral bracts. Bill Thompson (often in Worcs. and Yorks.) and Vincent Jones (often in Yorks.) have done much work on them and, from their writings, the following seems a much more straightforward key:

Hieracium consociatum: some teeth on basal leaves > 6mm; teeth on upper stem leaves >6mm (up to 10mm); basal leaves 4 to 5 cm wide;

H. argillaceum: teeth on basal leaves < 6mm; teeth on upper stem leaves < 6mm; basal leaves up to 4cm wide. It is a less robust plant.

These characters can be clearly seen in the photographs on pages 134 & 135 of Vincent's superlative “Yorkshire Hawkweeds”.

In **Update No. 5**, Ian Hopkins wrote of a second-hand report of *Colchicum autumnale* (**p. 384**) of c. early- to mid-2000s from a former student whose mother may have seen it, once, apparently whilst “pony trekking” (whether she was actually on horseback, or on footholding the horse’s bridle for another rider was not made clear), at the margin of a wood in the Longdon area. Ian suggested that this could have been at Georges Hayes/Piggots Bottom.

This original report was of course second-hand and vague. He was assured that the plant certainly was not the pink, late summer-autumn flowering *Cyclamen hederifolium*, and that it was found somewhat to the south of Upper Longdon. There is plenty of woodland to the west of Upper Longdon, but to the south lie only lanes (albeit sometimes with tall hedges) and eventually the woods Georges Hayes and Piggots Bottom. Given that there are riding schools in that general area, the supposition was his that this was perhaps the area concerned. It seems to have proved so!

In 2016 he was in that area, and along the surrounding lanes looking at colonies of Wild Daffodils. He decided to keep a look out for any *Colchicum* leaves, as they can be often be easier to detect than the flowers (He knows of a wood in Worcestershire (Trench Wood, about 6 miles NE of Worcester) where leaves of *Colchicum autumnale* are quite frequently to be found in spring in many parts, yet flowering later in the year is only obvious at one spot at the edge of one particular ride where the local management team deliberately cut back and clear an area in mid-summer specifically to encourage flowering. What he actually found was rather interesting:-

Bardy Lane, SK0614, a single clump of *Colchicum* leaves on the grassy verge on the eastern side of Bardy Lane. The leaves were definitely larger and more developed than those of the plants described below, although this could simply be due to the lack of shading. The aspect is fairly open and the only competing vegetation would be various grasses, although the verges of this lane have in the past

certainly been subject to mowing operations at least once in the year.

Georges Hayes, SK0613. It rather looks as if a rough path is in the process of being created by a person or persons accessing the wood directly from Bardy Lane at a point where there is no fencing, rather than from the usual car parking spot further south. Two small, trampled clumps of *Colchicum* were present, with four other clumps nearby on top of a bank, mostly likely to be quite heavily shaded when the leaves of the trees and scrub expand.

He supposes flowers seen at either location might go some way to explaining that sighting of some years ago. Obviously the exact identity of these *Colchicum* plants is unknown given the obvious absence of flowers. All he can suggest is that they are not species or hybrids characterised by leaves which have a somewhat "pleated" appearance. It should be noted that there have been various introductions of plants in the Georges Hayes reserve in earlier years.

"*C. autumnale*" is certainly listed in many bulb catalogues, but it is rarely grown now in gardens: it doesn't flower freely enough! Most garden *Colchicums* are now of various hybrids, or forms of *C. cilicicum* or *C. speciosum*.

There is a very detailed, informative and fascinating illustrated article by John Winterton entitled "'This vegetable and unparalleled wonder': Johnson's Willow" in the "Johnson Society Transactions, 2017". Dr. Samuel Johnson was extremely interested in this very large specimen of *Salix x fragilis* (p.173), growing on the west bank of Stowe Pool, Lichfield, in the 1780s. It is thought that it was planted c. 1700. It had grown to a height of thirty-nine feet in 1785.

Unsurprisingly, for this brittle-branched species, it was gradually destroyed by high winds during the first thirty years of the nineteenth century. One of the "pea-sticks" taken from a fallen limb was found to have taken root in a nearby garden and was transplanted on to the original site, in 1830. It, too, was felled in the same way in 1881. Cuttings from it were eventually established as the Third Willow. It remained there until 1956, when it became unsafe and was felled. A further cutting developed into the Fourth Willow which, sadly, had to be diminished in size, by pollarding, in 2014 and 2016, to meet modern safety standards.