TARAXACUM SECTION ERYTHROSPERMA

Section *Erythrosperma* species are largely restricted to well-drained, often shallow soils in habitats such as short chalk and limestone grassland, sand-dune grasslands, cliff-tops and sandy or gravelly heaths. Some species can also occur in man-made habitats such as wall-tops, gravelly tracks, lawns or well-drained road-banks. Most species are small and delicate, so are poor competitors and rarely behave as ruderals or weeds.

In the British Isles, the abundance and diversity of *Erythrosperma* species tends to be greatest in south-east England and lowest in the North-west, although they probably occur in every vice-county, and the dunes and limestones of e.g. The Burren or Sutherland boast several species.

Thirty-two Erythrosperma species are recorded from the British Isles. Of these, six are endemic, and four (*T. pseudoproximum*, *T. pseudolacistophyllum*, *T. falcatum* and *T. disseminatum*) are rare adventives with only a handful of British or Irish records and are not treated here. *Taraxacum placidum*, only known from Alderney in our Islands is also omitted as is *T. cenabense* of uncertain status.

The centre of diversity of the section is south-central Europe, where in thermophilous grasslands apomicts (triploid and tetraploid) coexist with sexual diploid populations (collectively known as *T. erythrospermum*) in a confusion of forms which are probably still generating new apomictic hybrid entities. *Taraxacum. erythrospermum* has twice been recorded as a British adventive, but not in last 40 years. Apomictic species range eastwards to Turkey and south to Andalucía.

Section *Erythrosperma* species are:

- Small and delicate with highly dissected leaves.
- Exterior bracts are <9 mm long, usually <7 mm.
- The open capitulum is usually <30 mm in diameter, often less.
- Many species lack pollen and/or have yellow styles.
- Only one species (*T. inopinatum*) has spotted leaves.
- Achenes are frequently reddish to dark purple in colour and the cone (coloured section connecting achene body with rostrum) is narrowly cylindrical (lens).

On northern sand-dunes, *Erythrosperma* species, especially *T. haworthianum* (see below), can be confused with our two Section Obliqua species which have greyish achenes with a short conical cone.
1a. Species lacking pollen (check stigmas with a lens) or only a few grains present (2a-2b) (for lead 1b see page 5)

2a. Ligules partly in-rolled, pointed, reddish at tip; capitulum rarely opening fully  

T. argutum

2b. Ligules flat, square-ended, capitula opening fully in good light (3a-3b)

3a. Leaves spotted and blotched (uniquely in this section), achenes dark red. Atlantic Britain.  

T. inopinatum

3b. Leaves not spotted, rarely blotched on interlobes, achenes rarely dark red (4a-4b)
4a. Leaf-lobes >6 in number on each side, poorly differentiated; leaf semi-prostrate, narrowly oblong; ligule with dark teeth. Dry grasslands, lawns, mostly southern

T. glauciniforme

4b. Leaf-lobes <6 in number on each side (5a-5b)

5a. Exterior bracts <5.5 mm long, erect; achenes dark red to violet-purple when ripe (6a-6b)

6a. Scape completely glabrous, even at apex (lens); ligule teeth dark

T. rubicundum

6b. Scape slightly pubescent when young; ligule teeth yellow

T. parnassicum
5b. Exterior bracts >5.5 mm, recurved to spreading; achenes brown to cinnamon (7a-7b)

7a. At least the lower (outer) exterior bracts reflexed; ligule teeth yellow

T. fulvum

7b. Outermost exterior bracts spreading to somewhat recurved; ligule teeth usually darker than ligule

8a. Exterior bracts spreading, heavily pruinose, bordered, <3 x long as broad, achenes dark brown when ripe

T. proximum

8b. Exterior bracts scarcely pruinose, dark green below, achenes straw-coloured to pale brown

9a. Ligule stripes brown, teeth reddish; styles discoloured; achene body 3.0 mm. Widespread.

T. fulviforme
9b. Ligule striped grey-violet, teeth dark; styles yellow when fresh and dry; achene body 3.5 mm. Orkney and Outer Hebrides

T. tanylepis

1b. Pollen present, usually abundant (10a-10b)

10a. Lateral leaf-lobes narrowly linear, expanded or even forked near the apex. Sand-dunes, scarce (11a-11b).

11a. Capitulum > 30 mm in diameter when fully open; achene body dark red, 3.5 mm  T. commixtum

11b. Capitulum < 30 mm in diameter when fully open; achene body dark purple, <3.0 mm  T. dunense
10b. If lateral leaf-lobes linear, then not expanded at apex (12a-12b)

12a. Styles yellow, same colour as ligules in fresh and dried condition; leaves narrowly lanceolate, muttilobate; exterior bracts <7 mm, ovate, pale-bordered. Northern dunes.

13a. Ligule stripe reddish; ripe achenes dark purple

(T. gotlandicum, which has been recorded from a single location on inland limestone in north-east Scotland is similar but with dark red achenes)

13b. Ligule stripe pale silver-grey, or absent; ripe achenes dark red

(T. limbatum)

12b. Styles discoloured, darker than ligules in fresh and dried condition; leaves various but usually oblanceolate in outline, deeply dissected into 3-5 lobes. Includes widespread and common species
14a. Ligules short, striped purple, scarcely exceeding inner bracts; exterior bracts recurved, suffused purple at least at apex. Widespread, dunes, heaths  

*T. brachyglossum*

14b. Ligules ±twice length of exterior bracts; exterior bracts erect to recurved, not purplish above (15a-15b)

15a. Distal margin of lateral leaf-lobes expanded at the base; exterior bracts spreading, recurved at the apex, pruinose (16a-16b)

16a. Leaves highly contorted; styles dark yellow, drying blackish; ligule stripes purple-brown; mature achenes pale brown. Sand-dunes in the south-east, rare.  

*T. tortilobum*

16b. Leaves crisped at interlobes but not contorted; styles dark yellow, drying discoloured; ligule stripes pinkish-grey; mature achenes chestnut-red. Widespread and frequent  

*T. lacistophyllum*
15b. Distal margin of lateral leaf-lobes not expanded at base; exterior bracts rarely strongly pruinose (17a-17b)

17a. Petioles narrow, unwinged, brilliant vinous-purple below; outer exterior bracts rounded-cordate at base, conspicuously bordered; ligule stripes grey-brown (widespread and common) **T. oxoniense**

17b. Petioles otherwise; ligule stripes not grey-brown (18a-18b)

18a. Exterior bracts with a conspicuous white or rose-coloured border, but not ovate-cordate at base; ligule teeth yellow (19a-19b)

19a. Exterior bracts narrow, recurved; petioles white **T. wallonicum**

19b. Exterior bracts erect to spreading; petioles suffused purple (20a-20b)

20a. Lateral leaf-lobes arcuate-recurved; exterior bracts erect; achenes dark red when mature. Mostly sand-dunes **T. arenastrum**
Plant Crib 3

20b. Lateral leaf-lobes narrowly triangular; exterior bracts recurved distally; achenes grey-brown when mature. South-west and Ireland

18b. Exterior bracts unbordered or nearly so; ligule teeth often coloured darker than ligule; petioles various (21a-21b)

21a. Styles yellow in fresh and dried conditions; exterior bracts ovate, spreading, pruinose

21b. Styles discoloured at least when dry; exterior bracts lanceolate, recurved (22a-22b)

22a. Ligules striped dark purple; apex of inner ligules red; interlobes suffused blackish. Widespread, but uncommon

T. degelii

T. proximiforme

T. scoticum
22b. Ligules with paler stripes; interlobes green (localised and rare in southern England) (23a-23b)

23a. Involucres narrow, cone-like; exterior bracts narrowly lanceolate, spreading distally; petioles green. Rare, heathy grassland, S. England

T. retzii

23b. Exterior bracts recurved at apex; petioles purplish (24a-24b)

24a. Terminal lobe linear, sometimes expanded at apex, bearing a single pair of basal lobules; ligule stripes pale reddish; achenes chestnut when ripe. Breckland

T. scanicum

24b. Terminal lobe sagittate, acute, scarcely dentate; ligule stripes grey-violet; achenes pale brown. Chalk grassland, southern England

T. acutum