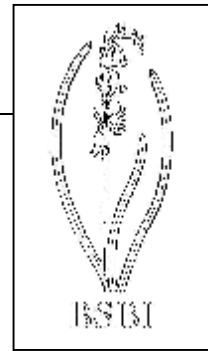


Plant Crib



ULEX

Ulex minor is often confused with *U. gallii*. Both are very plastic, especially in the size of vegetative parts, and show parallel ranges of variation, and the lengths of the calyx and petals provide the most satisfactory characters. Populations of *U. minor* generally have a mean calyx length less than 9 mm and, in low-growing heathland plants, often 8 mm or less. *Ulex gallii* populations usually have a mean calyx length of more than 10 mm and even starved populations on thin soils rarely have a mean calyx length as short as 9 mm (Proctor 1965).

Calyx length scarcely changes between anthesis in late summer and dehiscence of the pods in the summer following, so it a very useful character. Identifications using single measurements are likely to result in 5-10% misidentifications, whilst means of 10 measurements will almost always place a plant unambiguously. *Ulex gallii* is much more frequent in the west, but does occur rarely in the east, and has been under-recorded in northern Scotland. *Ulex minor* is now increasingly being found outside its traditional stronghold of SE England, and could be more widespread still.

The hybrid *U. europaeus* × *U. gallii* sometimes forms swarms but more often occurs as occasional plants where the parents grow together. It is known from SW England to NW Scotland, and in Ireland. It is intermediate mostly obviously in bracteole size, pod length and number of ovules (7-10 ovules; note seeds of *U. europaeus* may be significantly predated by the gorse weevil). It flowers from August to March (maximum in September), and hence a useful field character for picking out potential hybrids is to look for plants continuing to flower profusely through the autumn/early winter. Specimens including flowers or mature fruits should be collected of plants which appear intermediate. No hybrids of *U. minor* are known in Britain.

- 1 Calyx softly 'furry' with dense rather spreading hairs; bracteoles 2-4.2 mm wide, much wider than pedicels; pod (12-)14-17(-19) mm; ovules/developing seeds (9-)10-14(-16); flowering mostly September-June, maximum March-April, (autumn flowers are accompanied by buds) *U. europaeus* L.
- 1 Calyx with inconspicuous, mostly appressed hairs; bracteoles 0.5-1.3 mm wide, not or only slightly wider than pedicels; pod (8-)9-12(-14) mm; ovules/developing seeds (3-)4-6(-7); flowering mostly July-November, maximum August-September (late flowers accompanied by withered flowers) 2
- 2 Mean calyx length 9-13 mm; petals golden yellow; standard 12-17 mm; pollen grains c. 40 µm diameter; spines sharply and stiffly pointed *U. gallii* Planch.
- 2 Mean calyx length 6-9-13 mm; petals lemon yellow; standard 6-12 mm; pollen grains c. 32 µm diameter; weaker plants with less sharp spines *U. minor* Roth.

References Benoit, P. M. (1962). *Proc. BSBI* **4**: 414-415.
Proctor, M. C. F. (1965). *Watsonia* **6**: 177-187.
Proctor, M. C. F. (1967). *Proc. BSBI* **6**: 379-380.

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