

Back from the Brink – Species summary

Yellow Centaury

BftB project: IP01 Dorset's Heathland Heart

Project lead organisation: Plantlife

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| Species name – common & scientific | Yellow Centaury – <i>Cicendia filiformis</i> |
| Photograph |  <p>© Alex Hyde / Back from the Brink</p> |
| Taxon group | Vascular plant - Gentianaceae |
| Conservation status | NERC S.41, GB & England Red List, IUCN Vulnerable, Dorset scarce. |
| UK distribution | Essentially a south-western species largely restricted to heathland areas in Cornwall, Dorset, the New Forest and Pembrokeshire. |
| Habitat associations | Typically found in lowland heathland landscapes in distinct microhabitats such as rutted trackways, damp hollows and the drawdown zone of seasonal pools, where the slightly enriched, clayey mineral soil is exposed. It is also more rarely found along forestry rides, on coastal cliffs and dune slacks. |
| BftB work carried out: | |
| Survey & Monitoring | Monitoring was carried out at four project sites before and after habitat restoration and were continued annually until 2021. Additional one-off surveys were carried out at 4 other locations (where management was not undertaken) during the project period. |

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| Sites habitat management works | <p>1480m of track were restored/created at: Stoborough Heath (2018), Grange Heath (2018-2020), Godlingston Heath (2019), Arne (2019, 2020) using different techniques (tree clearance, gorse cutting, deliberate rutting, scraping) to suit the site. This included obtaining precise historical information on the previous locations of tracks and carrying out innovative management to re-created suitable winter-wet conditions with micro-topographical variation.</p> |
| Technical advice provision | <p>A factsheet was created and disseminated and training provided to RSPB staff. Advice and recommendations for future management were given to NT staff on-site. Advice was given to land managers at two additional (non-project) sites to help safeguard the two other Purbeck populations within Rempstone Forest.</p> |
| Links made with other taxa / conservation work? | <p>A suite of damp, open ground loving species that are also rare or declining are often found growing with Yellow Centaury, including Allseed <i>Linum radiola</i> and Chaffweed <i>Anagallis minima</i>. Surveys were carried out for these species in restored areas (both were recorded). BFTB species Pale Dog Violet <i>Viola lactea</i> was also found to have regenerated at one restoration site, indicating the work to expose seedbanks was effective for more than one heathland species. Yellow Centaury generally requires disturbance and vegetation management, typically through livestock grazing, and the work was carried out in the context of the new Purbeck Heaths NNR, including the joined-up grazing unit which may allow this naturally ephemeral species to disperse more widely.</p> |
| Wider engagement & advocacy activities? | <p>Talks were given to the Dorset Flora Group, the Dorset Environmental Record Centre recorders, Rethink Nature, the 16th European Heathland Workshop, BFTB volunteers, and the Bournemouth Natural Science Society, raising awareness of the species in Dorset, the restoration project and successes to date. A group of volunteers were trained and supported in monitoring the species.</p> |
| BftB results obtained: | |
| Recorded Distribution (in BftB focal areas) | <p>Between 1992 and 2016, Yellow Centaury was recorded from 7 sites in Dorset. In 2017 it was no longer recorded as an above ground flowering plant from 4 of these sites and was present in very small numbers at 3 more. In 2018, 3 new populations were discovered at one site and, following on from highly targeted interventions, the species reappeared from the seedbank at 4 sites.</p> |
| Recorded Abundance of species populations | <p>Before the project, just 7 plants were recorded from project sites. By 2021, over 430 plants were recorded as a result of BFTB management, with at least 50 plants at each site. Two previously unrecorded populations were also found.</p> |
| Species Recovery Curve progress made | <p>1 – 8 Species recovering (<i>mostly</i>). This is a dynamic, early successional species. For full recovery it should be able to move around a connected heathland landscape (see recommendations). (note that the baseline is considered to be an underestimate given experimental and management work already carried out for the species in Dorset and Cornwall plus a monitoring scheme set up by Freshwater Habitats Trust).</p> |

Recommendations for future work:-

Grazing should be maintained at all sites and continued targeted management will be needed in the medium term to support existing populations.

The creation of suitable winter-wet bare ground with topographical variation on acidic sandy or slightly clayey soils (e.g rutted tracks) would potentially allow this intrinsically ephemeral species to move around the Purbeck Heaths landscape and would reduce the risk of repeated interventions depleting the seedbank.

Ongoing monitoring is required in the medium term to assess the longer-term health of the restored populations.

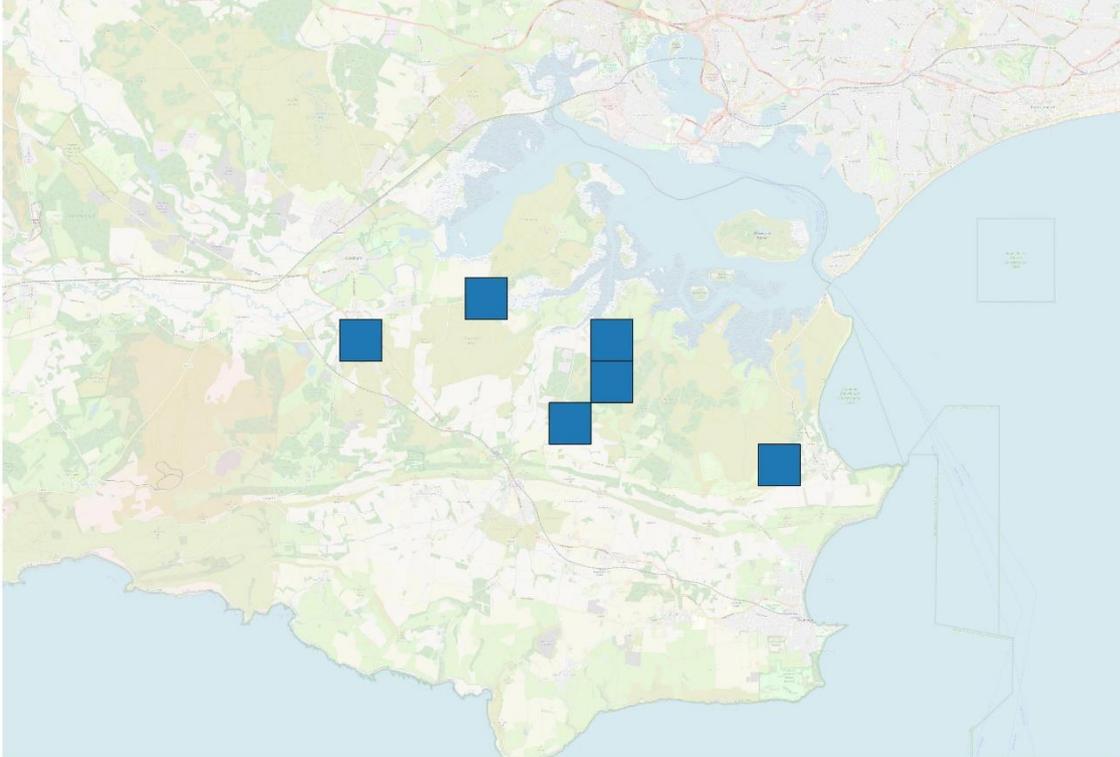


Figure 1: 1km squares supporting Yellow Centaury in the Purbeck Heaths in 2021 (BFTB data)