

Cornfield Flowers Project



Species Cards: non-arable



May lily (*Maianthemum bifolium*)

Vulnerable

A very rare none-arable species that we have helped to conserve in the National Park

The Scarborough site for May lily is regarded as the only native population in the UK

REASONS FOR DECLINE:

Habitat degradation; poor at flowering and setting-seed

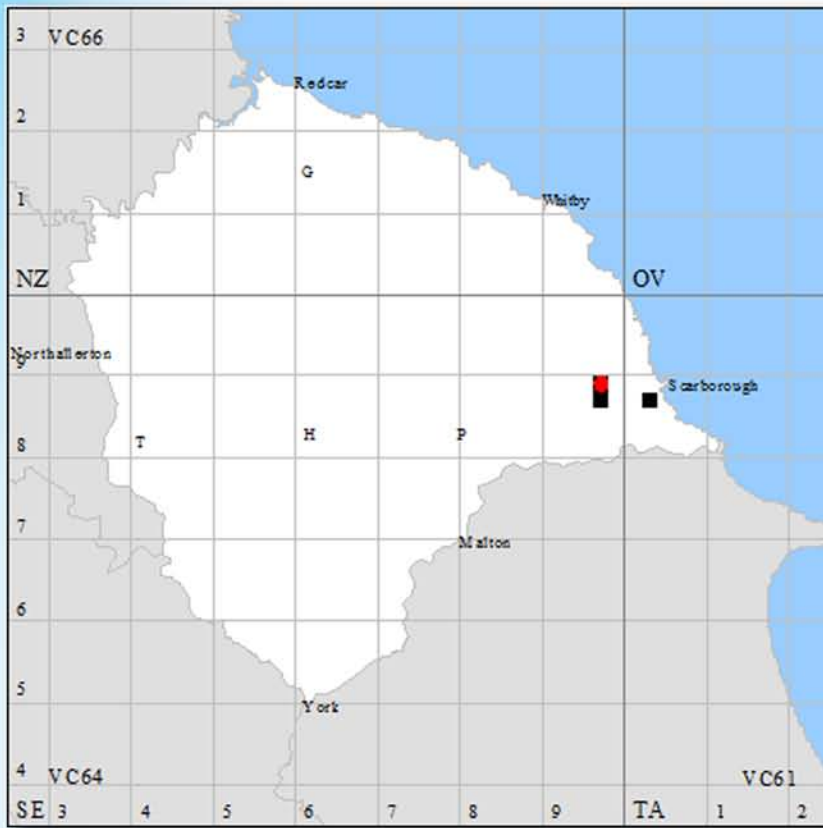
Our May lily experience...

The Natural History of the Scarborough District, published in 1953 by the Scarborough Naturalists, describes May lily as follows: 'Rare at Wrench Green, where since the conifers have been felled the plants are flowering again abundantly, 1947... found in 1857 by Messrs Renolds and Braby, this is the only British station where the plant is clearly indigenous (JGB).' JGB refers to John Gilbert Baker, and if you look him up you will find there can be no higher opinion. No sooner after being discovered though, the Scarborough May lily became a fashionable addition to many a London botanist's garden and was being dug up and carried off.

Harry Hick, who appears to have lived at and farmed Cockrah Bank Farm at Wrench Green most of his life, was born in 1915 and is recorded as stating that when he was a boy the May lily site covered a quarter of an acre. However, he was so concerned about its decline that, together with the botanist Kit Robb, he moved some of the plants to a new site on his own farm.

By the time the Cornfield Flowers Project became involved with the May lily, it had not been seen on its original site for about 14 years. After obtaining permissions from landowner Peter Hutchinson, Forest Enterprise, the National Park and Natural England, we took a small amount of plant material from one of the introduced sites and project officer Chris Wilson and volunteer Pauline Popely began to multiply it in pots. After two years, Chris' material was taken down to Mires Beck Nursery, at North Cave, to try to grow it on a larger scale. In 2013, 17 plants from Pauline and some of Mires Beck's stock were introduced to the original known site. By 2014, Mires Beck's work was so successful that 140 plants were planted out at Cockrah Banks. We await the 2015 May lily season with great interest.

Distribution in north-east Yorkshire: May lily (*Maianthemum bifolium*)



Key

● Post-2000 records
(inc. CFP introductions)

■ Pre-2000 records

G: Guisborough T: Thirsk

H: Helmsley P: Pickering

Data: BSBI, 2014 Maps produced by MapMate®

Key Facts - May lily (*Maianthemum bifolium*)

- Collected by Victorians and still available as a garden plant today
- Prefers free-draining acidic soils in Oak and Beech woodlands, but can persist for a while under sparse conifer planting
- Struggles to flower if too shaded; any range expansion is usually vegetative
- As a geophyte, May lily overwinters underground, with all above-ground vegetation dying off

UK Conservation Designations

The Vascular Plant Red Data List for Great Britain (2006) designates all UK wildflowers by their rarity, and hence conservation importance, in the following order:

Extinct → Extinct in the wild → Critically Endangered → Endangered
 Vulnerable → Near Threatened → Least Concern

The Cornfield Flowers Project is spearheaded by the Carstairs Countryside Trust, Ryedale Folk Museum, North Yorkshire Moors Association and North York Moors National Park Authority. It has a demonstration field and nursery at Ryedale Folk Museum and a working arable field at Silpho, near Scarborough. It is supported by the North York Moors National Park Sustainable Development Fund, North York Moors Coast & Hills LEADER Programme and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

