

# Cornfield Flowers Project



## Species Cards: non-arable



### Purple milk-vetch (*Astragalus danicus*)

#### Endangered

A perennial herb of unimproved calcareous grasslands; one of the non-arable species the CFP conserves

Has been declining markedly in Yorkshire and north-east England since before 1930

#### REASONS FOR DECLINE:

Agricultural improvement of grasslands;  
land-use change

### ***Our Purple milk-vetch experience...***

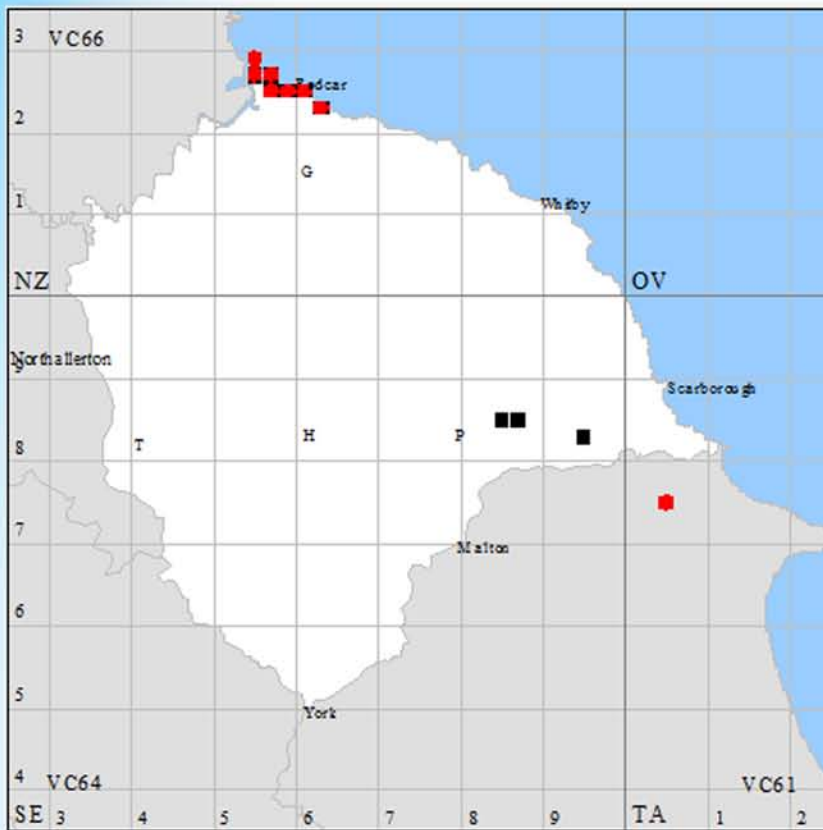
In southern England, Purple milk-vetch is found inland on chalk or limestone grasslands. However, from Scarborough upwards to northern Scotland it becomes almost exclusively coastal, but only on the east coast.

Scarborough Naturalists classed it as uncommon, and list sites at Stony Hags, Ruston Cow-pasture in 1884 and Harper's Lane in 1941. More recent sites were recorded at Ruston and Ellerburn in the North York Moors by Nan Sykes. Sites are more common in the East Riding, with Eva Crackles indicating 27 on the Wolds, however she states that it is latterly very infrequent, with only 16 post-1950 records.

Local botanist Cedric Gillings found a site for Purple milk-vetch in North Dale, Fordon in about 2010, and yet another site at Fordon by the roadside in Scarborough Dale. We have also searched an old site on volunteer farmer Philip Winter's land at West End Farm, Muston, for several seasons without success.

Because of its local decline, Scarborough added Purple milk-vetch to its Biodiversity Action Plan and the Cornfield Flowers Project took on the job of trying to cultivate it. Seed was gathered from the only site in our area where it appears to be thriving - the sand dunes of Coatham Marsh. The gathering proved difficult; very few were obtained and even less germinated. One of our volunteers, Belinda Robson, ended up with one reasonably strong plant that she passed on to Chris Wilson in 2014. Chris gave it a large tub to live in, filled with sand from Glebe Farm, Potter Brompton. The *Astragalus* did quite well in the tub and put out several runners, which were spiked down into the sand to root. At this point slugs put an end to growth in 2014.

# Distribution in north-east Yorkshire: Purple milk-vetch (*Astragalus danicus*)



## 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 - Purple milk-vetch (*Astragalus danicus*)

- Found on dry chalk and limestone soils in unimproved, species-rich grasslands
- Has very obvious purple, vetch-like flowers in a cluster, but is frequently shy to flower in the Scarborough area
- As an infrequent flowerer, it mostly spreads from creeping vegetative growth
- Common name derives from the belief that it used to increase milk yields of grazing livestock

### 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.

