

A re-examination of some Worcestershire records of *Fumaria* L. (Fumitories)

Roger Maskew

In the *Worcestershire Flora* (Maskew 2014) I expressed doubt about some records for the large species of fumitory recorded from the early part of the Worcestershire Flora Project, believing that *Fumaria capreolata* subsp. *babingtonii* (White Ramping-fumitory) had been over-recorded for robust forms of *F. muralis* subsp. *boraei* (Tall Ramping-fumitory) and possibly *F. purpurea* (Purple Ramping-fumitory).

The problem started back in 1991 when I collected some plants from a large quantity of fumitory draped over the perimeter fence of a stone monument in the grounds of Witley Court, at that time abandoned and in a semi-derelict state, this allowing easy access into the grounds. I sent a few plants to Michael Daker, the BSBI fumitory referee at the time, believing them to be *F. capreolata*. He sent a long reply in which he confirmed my identification (*pers. comm.* 1992), commenting that the plant was unusual in that it differed from the normal white-flowered form in having flowers 'more tinted with pink' which resembled Pugsley's var. *devoniensis*, a variety confined to the Woolacombe area of North Devon (Pugsley, 1912). Consequently, during the following years very similar material found at several other sites in the district I determined as *R. capreolata*. Unfortunately, the Witley Court plants were destroyed many years ago when the court and gardens were renovated. However, I now realise that these plants were almost certainly not a pink-flowered form of *F. capreolata*, as all similar plants found in the district this year have turned out to be either *F. purpurea* or *F. muralis*.

It was after the publication of Rose Murphy's excellent monograph (Murphy, 2009), that I decided to revisit the *F. capreolata* sites again in 2011, as I was unsure about the original determinations, but with hindsight this was done too late in the season, with plants only being found at three sites. One of these was the allotments at Martley, where I collected plants, originally determined as *R. capreolata*, and sent them to the then BSBI referee Rose Murphy who re-determined them as *R. purpurea*.

Since then the problem of the other *R. capreolata* records had remained unresolved and largely forgotten about. That is until I was reminded of it when I received an email from Brett Westwood in July last year regarding the large, long established population on the side of the Stourport-on-Severn Road, Great Witley, which had previously been determined as both *R. muralis* and *R. capreolata*. His suspicion that this population was in fact *F. purpurea* had been confirmed by the current BSBI referee Tim Rich, who had also confirmed *F. purpurea* from nearby Camp Lane back in 2011.

Having had records for *F. purpurea* now confirmed from three sites, during the spring of this year (2020) I decided to revisit nine sites in mainly western hectads, where there were previous records for both *R. capreolata* and *R. muralis*. Fumitory flowers early in the season so I began the survey in early May, this also being a good time to find plants before the dratted verge cutters get to work. Although plants could not be re-found at a few sites, I was able to confirm *F. purpurea* at five further sites in the Great Witley/Hillhampton/Astley districts of SO76, it now being present in six monads. In SO75 the allotment site in Martley was destroyed some years ago by the building of a housing estate, but I managed to find *F. purpurea* in the carpark opposite, and further up the road at the Martley Scar there is another good colony just inside SO76. There is also one other record for *F. purpurea*, from Tenbury Wells (SO56), where it was found by Ellen Heywood-Waddington in 1995. I also sent plants from here to M. Daker for determination. In reply, although on balance he thought they were probably *F. purpurea*, he expressed an element of doubt about it. As the plants have never been re-found the record should be regarded as unconfirmed.

F. purpurea is endemic to Britain, Ireland and the Channel Isles. The *New Atlas* (Preston et al, 2002) records it as present in only 71 hectads in Britain, and a further 17 in Ireland, being most frequent in Cornwall, Lancashire, South-east Scotland and Orkney. Away from these areas it is extremely rare, and until very recently, only recorded from some 20 hectads. So the confirmation of this population in western Worcestershire, together with its recent discovery at six sites in Herefordshire is a significant find in this part of England.

By the middle of May 2020 I was beginning to wonder whether there were any extant *F. capreolata* sites in the county, as I had been unable to find any fumitory at one of the two recorded sites in SO74, and the single sites in SO95 and SP04, and only *R. muralis* at the one in SO85. Fortunately, by the middle of June I had confirmed the typical white flowered subsp. *babingtonii* at three well separated sites. Unsurprisingly, I also found *F. muralis* subsp. *boraei* in a total of nine sites in four hectads (SO66/74/75/76), but was unable to re-find any fumitory at the several sites listed for SO56 and SO67. In addition changes in land use had wiped out our two sites for *R. bastardii* long ago (SO74, SO86), but I found a new site in the Severn Valley Railway sidings at Sandbourne, Bewdley (SO77). *F. officinalis* subsp. *officinalis* was also found in many places, too many to list below.

One thing that became very apparent during this survey, which is worth pointing out, is that *F. muralis* is an extremely variable plant, and the larger forms can superficially resemble *F. purpurea*. But on close inspection the two species differ in a number of ways, for example, the size and shape of the sepals is entirely different. Murphy (2009) is an essential reference.

Finally, it is interesting how being engaged in a specific task can sometimes lead to completely unexpected surprises. On such an occasion, while searching for fumitory in an unkempt arable field near Astley in late June, a family party of five Crossbills briefly landed and drank from a puddle of water in the corner of the field, no more than 30m. from where I was standing.

The following list contains some new records, but comprises mainly of either re-determinations or confirmations of old records. Records R. Maskew unless otherwise stated.

***Fumaria capreolata* subsp. *Babingtonii* (01):**

- large sprawling patch on laneside fence, Aston Bank, nr. Tenbury Wells, SO621686, 28-5-20
- small clump, pavement and foot of telegraph pole, Barnard's Green, SO792456, 4-6-20
- two large adjacent patches, bank of Stratford Road, Bromsgrove, SO963708, 2-6-20



01. White Ramping-fumitory *Fumaria capreolata* ssp. *babingtonii*. Roger Maskew

F. bastardii:

- small clump, railway sidings, Sandbourne, Bewdley, SO797749, 29-6-20

F. muralis subsp. boraei:

- small clump, hedge bank, near Perry Farm, Stoke Bliss, SO629626, 12-6-20

- small clump, edge of carpark, Stoke Bliss Social Club, SO630629, 8-5-20

- large patch, wall, B & Q carpark, Malvern Link, SO788479, 4-6-20

- large sprawling patch, garden hedge/fence, Leigh Sinton, SO781560, 4-6-20

- small clump, trackside, W. of Woolstan's Lodge, Hillhampton, SO775662, 6-5-20

- small clump, hedge, E. of Woolstan's Lodge, Hillhampton, SO779663, 6-5-20

- large clump, laneside, Dunley, SO788693, 14-5-20

- single plant in shade on hedge bank (probably this species), Structon's Heath, SO770658, 6-5-20

- few small plants, garden and pavement, Bromwich Road, Worcester, SO842536, 2-6-20

Fumaria purpurea (02):

- large clump, edge of Martley Social Club carpark, SO752597, 12-5-20

- extensive colony along c. 100m, A451, Great Witley, SO753/754661, B. Westwood, conf. T. Rich, 2019

- lane bank, Camp Lane, Great Witley, SO741652, B. Westwood, conf. T. Rich, 2011 (not seen 2020)

- very clump, pathside/field margin, N. of Hundred House, Great Witley, SO752665

- small clump, hedge bank, Yarhampton Cross, SO775673, 6-5-20

- large clump, trackside hedge bank, nr. Hillhouse Farm, Hillhampton, SO770663, 6-5-20

- very small clump, laneside, School Lane, Astley, SO796684, 6-5-20

- 1-2 small plants, roadside hedge, Dunley, SO789691, 6-5-20

- few large clumps, foot of rocky bank, B4204, Martley Scar, SO752601, 12-5-20

02. Purple Ramping-fumitory *Fumaria purpurea*. Roger Maskew



02. Purple Ramping-fumitory *Fumaria purpurea*. Roger Maskew

References

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Images

01. White Ramping-fumitory *Fumaria capreolata* ssp. *babingtonii*. Roger Maskew