

Buffalo-bur *Solanum rostratum* at Chaddesley Corbett, Worcestershire.

Mike Southall

While inspecting a Dwarf Bean crop at Longmore Farm near Chaddesley Corbett on the 30th of July 2018 I came upon a Buffalo-bur *Solanum rostratum* plant in flower (01).



01. Buffalo-bur *Solanum rostratum* at Chaddesley Corbett, Worcestershire. M. Southall

I recognised it because I had found one at Norchard during the hot summer of 2006. The plant is a native to the United States and northern and central Mexico where it is considered to be a noxious weed. Rather like our Burdock the seeds can become tangled in animals' fur. In Worcestershire there had been only four post-1970 records. The hot summer conditions of 2018 must have been more suitable for seed germination. The plant is likely to have been introduced as a wool alien. The Kidderminster carpet factories waste wool was sold and spread onto fields as a fertiliser known as shoddy, a practise I remember well from my early farming days. Many non-native plants were introduced in this way with seeds still viable in the soil's seedbank.

Solanum rostratum has many common names including Buffalobur Nightshade, Buffalo-bur, Spiny Nightshade, Colorado-bur, Kansas Thistle, Mexican Thistle and Texas thistle. It is an annual which forms a tumbleweed in its native region. It has become an invasive species in many countries including Russia and Australia. The plant is very prickly and is toxic to domestic animals, except goats, if eaten. It contains the glycoalkoloid solanine in all its parts. I regretted touching the plant because my hand hurt for the rest of the day.

Charles Darwin had ordered some seeds from a colleague in America, just over a week prior to his death. He was interested in the plants heteranthery. This is where the flowers bear two sets of anthers of different sizes, one for pollination and one for feeding.

Solanum rostratum is the ancestral host plant of the Colorado potato beetle, *Leptinotarsa decemlineata*, before it became a pest of the potato, *Solanum tuberosum*.

Later in the year I recorded several plants of the non-native Thorn apple, *Datura stramonium*, and Green Pigweed, *Amaranthus hybridus* in different arable fields.

Acknowledgement.

Thanks to John Day for identification, plus added information.

Reference

Wikipedia

Editor's Note

Buffalo-bur *Solanum rostratum* appeared in my vegetable patch at Little Comberton for the first time during the summer of 2018 and flowered over many weeks (02). Brett Westwood identified it from photographs. Many alien plants derived from bird food have grown in my garden over the years including Thorn apple, *Datura stramonium*, but the origin of the Buffalo-bur in 2018 is unknown. (see Green, H. 2007. Bird food aliens *Worcestershire Record*. 21:47-48).



02. Buffalo Bur *Solanum rostratum* in Little Comberton garden 01 September 2018. G.H. Green

Images

01. Buffalo-bur *Solanum rostratum* at Chaddesley Corbett, Worcestershire. M. Southall

02. Buffalo Bur *Solanum rostratum* in Little Comberton garden 01 September 2018. G.H. Green.