

Lesser Centaury *Centaureum pulchellum* in Wyre: a first record for VC40

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On 3rd August 2022, Rosemary Winnall led a field meeting of the Wyre Forest Study Group from Buttonoak to the Hurst Coppice/Pound Green area for some general recording in a relatively under-studied location. At Hurst Coppice we followed the Worcestershire/Shropshire county boundary which shadows the stream, on this occasion a mere trickle owing to the lack of rain and high temperatures. A detour along the main forestry track to inspect the nests of *Formica sanguinea* took us into Shropshire where a cluster of small centaury plants in flower on the weedy margins of the track at grid ref SO 751 795 was noted. The intense lipstick-pink corollas and small size contrasted well with the paler pink blooms of Common Centaury *Centaureum erythraea* nearby. John Bingham agreed that the thirty or so small plants on view were Lesser Centaury *C. pulchellum* and suggested that they were new to VC40 Shropshire.

Photos and details of the plants were sent to the joint recorders for VC40, John Martin and Mags Cousins, who confirmed that this was

indeed the first record for *C. pulchellum* and a welcome addition to the county flora.

Although this is the first record for Shropshire, the plant is scattered across southern and central Worcestershire VC37, but is not known elsewhere from the main block of woodland in Wyre. However, it was recorded during a WFSG field meeting in Areley Wood near Stourport-on-Severn on 18th August 2012, when there were a few plants spreading along a broad track at the top of the wood. It is likely that seeds may be transported by forestry machinery leading to potential new records anywhere along forest track-sides, especially where these are winter-wet and offer little competition for the seedlings. The flowers only open in sunshine which means that they are easy to overlook in overcast weather, but when seen well, their intense deeper pink hue is easily recognisable.

References: Rich, T. & McVeigh, A. (2019) *Gentians of Britain and Ireland*. Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland.



Centaureum pulchellum at Hurst Coppice, 3 August 2022

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