

Northern buckler-fern *Dryopteris expansa*

WHAT IS THE NORTHERN BUCKLER-FERN ?

Northern buckler-fern is a montane species which is probably ancestral to the broad buckler-fern, one of the commonest and most widespread of the British ferns.

CURRENT STATUS:

Northern buckler-fern is found mainly in the Scottish Highlands with much smaller numbers in Wales and in northern England. It favours montane areas.

The northern buckler-fern is not always easy to distinguish from the broad buckler-fern, *Dryopteris dilatata*, and many records and assessments of its local distribution have been based on incorrect identifications. In 1998 the British Pteridological Society surveyed most of the Teesdale sites, and identified only one small population as the genuine article. There were about 15 plants, plus a single hybrid of *Dryopteris dilatata* x *expansa*. The identity of the plants was confirmed microscopically. At the grid references of most of the earlier records, only *D. dilatata* was found.

The remaining site is an area of exposed non-calcareous boulder scree of a few tens of metres within the Upper Teesdale National Nature Reserve.

There is a possibility that the older records implying a more widespread distribution were correct, and that the fern has declined to its present single site. However, this is not thought to be the case. Recent improvements in identification literature have enabled difficult plants to be correctly identified.

WHY IS NORTHERN BUCKLER-FERN OF CONSERVATION IMPORTANCE?

The northern buckler fern is part of the relict Upper Teesdale flora, and is scarce in other areas.

NORTHERN BUCKLER-FERN IS AT RISK FROM:

Lack of genetic diversity. The small colony is probably highly inbred.

Overgrazing by sheep.

Recreational disturbance – the Pennine Way passes within a metre or two of the ferns, and the large boulders there are a regular place to stop and sit.

SUGGESTED ACTIONS

Management of the remaining site to optimise conditions for the fern.

Monitoring of the remaining site.

Survey of other potential sites for the species.