



## Autumn Ladies Tresses Orchid (*Spiranthes spiralis*)

### Biodiversity Action Plan | Cummey Yanno Beiy-Feie



#### Background

A subtle, late flowered orchid that was formally found in one location in the north and one location in the south of the Island.

Its reintroduction to the Isle of Man would help reverse a local extinction. By using an existing conservation project (the Shaking Grass Action for Wildlife project), the resource implications for this introduction are modest.

#### Description



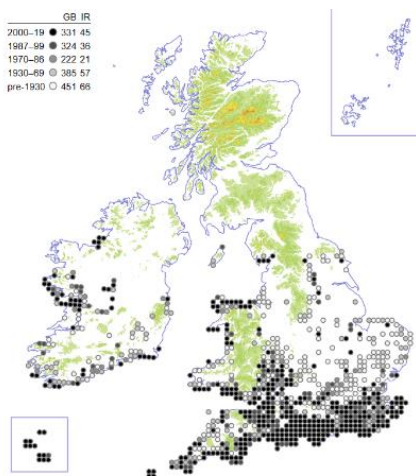
Growing less than 20cm tall, this tiny, white orchid flowers that spiral around the central stem appear in August and September in dry grassland. Normally on coastal sand or limestone. It is frequently found in amenity mown grassland.

Its photosynthesising grey/green rosette appears in late summer and dies off in late spring or early summer, just before a flower spike emerges.

During its short summer dormancy it is sustained by small underground tubers, with few roots needed owing to the heavy reliance on fugal symbionts.

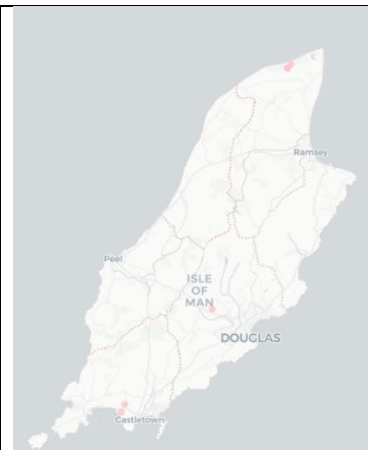
#### British Isles Distribution

The BSBI distribution map of this species shows it to be widespread in England, Wales and Ireland, but absent from Scotland. The Isle of Man is on the northern edge of its range within Britain and Ireland.



#### Isle of Man Distribution





27 records on NBN Atlas IOM relate to 3 sites where this species has been recorded.

At Chapel Hill by Balladoole Quarry in Malew (last recorded 1957).

At Ballaghennie (the Ayres) the species occurred just outside the NNR (but within the ASSI). This is on private land adjacent to the slacks area of the NNR. It has not been recorded since 2001 (pers comm Louise Samson) after a major flood.

There is a curious record for Union Mills for the Union Mills Curragh in 1993 (from Larch Garrad). This is a very suspect record (with 4 fig grid ref), but should be checked out.

## Habitat and Ecology

This is a species that can only compete in very low vegetation, requiring low fertility, dry soils, with vegetation controlled by grazing or mowing. It is more tolerant of lower pH than many other typically limestone orchids and can be found in heathy vegetation.

The species is slow to establish (taking over a decade from seed to first flower) and will typically not flower two years in a row. It frequently fails to even put up a leafy rosette after flowering, resting as a mycorrhizal dependent tuber. Sometimes this dormant phase can last for several years.

## Legal protection

Listed on Schedule 7 of the Wildlife Act 1990 and black-listed under *Plants of Conservation Concern in the Isle of Man 2022*.

## Threats

The species disappeared from the Isle of Man from its two sites for different reasons:

- At Balladoole the grazed limestone grassland of the ancient monument was fenced off to protect the ancient monument from hoof damage. This caused the vegetation to develop into long-rank grass unsuitable for the Autumn Ladies Tresses Orchid.
- At Ballaghennie this species occurred in damp vegetation similar to dune slacks. It was not seen after a serious flood event in 2001 (pers comm Louise Samson). Prolonged spells of flooding are believed to be detrimental to this species and means that even if the plants were dormant at first they are unlikely to have persisted since.

The species was at the edge of its range on the Isle of Man and has exacting requirements, thus without bespoke conservation efforts its residence in the changing environment of the past 100 years was always precarious.

## Reason for BAP

The species has recently gone extinct in the Isle of Man.

## Aims

To reintroduce a species lost to the Isle of Man.

To use nursery grown stock (of British origin) to reintroduce the species to the MWT Billown Nature Reserve (extension area, outside of the ASSI). From here it is hoped the species will spread by seed within site, and eventually into the wider countryside. While suitable locations are fragmented, the



example of Bee Orchid which is now known to occur four sites in the south-east of the Island outside its original location in Billown.

### Linked BAPS

Chalk Fragrant Orchid BAP  
Shaking Grass Action for Wildlife Project and related BAPs

Delivery Options	Active	Challenges
Translocate plants from GB nursery-grown stock to Billown extension		The heavy soils of the Billown extension site may be challenging for this species and the site exists in intensively farmed region of the Island.

### Delivery Plan

Strategy	Lead
Translocate plants from GB nursery-grown stock to Billown extension site: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Order 10-20 plants per annum for 3 years</li> <li>• Plant in a wide variety of the extension site including well drained and damp areas. Most will be in holes with added limestone and horticultural grit.</li> <li>• Planting will be early autumn of early spring (in line with established guidelines).<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Grazing will be excluded from Feb to July.</li> </ul>	MWT (with Colas as landowner)
Check original record cards by Larch Garrad to see if further information exists for the (unlikely) union Mills Curragh.	IOM BSBI. (A. Dubbeldam and P. Thomlinson)

Action	Timing	Responsibility
Plant	Sept '25, '26	MWT
Graze	July-Oct	MWT
Monitor	July, annually	MWT
Check record cards	Winter 2025	BSBI

### Annual Updates

Year	
2024	Project approval granted by DEFA 20/11/2024.

<sup>1</sup> <https://britishorchids.co.uk/product/chalk-fragrant-orchid/>



