

# Seaford Natural History Society

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## Moon Carrot Surveys - Seaford Head Local Nature Reserve

Moon carrot (*Seseli libanotis*) is a rare plant in the UK which is found on a few sites near the coast in East Sussex and a couple of sites in East Anglia.

The Management Plan for Seaford Head notes that moon carrot is a species of conservation concern and includes a recommendation that the plant be mapped and monitored.

In 2013 the Society proposed that it carry out a moon carrot survey in August with a view to making this an annual task.

Moon carrot grows in two small areas in the vicinity of Hope Gap. The larger area is about the size of two football pitches; the smaller area about the size of a tennis court.

The first survey mapping and counting of moon carrot was carried out in late August 2013. This involved a series of transects over the main site identifying the first (most northerly) plant in each transect and counting the number of plants seen walking from the northern boundary of the area towards the cliff edge. Further similar surveys were carried out in 2014, 2015 and 2016.

Moon carrot is white umbellifer similar to wild carrot which is widespread in the reserve and one challenge was to ensure that wild carrot was not inadvertently included in the counting and mapping. Fortunately a preliminary survey showed that there was very little wild carrot on the main site and that the few other white plants in flower were easy to identify so that the monitoring was not beyond those with limited botanical knowledge.

Most of the moon carrot is found in rabbit-grazed grassland and the plants are very short (2-4 cm); where they are sheltered from rabbit-grazing they were somewhat taller (up to about 30cm).

We carried out 9 transects and found plants in the high hundreds in 2013 on the primary site. In 2014 the count was in the mid-hundreds. In 2015 we found over 2000 and in 2016 over 1000. We also identified the limits of the area where the plants are found and how the density varied across the area.

The secondary area was surveyed separately. It is dominated by wild carrot and moon carrot plants only in single figures were found in all the surveys.

An isolated plant was found in 2013 well away from the two sites mentioned growing amongst some bramble. It was significantly taller (70cm+) and from a distance could easily have been mistaken for wild carrot, so different did it look from the plants found in the rabbit-grazed area with which we are most familiar.