

Broad-leaved Helleborine

Epipactis helleborine

previously: *Epipactis latifolia*

IDENTIFICATION

Robust and tall, up to 90 cm; can form small clumps. Leaves broad, strongly ribbed, arranged spirally up the stem. Up to 100 flowers borne in a one-sided spike. Ovary strongly ribbed and smooth. Sepals blunt, upper petals smaller and pinkish. Lip divided into a cup-shaped hypochile, dark red and sticky within, and a pinkish, wedge shaped epichile, the tip strongly reflexed. The base of the epichile bears two rough, brown bosses. Flower colour varies from greenish where plants grow in shade to deep reddish-brown in sunny sites. Chlorotic plants, where all parts are pale yellowish-green, have been reported widely.

CONFUSING SPECIES

All the helleborines except Marsh Helleborine (page 50). Look for the broad leaves, robust growth and the two diagnostic rough bosses on the base of the epichile in this species.

HYBRIDS

Hybrids with Violet, Dark-red and possibly Narrow-lipped Helleborines have been recorded where the species grow together.

TAXONOMIC STATUS

Young's Helleborine (page 58) was formerly considered to be a full species, but recent genetic research has suggested that it is part of the variation found in Broad-leaved Helleborine. As such it does not warrant species or even sub-species status, and probably is best regarded as a variety, the taxonomy we have followed here.

POLLINATION

Self-pollination is rare in Britain. The German Wasp and another wasp *Dolichovespula sylvestris* are the most important insect pollinators. They lap nectar stored in the hypochile, seeming to get very sleepy or drunk, and have even been seen falling out of the flowers. Ants have been recorded removing the entire pollinium.

CONSERVATION

No particular conservation concerns; capable of colonising new forestry plantations.

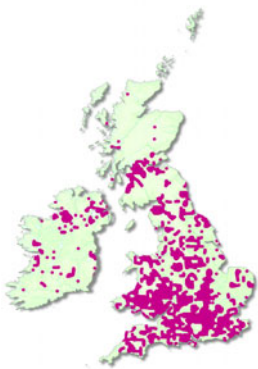
Widespread and common

Height: up to 90 cm

No. of flowers: up to 100

FLOWERING PERIOD

Early July to early September



DISTRIBUTION

Widely distributed throughout England, Wales and central Scotland. In Ireland it is less common, scattered mainly in the north and west.

HABITAT

Mainly found on calcareous soils, but will tolerate slight acidity. Grows in broad-leaved and coniferous woodlands, especially on road and track verges where there is plenty of sunlight. Also on limestone cliffs and pavements, dune slacks and even in town gardens, such as in Glasgow where it is relatively common.

