

Report on *Stachys germanica* (Downy Woundwort) Worsham Lane SSSI (The Freeboard), Minster Lovell 2025



Photos G. Early 29 June 2025

Historical information

The area where Downy Woundwort grows is in a right of way known locally in Minster Lovell as The Freeboard. The plants occur along a section of this bridleway on the south-facing verge. It has been known from this locality for a long time. In a paper published in *Watsonia* in 1988, Peter Marren wrote ‘An old lane near Worsham has been known as a locality for *S. germanica* for at least 50 years. A single plant appeared here in 1972 by the then overgrown boundary hedge. Another appeared in 1984, following a fire which had burned down that particular section of hedge.’ This destruction is believed to have been caused by a stubble fire, in the adjoining field, that got out of hand.

In March and April 1988, the first recorded management work was carried out. Jo Dunn, who was one of the founder members of the Wychwood Flora Group (then known as the Cotswold Rare Plants Group) was instrumental in getting this organised. She, together with three Nature Conservancy Council (NCC, now Natural England) staff, cleared the vegetation by hand. Their work was rewarded as, later that year, Jo recorded about 100 rosettes. More hand clearance work was carried out the following year, after which 75–80 flowering stems were recorded. Later, in November, three NCC staff cleared 250 yards (227 m) of verge using a rotary cutter and slashers.

This regime of removing vegetation and ground disturbance, which is required to keep the habitat suitable for *S. germanica*, a biennial plant, growing here, has been continued almost every year since by a succession of WFG members, Oxfordshire County Council staff and Cotswold Voluntary Wardens. Without this intervention one wonders if Downy Woundwort would still be found here.

Management work in 2025

On 11 February the Cotswold Wardens cut back the new woody growth, mostly Blackthorn suckers, in the area which they had cleared last March. The arisings were raked off by two wardens the following day. There was no rotovation this year.



Management work on 11 March 2025 (Genny Earley's photos)

Check-up Visit

On 27 May Katherine Doughty visited the site and found three groups of plants – see her photos below.



Group 1



Group 2



Group 3

Visit by Jo Alderton from the Species Recovery Trust

On 23 June Genny Early and Brenda Betteridge took Jo to see the site. No formal count was carried out but nine short flowering plants were seen amongst vegetation that was exhibiting drought stress. As the plants were already flowering it was decided to carry out the annual survey earlier than usual.

Survey

On 29 June six members of the Wychwood Flora Group (Jan Blake, Katherine Doughty, Genny Early, Christine Marsh, Francis Watkins and Brenda Betteridge). With a more thorough search 18 flowering plants and two rosettes of Downy Woundwort were found. They were in little groups spread out along the area in which the scrub had been cut back. Most of them were quite close to the path but a few were near the hedge. Like all the surrounding vegetation they were much shorter than usual as a result of the very dry spring and early summer. Hopefully the two unflowering plants will survive to produce flowers next year.

Summary of observations made on 29 June

GPS readings	No. of young plants	No. flowering plants	Approximate height	Position	Comment
SP30664-09640		1	15 cm	Near footpath	
SP30638-09651		1 + 2 = 3	15–20 cm	Near footpath	
SP30635-09651		1 + 1 (eaten off) + 3 = 5	15 cm	Mostly near hedge on left of opening	
SP30619-09657	2 rosettes	7 (3 eaten off)	≤15 cm	Scattered: 1 by path/2 middle/4 by hedge	
SP30613-09653		1	15 cm	By footpath	
SP30603-09656		1	20 cm	By footpath	
Total	2 rosettes	18			

Brenda Betteridge
for the Wychwood Flora Group

Copies to:

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