

A new county record for alpine clubmoss (*Diphasiastrum alpinum*) from the Comeragh Mountains, Co. Waterford (H6)

The alpine clubmoss (*Diphasiastrum alpinum* L. (Holub)) was recently recorded in Co. Waterford for the first time during a pilot survey of upland habitats, carried out on behalf of the National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS), Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. The species occurred at two exposed locations on the plateau of the Comeragh Mountains (cSAC 001952) at the head of Coumlara (S3089011241, S3094011274, recorded using a Trimble Nomad handheld computer with integrated GPS receiver) at an altitude of *c.*735 m a.s.l. and was recorded on 24 March and 6 April 2010 respectively. The populations were scattered through an area of rocky montane heath which appeared to have developed where upland

blanket bog had been eroded down to siliceous bedrock and gravel. The patchy vegetation was dominated by *Calluna vulgaris* (L.) Hull and *Racomitrium lanuginosum* (Hedw.) Brid. *D. alpinum* is listed as a characteristic species of Alpine and Boreal heaths (4060), which appear on Annex I of the Habitats Directive (Anon. 2007 Interpretation manual of European Union habitats. EUR 27. European Commission DG Environment, Brussels. Online at: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/habitatsdirective/docs/2007_07_im.pdf. Date accessed: 1 October 2010) and are one of the qualifying interests of the Comeragh Mountains cSAC.

Diphasiastrum alpinum has an upland distribution, occurring on mossy heaths or bare peat on mountain ridges and summits and is rare and apparently declining in Ireland. It is currently known from Cos Wicklow and Galway northwards and formerly from Co. Kerry but is now apparently extinct there (Webb, D. A., Parnell, J. and Doogue, D. 1996 *An Irish flora*. Seventh edition. Dundalgon Press, Dundalk). Distribution map data show that the species, having previously been recorded from 49 hectads, has been confirmed from only 17 hectads in Ireland since 1987 (Preston, C. D. Pearman, D. A. and Dines, T. D. (eds) 2002 *The new atlas of the British and Irish flora*. Oxford University Press, Oxford), although it is unclear whether this apparent decline is due to the actual loss of the species or insufficient recent botanical recording effort in the Irish uplands (Conaghan, J. 2006 *Irish Naturalists' Journal* **28**: 305). However, in a recent resurvey of six sites at which the species was previously recorded, it was only refound at four (Nienhuis, C. and Smyth, N. 2009 *Conservation and monitoring of legally protected and annexed fern allies in Ireland*. Interim report to the National Parks & Wildlife Service, Dublin), which suggests that the species is indeed declining and should be closely monitored. In view of the previously known distribution of *D. alpinum* in Ireland, this new county record represents a significant southward extension in the known range of this rare and declining species in Ireland.

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