OPHIOGLOSSUM ON THE ISLE OF RAASAY
Stephen J Bungard
Risboro, 3 Clarke Wood, Wiswell, Clitheroe, Lancs. BB7 9BX

The Isle of Raasay lies between Skye and the Scottish mainland and has a good variety of ferns. As a self-inflicted task, I have been mapping all vascular plants on Raasay on a 1 km square basis for the past nine years and offer here the results so far for one small genus.

Despite extensive botanical work on Raasay in the 1930's, the first record of Ophioglossum from the island was in 1960. This record 'among boulders in grassland at Oskag' on the west coast of Raasay has never been found again and remains in some doubt as other records made by this recorder during his 1960 visit are also in doubt. However in 1984, O. vulgatum was found above the path from Fearsns to Leac on the east coast where I was able to re-find it in 1997 and where it can be seen today.

Indeed, it is not only to be seen scattered over some distance at the original site towards the top of a grassy bank below basic cliffs, it is also quite common just above but more especially below the same path for several hundred metres. In all these places it is under Pteridium aquilinum. Keen to add O. vulgatum to the list for the next 10 km square to the north, I was able to find it again at the first attempt in 1998 in similar land - a basic slope on the east coast about 6 km north of the original site, again under bracken. More recently (May 2000 and May 2001) I found more in this 10 km square, well away from the basic soils of the east coast but still under bracken. So all O. vulgatum known on Raasay today is under bracken and this seems to be more important than the underlying rock type.

In 1996, the year before finding O. vulgatum at the previously known site, I came across some Ophioglossum near the extreme north-western tip of Eilean Tigh, a tidal island off the north end of Raasay. The site is 2½ hours brisk walk from the end of the road on Raasay and requires good timing if one is to cross to Eilean Tigh and not be marooned. Photographs and a specimen sent to Alison Paul confirmed my identification as O. azoricum. There are several hundred plants on these bleak exposed shorted cropped peaty banks. Other plants to be found with it include Aira praeceps (Early Hair-grass), Plantago coronopus (Buck's-horn Plantain) and Sedum anglicum (English Stonecrop).

Subsequent searches have shown that O. azoricum occurs at other sites on Raasay and its associated tidal islands, Eilean Fladday and Eilean Tigh, and also on the island of Rona to the north of Raasay, but this small fern remains unknown on Skye. Most of the sites are similar to the first in being exposed coastal peaty banks but two discovered in 2000 are rather different. These are flat areas that flood in winter from, in one case a lochan, and in the other a small burn. The associated flora is also different. These are areas of partly bare peat but also present are species such as Filipendula ulmaria (Meadowsweet), Leontodon autumnalis (Autumn Hawkbit), Potentilla erecta (Tormenil), Ranunculus repens (Creeping Butercup), and Ranunculus flammula ssp flammula (Lesser Spearwort).

It seems unlikely that all Raasay sites for these two ferns have been found and there remains the challenge of finding O. azoricum on the much larger adjacent Isle of Skye.

The maps show 1 km square distributions for the two species and were produced using Alan Morton's DMAP programme.