

Species Factsheet

the
species
recovery
trust

Melampyrum arvense

Field Cow-wheat



Red List Status:

Endangered

Threat of extinction:

High

Main threats:

Agricultural intensification, habitat changes and a lack of disturbance

Description: An herbaceous flowering plant, it is easily recognised by its showy purple and yellow spiky inflorescences. It has narrow, toothed leaves that grow on opposite sides of the stem.

Lifecycle: This species is hemiparasitic, commonly on the roots of grasses but also on those of other plants. In the absence of host species it fails to flourish and only small plants will grow. Experimental evidence suggests that it can parasitise a wide mix of different species. It flowers from June to September.

Habitat: Formerly an arable weed, the species is now found in grassland and appears to favour dry chalky soils, and require open conditions.

Distribution: Found in continental Europe, from the Ural Mountains in the east to southern Sweden in the north and the northern Mediterranean in the south.

Status: Classified as Endangered and is therefore considered to be facing a very high risk of extinction in the wild.

Reasons for decline: Improved seed cleaning, agricultural intensification and a lack of disturbance and habitat change at some sites. It was rare by 1930, with roughly 19 sites, and has continued to decline over the last 40 years. Also declining elsewhere in Europe.

Protection under the Law: Protected under Schedule 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

What we are doing:

- Establishing a monitoring network across all sites
- Undertaking habitat restoration work to create optimum conditions at extant sites
- Creating *ex situ* populations for eventual re-introduction to the wild

What you can do:

- If you live locally volunteer to become a site monitor
- Become a species supporter and help fund the project