

# Species Factsheet

the  
species  
recovery  
trust

*Polygala amarella*

Dwarf Milkwort



**Red List Status:**  
Endangered

**Threat of extinction:**  
Very high

**Main threats:**  
Habitat loss and changes in habitat management

**Description:** A small herb with erect to ascending stems to 15 cm long but often only 1.5 - 5 cm. Leaves are spoon-shaped at base, forming a distinct rosette; stem leaves are usually smaller and narrower. Inflorescence a raceme of 6 – 30 very small flowers, each 2.5 – 5 mm long, with non-anastomosing veins on the inner sepals. Flowers are sky blue to pink in northern populations, pale mauve to white with hints of green in North Downs populations. Flowering from May to July.

**Lifecycle:** Thought to be a short-lived perennial that relies upon regular flowering and seed set to maintain populations. North Downs populations may have shorter life cycles than northern limestone populations.

**Habitat:** Short turf on very thin calcareous substrates. In Kent it occurs in chalk grassland kept open by grazing and/or drought. In northern limestone populations it occurs on raised tussocks in calcareous mires, in grassland on limestone scars and ledges, and on metamorphosed 'sugar' limestone in Teesdale, County Durham.

**Distribution:** Very disjunct - in three areas on limestone in northern England as well as on the North Downs in Kent, where it has declined to just three populations.

**Status:** Endangered. Has declined more than 50% since 1930.

**Reasons for decline:** Habitat loss and changes in habitat management. Sites have been lost to the ploughing and improvement of chalk grassland, and also the cessation of grazing resulting in the encroachment of grasses and scrub. In northern England overgrazing has been implicated in the milkwort's loss from some sites.

**What we are doing:**

- Annually monitoring the last three colonies in the North Downs in Kent.
- Undertaking habitat management at the most vulnerable site where only 1 plant flowered in 2013.
- Creating ex-situ populations for ecological research and eventual re-introduction in the wild.
- Carrying out habitat restoration at historic sites with the intention of re-introducing Dwarf Milkwort if it does not return naturally.

**What you can do:**

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

