

Yellow marsh saxifrage

Saxifraga hirculus

STATUS

Protected under Schedule 8, Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and under Schedule 4 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats etc.) Regulations 1994, Listed in national Red Data Book 3 - near threatened, Listed on Annexes II and IV of the EC Habitats Directive and Appendix I of the Bern Convention, English Nature Species Recovery Programme for North Pennines



WHAT IS THE YELLOW MARSH SAXIFRAGE?

The yellow marsh saxifrage is a perennial plant occurring in base-rich flushes and mires at high altitudes.

WHERE IS IT FOUND IN THE UK?

It is restricted to approximately 20 localities in about ten square kilometres in Northern Ireland, Scotland and northern England. In northern England there are populations in the North Pennines and the Yorkshire Dales.

WHY IS THE YELLOW MARSH SAXIFRAGE OF CONSERVATION IMPORTANCE?

The yellow marsh saxifrage is threatened and declining throughout much of Europe. Many of the European sites have been destroyed. Current causes of decline include loss and degradation of habitat through afforestation, drainage and over-grazing. Yellow marsh saxifrage has probably always been rare, but increased grazing and moorland drainage can only have resulted in the further loss of populations over recent decades.

THE YELLOW MARSH SAXIFRAGE IN THE DURHAM AREA

HOW HEALTHY ARE THE LOCAL POPULATIONS OF THE YELLOW MARSH SAXIFRAGE?

The North Pennines colonies are thought to be some of the healthiest in the UK.

HOW MUCH DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE YELLOW MARSH SAXIFRAGE IN THE DURHAM AREA ?

The main population is now concentrated in the northern Pennines which holds 80 - 90% of the UK population (UK BAP, 1994). Moor House and Upper Teesdale is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) for this species.

This plant is one of a group of plants in the UK known as the "Teesdale Assemblage" many of which occur only in the extreme environment of Upper Teesdale. Such plants were much more widespread at the end of the last ice age and only persist where similar conditions still exist today. These plants include the spring gentian (*Gentiana verna*), the Teesdale sandwort (*Minuartia stricta*), Teesdale violet (*Viola rupestris*) and bitter milkwort (*Polygala amara*).

It is difficult to estimate the populations accurately because the flower heads are grazed off, making identification difficult. The leaves are inconspicuous and hard to find. The apparent preference of the yellow marsh saxifrage for inhospitable upland areas also poses practical difficulties for surveying and monitoring populations.

WHERE HAS IT BEEN FOUND IN THE DURHAM AREA ?

Teesdale, Lunedale and Weardale are the main centres in the UK for yellow marsh saxifrage. Bryophyte flushes on the upper slopes of Dun, Mickel and Dufton Fell also contain the species.

YELLOW MARSH SAXIFRAGE IS AT RISK FROM:

Loss and degradation of habitat through afforestation, drainage and over-grazing at a national and European level.

YELLOW MARSH SAXIFRAGE BENEFITS FROM:

A baseline survey of extant populations followed by the establishment of a monitoring programme.

The implementation of appropriate management regimes.

Reduction of grazing pressures, drainage measures and damage by afforestation which would improve the habitat available to the plant.

Education and awareness raising for relevant interest groups.

IMPORTANT HABITATS FOR THE YELLOW MARSH SAXIFRAGE

Base-rich flushes and mires in upland areas

OTHER SPECIES ACTION PLANS COVERING ISSUES RELEVANT TO THE YELLOW MARSH SAXIFRAGE:

Upland heathland and blanket bog *

Upland calcareous grassland *

N.B * indicates action plan produced in 2000.

THE YELLOW MARSH SAXIFRAGE AND THE LAW

The yellow marsh saxifrage is listed on Schedule 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. This prohibits the unauthorised intentional uprooting, picking or destruction of yellow marsh saxifrage. The possession of yellow marsh saxifrage for the purpose of sale is also prohibited.

Yellow marsh saxifrage *Saxifraga hirculus*

TARGETS FOR THE CONSERVATION OF THE YELLOW MARSH SAXIFRAGE IN THE DURHAM AREA:

	DATE
Target 1 Survey existing populations	2002
Target 2 Maintain sustainable populations of yellow marsh saxifrage at all known sites and ensure correct management.	ONGOING

Target 3 Reintroduce yellow marsh saxifrage to two sites where it is known to have occurred previously and where long term reintroductions are sustainable.	2005
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YELLOW MARSH SAXIFRAGE ACTIONS

ACTION	DATE	POSSIBLE PARTNERS	MEETS TARGET NO
SPECIES MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION			
1. Continue to give high priority to the conservation of the species in statutory sites.	ONGOING	EN, Land owners	1, 2
SITE MANAGEMENT			
2. Encourage implementation of appropriate management regimes on sites supporting the species.	ONGOING	EN, FWAG	2
3. Seek to avoid damage by afforestation or drainage work which may affect the hydrology of the sites. If sites are overgrazed, consider measures to reduce the intensity of grazing. Be aware of the implications of the Countryside and Rights of way Bill, i.e. potential for increased access to yellow marsh saxifrage sites.	ONGOING	EN, FWAG, MAFF	2
4. Following feasibility assessment and identification of suitable sites, seek to restore two populations within their former range.	2005	EN, FWAG	3
RESEARCH AND MONITORING			
5. Survey all former, current and potential sites to confirm the status of the yellow marsh saxifrage in the Durham area.	2002	EN, Local Specialists, Universities & Colleges	1
6. Monitor extant populations on a regular basis.	ONGOING	EN, Local Specialists, Universities & Colleges	2
7. All records of yellow marsh saxifrage to be passed to local record centres.	ONGOING	EN, Local Specialists, Universities & Colleges, LRC, Site owners	1
ADVISORY			
8. Ensure landowners and managers are aware of the presence of yellow marsh saxifrage on their land and of the appropriate management methods for habitat enhancement.	ONGOING	EN	2
COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLICITY			
9. Use the yellow marsh saxifrage to promote the importance of Durham's flora (especially the Teesdale Assemblage). The species can also be used to promote the importance of moorland habitats.	ONGOING	EN, LA21	2
10. Ensure that walkers on the Pennine Way or other routes do not inadvertently damage the plants and that increased access to the countryside does not lead to flowers being picked.	ONGOING	EN, DBAP, LAs	2