

Weasel's-snout

Misopates orontium



Lifecycle

Weasel's-snout is an annual, flowering between June and October. Seeds predominantly germinate in the spring, although some summer and autumn germination occurs. Seeds are long lived.

Habitat

Weasel's-snout prefers acidic, light, sandy loams. It is found in arable fields and field margins, allotments, gardens and waste ground. It likes sunny, south-facing dry ground and is highly drought-tolerant. It is shade intolerant, preferring open habitats. It is often found with other uncommon species such as Corn spurrey, Corn marigold and Field Woundwort.

GB status and rarity

Due to its decline, Weasel's snout is classified as "Vulnerable" in The Vascular Plant Red Data List for Great Britain (2005) and is also considered "Vulnerable" in the Vascular Plant Red List for England (2014).

Weasel's-snout or Lesser Snapdragon is a member of the plantain family (Plantaginaceae). It is often branched with a leafy stem, growing up to 60 cm tall. Dark-green shiny leaves up to 5 cm long are narrowly oval in shape with stalkless asymmetrical flowers in the leaf axils.

Flowers resemble those of the garden snapdragon and have deep pink petals with a slight yellow tinge in the flower tube. They are 10-15 mm long. Weasel's-snout is said to get its name from the hairy green fruit it produces that resembles a weasel's snout!

Protection under the law

This plant is not protected under law in any of the UK countries.

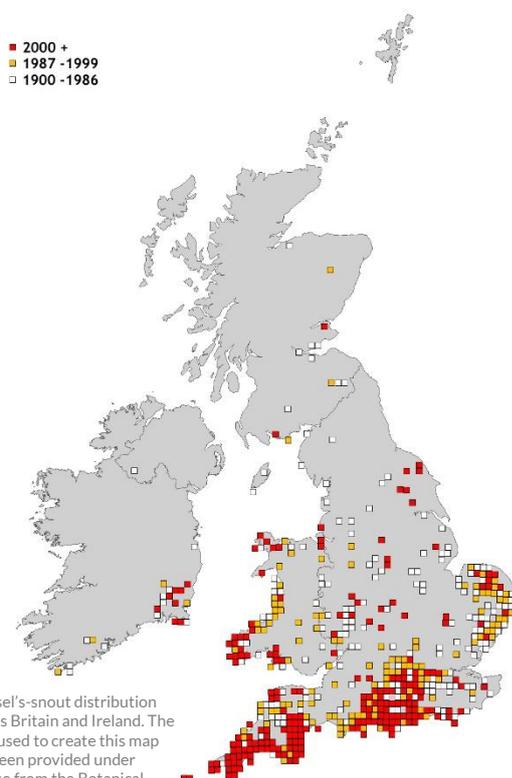
Survey method

Individual plants should be counted. In larger populations, estimates should be made.



Distribution

This species is most common in the south of England, especially along the south coast and in Devon and Cornwall as well as some records of the species in Pembrokeshire. Records are very sparse in Scotland and Ireland.



Weasel's-snout distribution across Britain and Ireland. The data used to create this map has been provided under license from the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI) and accessed from the Society's online database.

Reasons for decline

Weasel's-snout has declined due to the intensification of farming and a change from spring sown cereals to autumn cultivation and sowing. Increased fertiliser and herbicide use has contributed to the decline of many cornfield flowering plants. In addition, cultivation by minimum tillage or direct drilling of crop seed does not disturb the soil sufficiently to stimulate germination of seeds.

Habitat management

Weasel's-snout prefers annual disturbance and the creation of bare ground in the spring therefore habitat management for this species should focus on annual spring cultivation. It can survive within a sparse crop where there are gaps in the canopy. This is achieved by sowing with a low drill rate and/or using a cereal variety that does not produce too many tillers.

The use of nitrogen fertiliser and broad-spectrum herbicide should be avoided as Weasel's-snout is vulnerable to these herbicides. If treatment of a problematic weed species is required, targeted herbicide use should be employed once Weasel's-snout has set seeds, or on rotation to allow the species to recover from the soil seed bank.

If Weasel's-snout has been present on a site historically, regular spring cultivation may be sufficient to enable dormant seeds to germinate. Field margins can provide ideal habitat since they are less likely to have herbicide and fertiliser applications. Rotational management of margins should be employed to prevent the build-up of pernicious weeds.



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