

Corn Spurrey

Spergula arvensis



© Cath Shellswell

Lifecycle

Corn Spurrey is a summer annual, flowering between June and August. Seeds usually germinate in early spring, though some germinate in autumn and may remain viable in soil for many years.

Habitat

Corn Spurrey prefers slightly acidic, sandy, shale and gravelly soils as well as clays, but can occur on chalky soils. It prefers open and disturbed habitats and arable farmland. It may be found in newly cultivated grassland or waste ground. This species is largely associated with spring-sown cereals such as spring barley.

Corn Spurrey is a member of the pink family (Caryophyllaceae). It is a slender scrambling plant with branched reddish-brown stems up to 60 cm in height and 3 cm long narrow thread-like leaves arranged in whorls up the stem. Loosely branched clusters of five-petaled white flowers, approximately 8 mm in diameter, are present at the end of stems. Petals are notched and the flowers have a sweet scent. Seeds are black, round and approximately 1.5 mm in diameter.

GB status and rarity

Due to its decline, Corn Spurrey 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) and 'Near Threatened' in the Vascular Plant Red List for Wales (2008).

Protection under the law

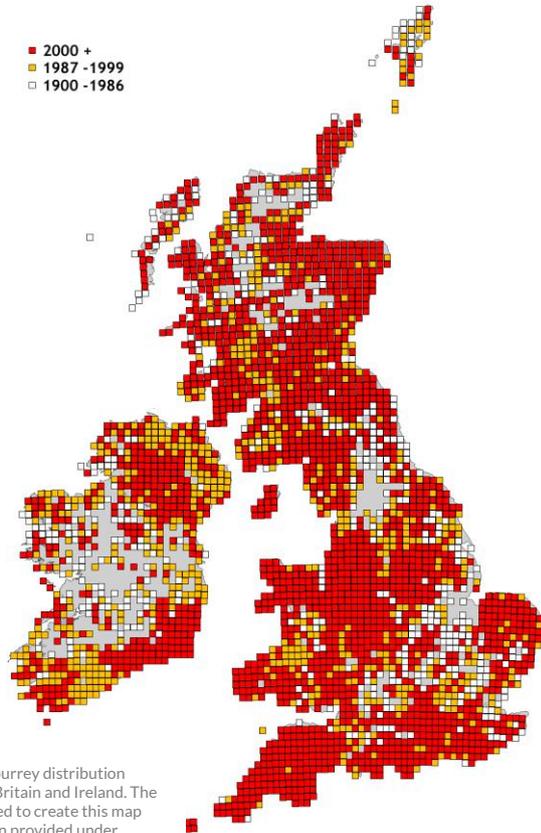
This plant is not protected in any UK country.

Survey method

Individual plants should be counted, or in larger populations, an estimate made. As this species can form clumps, making it hard to distinguish individual plants, one way to estimate plants is to count the number of individuals occurring within a few 1x1 m quadrats and scale the average up to the entire area covered by the species.

Distribution

Corn Spurrey is widespread across the UK but most common along the western side of England, Wales and Scotland. It is often frequent in fields with Corn Marigold, Field Woundwort and Small-flowered Catchfly.



Corn Spurrey 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

Corn Spurrey has declined due to the intensification of arable farming and increased fertiliser, herbicide use and liming of fields. Although seeds may germinate in the autumn, a change from spring to autumn cultivation has also contributed to the decline. It is thought that cultivation practices like minimum tillage and direct drilling of crop seed does not disturb the soil sufficiently to stimulate germination of seeds.

Habitat management for Corn Spurrey

Corn Spurrey prefers annual disturbance and the creation of bare ground in the spring (February to April). Habitat management for this species should focus on annual spring (preferably) or autumn cultivation. Historic management practices and records for the site should be examined. If Corn Spurrey has been present in the last five years, regular spring or autumn cultivation may be sufficient to enable dormant seeds to germinate.

This species is rarely found in grassland and will do best within a spring-sown crop. 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. Broad-spectrum herbicide and nitrogen fertiliser use should be avoided. If treatment of a problematic weed species is required, targeted herbicides could be used.



© Cath Shellswell



© Cath Shellswell