

Broad-leaved Cudweed

Filago pyramidata



Lifecycle

Broad-leaved cudweed is an annual herb which flowers from July into the autumn. Germination can occur throughout the year, with peaks in autumn and, to a lesser extent, in spring. Most seed probably falls close to the parent plant, though transfer on feet or farm machinery does seem to occur. Seed appears to persist well in the soil, possibly for some decades.

Habitat

This species occurs on disturbed ground, including arable farmland, track edges, quarries, and disturbed patches in grassland. It occurs on well-drained soils, mainly on chalk or limestone, but also on sandy or gravelly soils.

GB status and rarity

Endangered

Broad-leaved cudweed is a low-growing, often sprawling plant, with leaves and stems covered in short, whitish, woolly hairs. Plants are often branched from the base, with simple leaves with are widest towards their tips. The flowers are arranged in small, pyramid-shaped heads, which are clustered together in groups of, normally, around 10 to 20. Each of the small pyramidal heads is surrounded by slender, pointed bracts, which are yellowish and curve outwards.

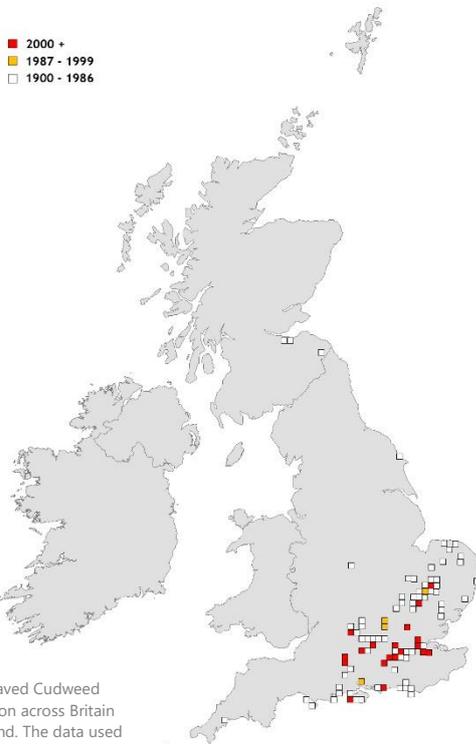
Broad-leaved cudweed is very similar to Common Cudweed *Filago vulgaris* and Red-tipped Cudweed *Filago lutescens*, both of which may occur in similar habitats. Common Cudweed has narrow leaves, widest towards the base, and normally 20 to 40 flower-heads in a cluster. Normally, the uppermost leaves of broad-leaved cudweed overtop the flower-head, and this is not the case in common cudweed. Red-tipped cudweed has red-tipped, erect (not outward-curving) bracts, and is covered in normally yellowish woolly hairs.

Protection under the law

Broad-leaved Cudweed is included as a species "of principal importance for the purpose of conserving biodiversity" under Section 41 (England) of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 and is protected under schedule 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Survey method

All flowering and non-flowering individuals on a site should be counted, or estimates made for larger populations.



Broad-leaved Cudweed 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.

Distribution

Broad-leaved Cudweed is a plant of southern and eastern England, though plants have been historically recorded as far north as Yorkshire (with a few casual records in southern Scotland), and as far west as Cornwall. The few remaining locations are all in the south-east of England.

Reasons for decline

Broad-leaved Cudweed has declined as a result of habitat loss and changes in farming management. Its loss from paths and tracksides may be related to changes in roadside habitats and perhaps also increased hard surfacing. Loss from arable field sites is probably related to use of selective herbicides and increased use of fertilizers, as it seems to prefer soils of low fertility. Reduction in grazing pressure, and associated poaching of the soil, as well as decline in disturbance on heathlands, are also likely to be factors.

Habitat management

Conservation management involves regular disturbance, which should ideally be in early autumn, in order to allow germination during the milder weather of late September and October. Disturbance in late autumn normally results in germination in the following spring, which is generally at a lower rate than autumn germination. So, on arable sites, early autumn cultivation is preferable, though cultivation in spring is better than none at all.

In fact, disturbance at any time of year can result in germination providing soils are not too dry, and disturbance of grassland during early summer can lead to plants appearing where seed is present in the soil. Digging over or rotavating of soil, or the creation of shallow, dry 'scrapes' in grassland have been effective in establishing plants.

There are indications that seed can be transferred on the feet of people or livestock or on the wheels of vehicles, and plants appear able to withstand at least moderate trampling. It may be, therefore, that re-establishment of unsurfaced footpaths or vehicle tracks, or even drove tracks for movement of livestock, could assist colonisation of new areas.

Broad-leaved Cudweed appears to be sensitive to the addition of nitrogen to the soil, so conservation on farmland sites will be assisted by the avoidance of fertilizer use.

Studies indicate that a site should have more than 175 plants present in any given year in order to maintain genetic diversity, though, clearly, substantially larger populations are to be preferred.