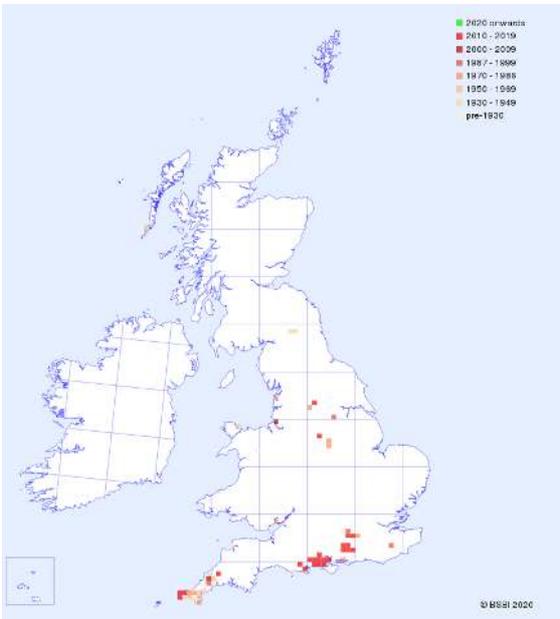


# Coral Necklace

## *Illecebrum verticillatum*



### Coral Necklace 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.

### Description

Coral Necklace is an aptly named small, glabrous plant. Clusters of pinkish white flowers are strung along the trailing reddish stems rather like beads on a necklace.

The oval and slightly cupped grey-green leaves grow in pairs and are 2-6mm long. The flowers, which grow in small whorls, consist of 8-12 flowers and are spaced quite consistently along the smooth stems, which can reach up to 20cm in length but are often much shorter. Each flower consists of 5 small petals and 5 thick corky sepals. Where the plant is growing in shallow water it is noticeable that flowering tends to take place only on emergent stems. Stems can become quite woody at the base.

### Lifecycle

The plant is annual. The stems elongate over the summer and it normally flowers between July and September. Although generally thought to be killed by frost, it can persist into the winter in milder conditions. It is self-pollinating and forms one-seeded fruits. It spreads mostly by seed, although it may also root from stem fragments. The germination of seeds can be held back by cold dry springs.

### Habitat

Coral Necklace is most commonly found in temporary pools in heathland or heathy grassland and in seasonally flooded hollows along sandy or gravelly tracks. It can also be found on tracks within forestry plantations.

Coral Necklace requires very open conditions and it therefore generally found where livestock grazing and trampling or vehicle use create disturbance and maintain a very short sward and plenty of bare ground. It prefers sandy soils, sometimes where there is an element of clay in the substrate.

It is often found growing in the same habitat as two superficially similar species: Water Purslane *Lythrum portula* (which has smaller flowers and larger leaves than the Coral Necklace) and Knotgrass *Polygonum aviculare* (which has green stems and larger leaves than Coral Necklace). It is sometimes found with other scarce species. For example, on winter-wet trackways it may be found Yellow Centaury *Cicendia filiformis*, Allseed *Linum radiola* and Chaffweed *Lysimachia minima*.

## Distribution

Coral Necklace was first recorded in Cornwall, where it is considered native, in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> Century. It is thought likely to be a 19<sup>th</sup> Century arrival elsewhere. It is locally abundant in New Forest and has more recently colonized the Dorset, Wealden and Thames basin heaths. It has declined seriously in Cornwall over the last 90 years. A sub-oceanic, southern temperate species, it is widespread in north-west Europe and north-west Africa.

## GB status and rarity

This species is classified as Endangered in England (i.e. facing a very high risk of extinction in the wild in the near future) and Rare (i.e. occurring in 15 or fewer hectads in Great Britain).

## Protection under the law

This Plant 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.

## Survey method

Individual plants can be counted, or in more extensive mats where it covers a large area, the percentage of cover per square metre can be estimated.

## Reasons for decline

With a loss in heathland habitat in the 20th century and a decline in grazing management, Coral Necklace has undergone a major decline, particularly in Cornwall and Berkshire. Other factors include agricultural and urban run-off, which have degraded water quality, the loss of seasonal pools through over-tidy land management and climate

change, and competition from the invasive species, notably New Zealand Pigmyweed *Crassula helmsii*.

## Habitat management

Winter-wet conditions, a very short sparse sward and ongoing disturbance are the key requirements of Coral Necklace. Where relatively high levels of livestock grazing are maintained throughout the year, additional management is unlikely to be necessary. On sites such as those in Dorset which are ungrazed, ongoing disturbance is crucial to maintain the required open conditions and it is essential that track repairs, such as surfacing or levelling out of hollows is avoided. New Zealand Pigmy weed, which can thrive in the same pools as Coral Necklace, it can easily outcompete it and should always be removed before it becomes established.



© Clive Chatters

Coral Necklace hollows in the New Forest.

## Sources and further information

[Pondnet Coral Necklace factsheet](#) Freshwater Habitats Trust

[The status of Coral-necklace \*Illecebrum verticillatum\* L. \(Caryophyllaceae\) in Great Britain](#) by David Pearman in *Watsonia* 27: 143–148 (2008)

[Pondnet recording form \(for pond populations\)](#) Freshwater Habitats Trust.

## Version

V1 2020 (SL, DW, CC)



© Sophie Lake