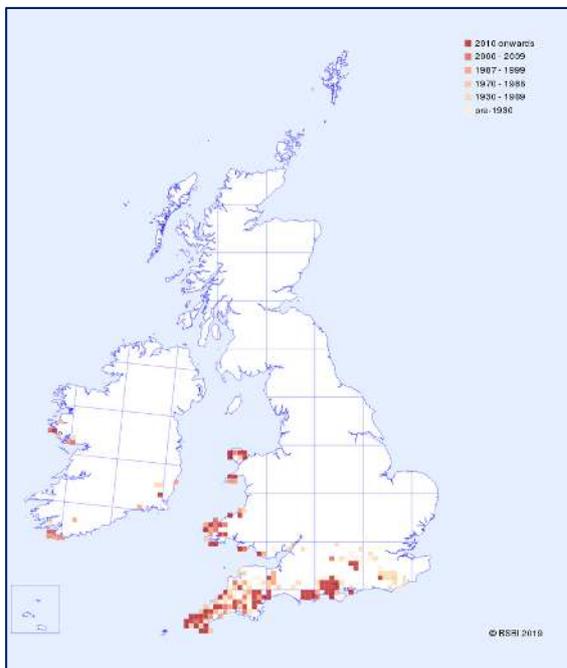


Pale Dog-violet

Viola lactea



Pale Dog-violet 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

Pale Dog-violet is a beautiful, delicate plant of the *Viola* family. Its milky-white petals are just tinged with colour and the lower petal is lined with deep purple veins. The spur (at the back of the flower) is yellowish or greenish and may be notched. The bluntly-toothed leaves are elongated into a spear shape (ovate-lanceolate) and are generally wedge-shaped (cuneate) at the base, without the distinctive heart-shape typical of many other violets. A faint purplish flush can sometimes be seen on the underside of the dark green leaf. The long stipules (leaf-like structures at the base of the flower stem) are pointed and toothed, sometimes with a fringed margin towards the base, and may be longer than the stems (pedicels) of the upper leaves, but shorter than those of the lower leaves.

This species hybridizes readily with Common Dog-violet *Viola riviniana*, which can be found in similar habitat. The proportion of hybrid plants is thought to be increasing at sites where both species are present, particularly on the Cornish coast. The hybrid *V. riviniana x lactea* is a more vigorous plant than Pale Dog-violet and can form large clumps, out-competing its parents. It is usually intermediate in form between the two species. It is, however, generally sterile and the brown, dead flowers remain on the plant in the place of seed capsules. Pale Dog-violet also hybridises, but much more rarely, with Heath Dog-violet *Viola canina* to form *V. canina x militaris*

Lifecycle

Pale Dog-violet is a perennial plant and flowers from May into June each year. Its seeds are thought to persist in the soil, creating a long-lasting seedbank from which it may regenerate years, even decades, after the parent plant has died.

Habitat

The preferred conditions of this species – dry or slightly damp acidic soils with a degree of disturbance - are generally found in lowland or maritime heath where it is often found in short vegetation alongside tracks, by gorse thickets or in grassy patches. It is associated with slightly enriched heathland soils. It is typically found growing with any of Heather *Calluna vulgaris*, Bell Heather *Erica cinerea*, Bristle Bent *Agrostis setacea*, Sheep's Fescue *Festuca ovina* and Tormentil *Potentilla erecta* and may be associated with areas of burnt Gorse *Ulex* spp,

Distribution

Pale Dog-violet is an oceanic species with a south-western distribution. Found from Anglesey down the west coast of Wales, along the south coast of England and in south west Ireland, its main concentrations are now in the New Forest Dorset, Cornwall, Pembrokeshire and Co. Kerry. The species had already declined severely prior 1930 but has continued to disappear from much of its previous range, particularly from south east England. Within its key areas it is reported to be withdrawing towards the coast.

GB status and rarity

Classified as 'Vulnerable' in The Vascular Plant Red Data List for Great Britain 2005 due to the magnitude of the decline in its range and area of occupation, and 'Endangered' in England (2014) i.e. facing a very high risk of extinction in the wild in the near future. It is Nationally Scarce (occurring in 16-100 hectads).

Protection under the law

This violet 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 stands, the dimensions of the stand and density of plants recorded together with an overall indication of the approximate number of plants. Particular care should be taken with identification where other *Viola*

species and therefore potentially hybrids are present.

Reasons for decline

As with many heathland specialists, the principal reasons for its decline are historic habitat loss (e.g. through development or conversion to arable or conifer plantation) and inappropriate land management. It is intolerant of shade and has disappeared on extant heathlands where a lack of traditional management such as livestock grazing, gorse cutting and swaling (deliberate winter burning of grass and heather) has resulted in scrub encroachment and the growth of secondary woodland.

Habitat management

Pale Dog-violet appears to respond well to both disturbance (such as livestock trampling) and to prescribed burning, which remove any build-up of litter and create localised bare ground. Cutting or mowing can be used to limited the growth of more vigorous species if cattle/pony grazing or controlled burning are not feasible.



Typical Pale Dog-violet habitat – an area subject to a prescribed burn and grazed by ponies.

Sources and further information

Violas of Britain and Ireland by Michael Porter and Michael Foley (BSBI Handbook No.17, 2017).

[Pale Dog-violet species factsheet](#), Plantlife (available online)

Pale Dog Violet by S.B. Evans in Stewart, Pearman and Preston 1994 *Scarce Plants in Britain* JNCC

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