

Fine-leaved Sandwort

Sabulina tenuifolia

Fine-leaved Sandwort is part of the Campion (Caryophyllaceae) family. It is a slender branched annual. The hairless stems grow up to 20 cm tall with linear strap-like short leaves. The flowers have five white petals and are 6 mm across. The petals are much shorter than the white bordered sepals.

Lifecycle

It flowers between May and June and only reproduces from seed.

Habitat

Fine-leaved Sandwort is an annual species of short calcareous grassland, as well as abandoned arable fields, old walls, quarries, railway ballast and inland calcareous sands.

Distribution

It is particularly common on abandoned arable land in Breckland, but elsewhere is restricted by the natural habitat of dry, weathered calcareous rocky slopes which are scarce in southern England. It is a mainly lowland species, but is found at 400 m in the Craven Pennines. The decline in its natural habitat has been compensated for by new populations along railway lines.

GB status and rarity

Endangered

Protection under the law

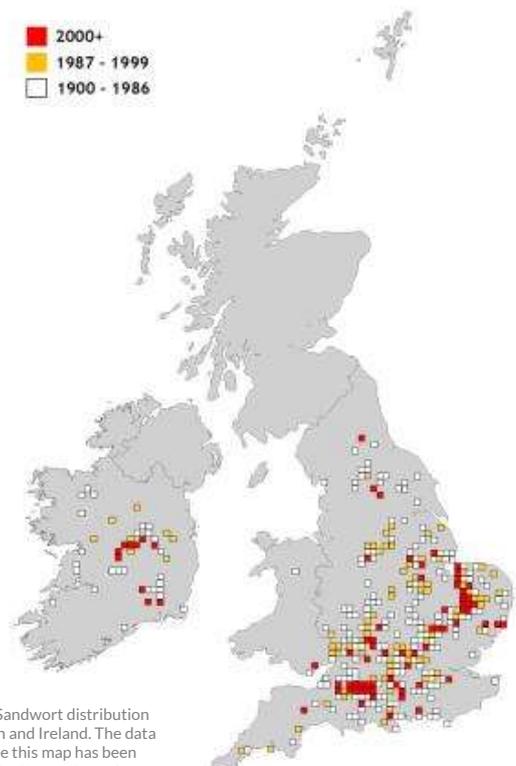
This plant is included as a species “of principal importance for the purpose of conserving biodiversity” under Section 41 (England) of the

Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.

It was classified as Endangered in the Great Britain Vascular Plant Red List and the England Vascular Plant Red List as the more southern populations are in decline.

Survey method

The number of individual plants should be counted, or estimated in larger populations. Surveys are best undertaken when the plant is in flower between May and June.



Fine-leaved Sandwort 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

Agricultural intensification has caused the decline in Fine-leaved Sandwort in grassland and arable fields, but the number of records has risen on railway ballast. Lack of management leading to the development of scrub woodland on grassland and in quarries has exacerbated the decline more recently.

Habitat management for Fine-leaved Sandwort

Fine-leaved Sandwort prefers very open calcareous soils, and will germinate following disturbance, such as on Salisbury Plain. The habitat needs to remain open for its survival as it is a poor competitor. As Fine-leaved Sandwort is an early spring annual, it may germinate from autumn through into early winter (probably October to December, depending on season), and is likely to grow during warm spells over the winter period, with the main growth late February to March. Thus, management should concentrate on soil disturbance during the late August to early October period.

Creation of new borrow pits, quarries and (excavation of disused quarries) and scrapes around old and new records of Fine-leaved Sandwort would provide potential habitat. It is likely to have followed the quarrying around a site and will grow on newly-dumped base-rich spoil. Fine-leaved Sandwort is associated with disturbed chalk resulting from tank usage on Salisbury Plain, with several new colonies discovered in recent decades along tracks.

Where Fine-leaved Sandwort was associated with arable fields in a long-term rotation, cultivation of soils followed by several years of fallow may bring buried seed to the surface and trigger germination.

Although the species is an annual, it may take a while to germinate and leaving the fallow plots for a few years before another disturbance would allow time for any viable seed to germinate, grow, flower and set seed.

Management may be required to keep vigorous annual and perennial herbaceous plants under control as they can quickly cover bare ground shading-out the less competitive Fine-leaved Sandwort.