

Frog Orchid

Coeloglossum viride

Frog Orchid is part of the Orchidaceae family. It is a short erect orchid, between 4-20 cm tall. It has a basal rosette of blunt hairless leaves and very narrow short leaves up the stem. The short loose-flowered spike has greenish to brown-purple flowers with a close helmet of sepals. The green-yellow or brownish flower lip hangs down below the sepals and has three teeth at the tip. Its outside edges are often chocolate coloured. The green bracts are as long as the flower stalk and flowers.

Frog Orchid can look superficially like Man Orchid *Orchis anthropophora*. The latter is usually a much stouter plant with glossy grey-green leaves, but has the close oval hood with yellowish-green sepals and long lip that may be red or chocolate edged. However, the flower lip has two spurs to the side creating 'arms' and two teeth at the tip rather than three like Frog Orchid.



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Lifecycle

Frog Orchid grows from tubers and flowers from June to August and grows almost entirely from seed with little vegetative spread.

Frog Orchid can be easily overlooked as the short flowering spike has green coloured flowers. The number of flowering spikes can vary enormously on an annual basis with individual plants flowering erratically.

Habitat

Frog Orchid is a plant of well-drained dry calcareous soils overlying chalk or limestone, or of calcareous sands in Southern England. It can rarely occur in more neutral to acid hay meadows, such as Dartmoor and Bodmin Moor where the vegetation is shorter. Elsewhere in the UK it is associated with flushes, limestone pavement, screes, rocky ledges, roadside verges and quarries. It was probably associated with sheep-walks / droves in the past, where a long continuity of grazing kept the grass permanently short.

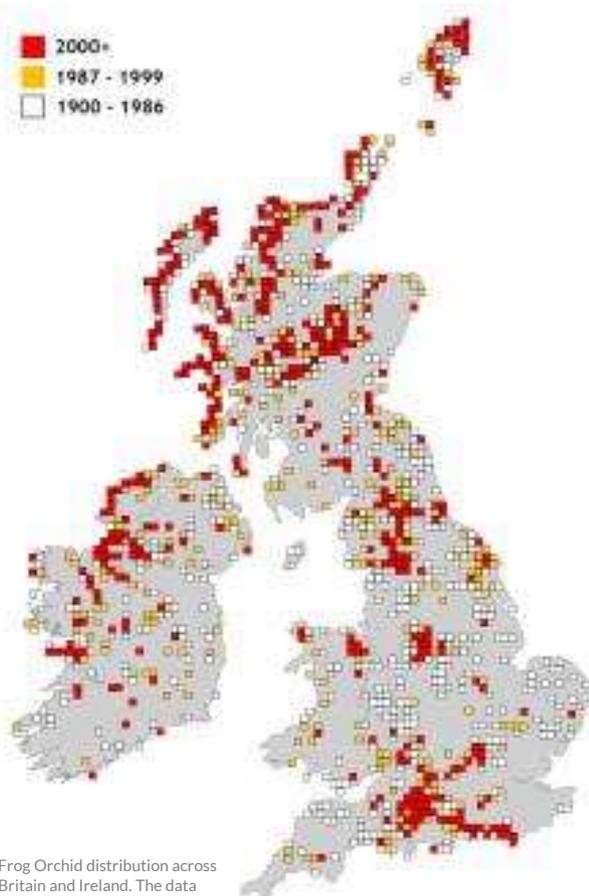
Species that Frog Orchid is often associated with include Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, Glaucous Sedge *Carex flacca*, Sweet Vernal Grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* and Ribwort Plantain *Plantago lanceolata*.

Distribution

Frog Orchid is widespread across the UK, but declined substantially prior to 1930 in Southern England with continuing declines.

GB status and rarity

Vulnerable



Frog Orchid 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.

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, Section 2(4) of The Nature Conservation Act (Scotland) 2004 and Section 7 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. It is listed as a priority species in Northern Ireland.

It is classified as Vulnerable in both the Great Britain Vascular Plant Red List. At a country level it is considered Vulnerable in the England Vascular Plant Red List and Scotland List of Priority Species. It is listed as Endangered in the Wales Vascular Plant Red List.

Survey method

Individual plants can be counted when it is in flower between July and August. It is easiest to count flowering plants as they are more visible than rosettes.



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Reasons for decline

Frog Orchid has been in decline since the 1930s due to the conversion of pasture to arable land, and agricultural improvement of grassland by spreading fertiliser and over-seeding with more competitive grasses. More recently, lack of management through under-grazing has become a threat leading to the growth of rank vegetation, bracken and development of scrub woodland.



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Habitat management for Frog Orchid

Depending on the habitat, management for Frog Orchid can be tailored to suit the situation. The aim is to achieve a balance between preventing flowering spikes from being consumed while maintaining the short sward and preventing the accumulation of grass thatch. After a very short period of little or no management, the sward can either become too rank or the thatch builds up to a level that swamps Frog Orchid rosettes.

The small stature of Frog Orchid is likely to become quickly shaded out if the vegetation is under-grazed for several years. Conversely, it can survive long periods of heavy grazing in a non-flowering state, surviving year to year as flat ground-hugging rosettes. It can however flower if grazing is relaxed. An example of where this occurs is at a site on Bodmin Moor where it appeared in good quantities following removal of grazing during the creation of a reservoir.

On calcareous pasture, mixed grazing outside of the flowering season (after July) would be recommended as livestock, particularly sheep, may incidentally eat the flowering spikes if turned out too early.

Rabbit grazing can contribute significantly to creating the right conditions for Frog Orchid. It is not known whether rabbits avoid eating Frog Orchid, but there are examples where medium to high rabbit populations maintain good conditions for this species, so they may avoid consuming the leaves and flowers.