

# Small-flowered Catchfly

## *Silene gallica*



A small campion that grows to about 30 cm in height. The whole plant is hairy and the hairs on the upper part of the plant are sticky, hence the name 'catchfly'. The lower leaves are narrowly oval in shape, while the upper leaves are slenderer. The young leaves form a rosette close to the ground which dies off as the plant matures.

Small-flowered Catchfly could be confused with White Campion and Night-flowering Catchfly. The flowers of these two species are larger than those of Small-flowered Catchfly which are up to 15 mm across. White Campion does not have sticky glandular hairs on the upper stem, and the flowers of Night-flowering Catchfly close during the day.

### Lifecycle

Small-flowered Catchfly is an annual herb flowering from June to October. Seeds can germinate in autumn or spring, but in arable situations this species tends to be found in spring-sown crops. Seed dormancy for Small-flowered Catchfly is unknown but the small, regular-shaped seeds are likely to be medium- to long-lived.

### Habitat

An arable species, typically found in the margins of fields sown with spring crops. This species is also occasionally found on dry, sunny banks near to the sea and along former railway lines. Other than regular disturbance, low soil nutrient levels and open vegetation are important requirements for this species.

Small-flowered Catchfly is found on nutrient poor sands and sandy loams, which in most cases are acidic in nature. Many of the largest populations are found on organic farms and where spring sown cereal fields are left as sacrificial crops for farmland birds.

Small-flowered Catchfly is normally found within species-rich arable plant communities. Although these communities are variable, the species that it tends to grow alongside include Weasel's-snout, Corn Spurrey, Redshank, Knotgrass agg., Fat Hen, Scentless Mayweed, Field Woundwort, Spear-leaved Orache and Field Madder. Small-flowered Catchfly does not appear to grow successfully where Corn Marigold dominates.

### GB status and rarity

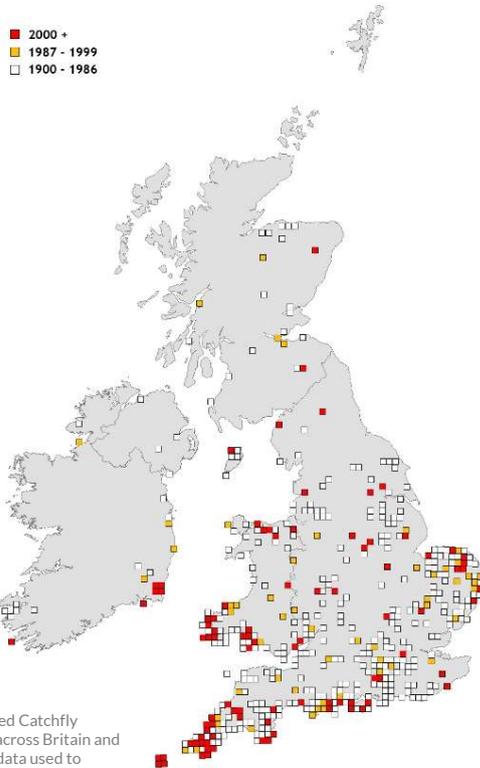
Endangered

### 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, and listed as a priority species under Section 7 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

### Survey method

Individual plants should be counted in smaller populations and larger populations could be estimated.



Small-flowered Catchfly 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**

This species has disappeared from an estimated 70% of its former range, when it was widespread across southern England and Wales. Most sites are now found near the coasts of south-west England, East Anglia and Wales. There are recent records scattered throughout north and eastern England and also in Scotland.

**Reasons for decline**

Small-flowered Catchfly is a poor competitor preferring open vegetation, low nutrient levels and regular cultivation of soil. Threats include intensive farming, particularly the development of competitive cereal crop varieties that can grow quickly, closing the cereal sward and preventing light reaching seedlings. Widespread use of broad-spectrum herbicides has also had a negative effect on this species.

**Habitat management**

Ideal management on arable land involves annual cultivation in either spring (between February and April) or autumn (between October and early December), without subsequent disturbance until Small-flowered Catchfly plants have flowered and set seed.

Small-flowered Catchfly readily germinates from seed, and requires soil disturbance, such as ploughing, to bring buried seed to the soil surface and trigger germination. It prefers soil that has been made into a fine tilth and will grow within a crop, such a spring of autumn sown cereal, root crops, or within uncropped cultivated margins, field corners or plots.

It is susceptible to broad-spectrum herbicides and their use will reduce population sizes. However, if required, treatment of problematic weed species, such as sowthistles, could be undertaken through targeted herbicide use. Fertiliser can encourage problem weeds, but fertiliser is not usually applied to uncropped areas for arable plants and its use is limited on cereal headlands and wildlife cover crops.

Using a reduced seed rate and/or a crop variety that has fewer tillers on conservation headlands will also benefit Small-flowered Catchfly as it is not very competitive. If this species is growing within a crop, the crop should be harvested after Small-flowered Catchfly has set seed, usually later into August. If conditions are right, seeds can germinate later in the summer, flower and seed before the first frosts.

In non-arable situations, populations of Small-flowered Catchfly should be maintained through appropriate scrub clearance. Small scale manual disturbance could also be carried out to create bare ground for seed germination.

