

Stinking Chamomile

Anthemis cotula



Lifecycle

Stinking Chamomile is an annual herb that flowers between May to October, generally reaching a peak in July. There may also be a flush of flowers in September-October on regrowth from cut shoots resulting from crop harvest. Flowers require insect pollination and each flowerhead produces between 50-75 seeds. Germination usually occurs in spring or autumn, but seedlings have been noted at other times of the year. Young plants, forming rosettes, are frost hardy and over-wintering plants start growing again in March. Seeds have been known to stay viable in soil after burial for 25 years.

Habitat

This is a pioneering species that will grow on a wide range of soil, but specifically prefers disturbed, heavy soils including clay, marl and clay-loam. It can also be found in calcareous free-draining soils, and clay caps

Stinking Chamomile is a member of the daisy family, Asteraceae. Stems are upright and branched, ranging in height between 30–60 cm. The leaves of the plant are pinnate, with very fine lobes. They grow directly from the stem, up to 6 cm long, and are normally hairless, however, soft, fine hairs can sometimes be found on the upper surface. Leaves produce an unpleasant, sickly odour, when agitated, hence the name.

Flower heads form loose inflorescences. The flowerheads (up to 3 cm in diameter) are composed of up to 18 white, ray florets, surrounding a collection of yellow inner-disc florets. Narrow scales are present amongst these inner disc-florets.

Similar in appearance to and occurs in the same habitats as Scented Mayweed, Scentless Mayweed, Corn Chamomile and Austrian Chamomile. Both Scented and Scentless Mayweed do not have scales associated with disc-florets. Corn Chamomile and Austrian Chamomile have scales which are shield-shaped with a mucronate tip, rather than narrow scales.

Stinking chamomile, either fresh or dried in hay, can taint milk if eaten by dairy cows. In the past dried flower heads have been used as an insecticide and as a mouse repellent!

on top of calcareous loams. There are records of this species from sandy and slightly acid soils, though it does not seem to be characteristic of this soil type.

Stinking Chamomile tends to be found in disturbed unmanaged areas, arable fields, coastal dunes and road verges in relatively warm, lowland areas with low rainfall.

GB status and rarity

Vulnerable.

Protection under the law

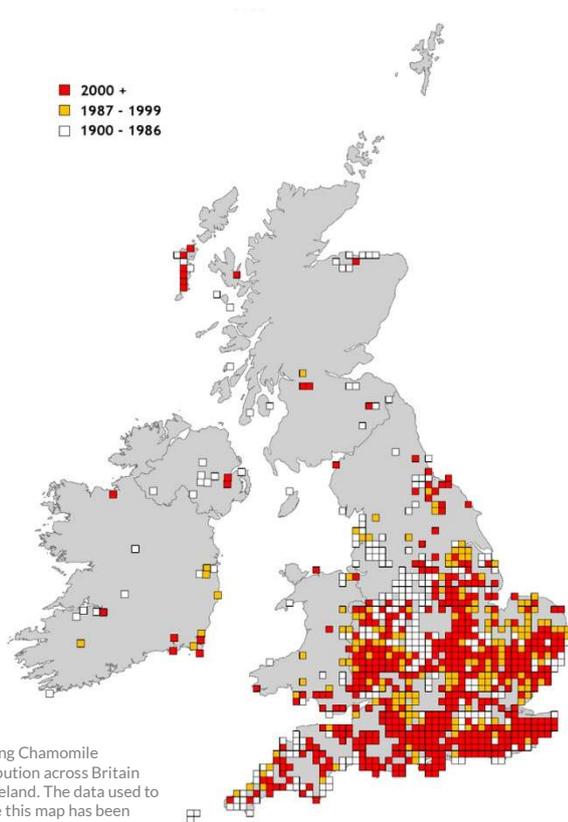
This plant is not protected by law in any of the countries of the British Isles.

Survey method

All flowering and non-flowering individuals on a site should be counted or estimated when larger populations are present.

Distribution

Stinking Chamomile is believed to have been introduced to the British Isles, from northern Europe, during the iron age. It is found throughout the British Isles; however, the majority of records are located in the south.



Stinking Chamomile distribution across Britain and Ireland. The data used to create this map has been provided under licence from the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI) and accessed from the Society's online database.

Reasons for decline

Modern, intensive farming practices have resulted in a population decline since the 1950's. Improved seed cleaning techniques to remove seeds from cereal crops, introduction of fertilisers and broad spectrum herbicides and loss of field margins have all been contributing factors.

Habitat management

Stinking Chamomile benefits from annual disturbance resulting in areas of bare ground, such as ploughing. It can germinate in spring or autumn.

As with most declining arable plants the use of fertilisers and herbicides is not recommended. Fertilisers are likely to result in thicker vegetation of very competitive plants that do well in higher nutrient environments. Broad-spectrum herbicides will negatively affect the growth of Stinking Chamomile and over time the lack of seed replenishment to the soil will reduce the population size and extent.



© Hannah Gibbons