

Red-tipped Cudweed

Filago lutescens



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Lifecycle

Red-tipped Cudweed is an annual plant, flowering from July to October. Experiments have shown that it probably germinates in autumn or winter. It seems to be somewhat irregular in its occurrence, and the length of time the seeds can remain viable in the ground is still unknown.

Disturbing ground in October or January where the plant has previously been recorded has encouraged growth of this species. However, it is not certain whether regular tilling of the soil, either annually or every two years, will always produce consistent results.

Red-tipped Cudweed is a small, herbaceous plant which resembles a tiny thistle. It displays a cluster of hidden flowers at the tip. The plant is grey to green-grey, often with a yellowish hue. It tends to grow to a height of around 25cm. This species is similar to and can be confused with Common Cudweed and Broad-leaved Cudweed. A key feature of Red-tipped Cudweed is the presence of bright red-tipped, erect bristle-points. Bracts are yellow and slightly outward-curving in Broad-leaved Cudweed and yellow and erect in Common Cudweed. In addition the leaves of Red-tipped Cudweed do not have recurved margins, though the other two species do have recurved margins.

Habitat

Open, sandy soils that are often acidic. Formerly most commonly reported from arable fields, it is now largely restricted to tracks, sandpits, heaths, commons and rabbit scrapes.

GB status and rarity

Classified as Critically Endangered, with a high risk of it becoming extinct in the wild in the UK.

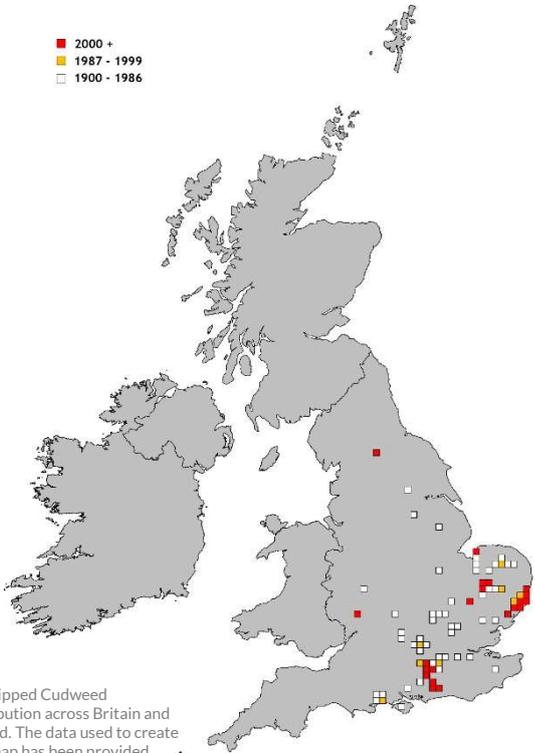
Protection under the law

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 is also listed under Schedule 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, meaning that it is an offense to pick, uproot or destroy any plants.

Survey method

As Red-tipped Cudweed is most readily identifiable when in flower it is recommended that this species is surveyed between July and September. Due to the size and stature of this species it should be possible to make a count of the number of individuals present. Larger populations could be estimated.

■ 2000 +
■ 1987 - 1999
□ 1900 - 1986



Red-tipped Cudweed 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 is largely restricted to southern and eastern England, being found at approximately 16 sites scattered across, Hampshire, Sussex, Surrey, Essex, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and Gloucestershire.

Reasons for decline

Since the 1950's, there has been a dramatic change in agricultural practices which has resulted in declines of many plant species historically associated with arable fields, such as herbicide use, development of highly productive crops and loss of traditional crop rotations. In addition, Red-tipped Cudweed may have been negatively affected by hard-surfacing paths and tracks, and in some cases afforestation with conifer plantations. Habitat suitability might have also reduced in some areas through the impacts of myxomatosis on local rabbit populations, especially where rabbit populations have never fully recovered.

Habitat management

Recommended habitat management for this species includes annual disturbance by digging or cultivating in early autumn. However, further research is needed to fully understand the requirements of this species. It is essential that sites are managed each year to maintain open conditions as the plant appears to have a limited period of viability within the seed bank. At a site in Suffolk, the ground is rotavated in alternative years. Ground scarification has also been carried out at a Red-tipped Cudweed site in the Breckland Forest to maintain the required open ground cover. Scrub management might also be required in certain locations, such as quarries.



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