

Eagle's claw

Anaptychia ciliaris subsp. *ciliaris*



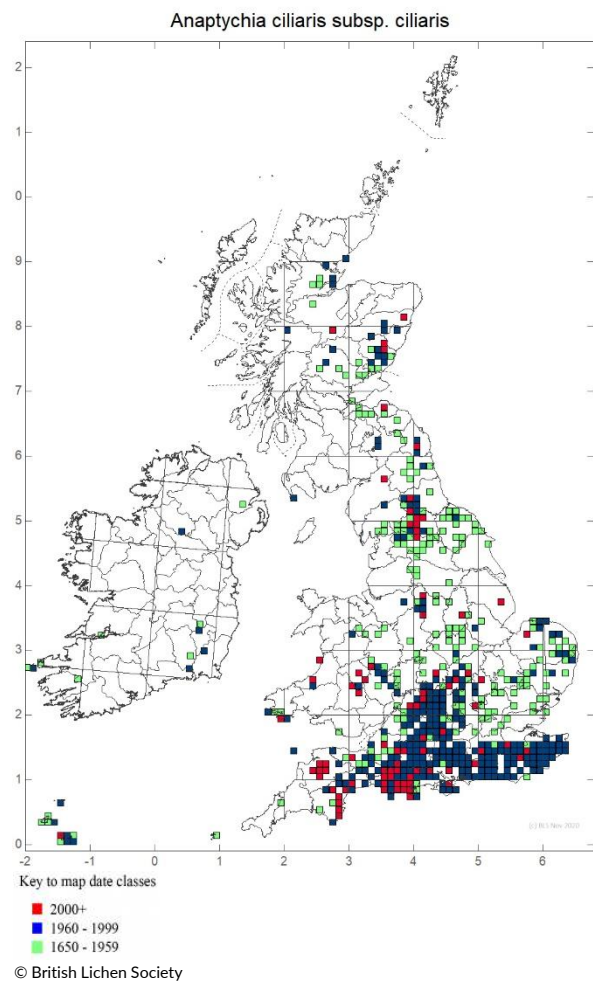
Eagle's claw lichen is a 'fruticose' lichen i.e. it has a shrubby growth form. It is pale grey and forms long strap-like lobes which become brown at the tips, and has a velvety texture. The underside is white, and lacks a cortex, or skin, so again can have a furry appearance as it is made up of just fungal hyphae. It has long curved eyelash-like structures on the margins of the lobes, these are the cilia that give it its scientific name and the 'claws' that give it its common English-language name. These are often darker than the lobes. Fruiting bodies – apothecia – are black, often with a pale dusting like icing sugar, about 5mm diameter, held on short stalks, and can be common in areas where the air is clean.

It is a rare lichen in Britain, assessed as Endangered in the GB Red List (Woods & Coppins 2012) on account of a 50-80% decline since the 1980s, is Nationally Scarce and is a S41 Priority Species in England.

Distribution

This species has always tended to avoid wetter western areas in GB but was widespread and locally common from south west England to north east Scotland in the past. Following a rapid decline

it is now mostly in central southern England e.g. Dorset.



Habitat

Eagle's claw lichen is mostly found on the trunks of veteran trees with less acidic (or base-rich) bark

e.g. Ash, Sycamore, elm and older oak that have a degree of natural nutrient enrichment (not that resulting from high level of ammonia pollution).

Primarily a species of agricultural landscapes, it favours well-lit veteran trees along boundaries and roadsides often growing at some height up the trunk. Unlike many specialist lichens of veteran trees it is not a pasture woodland species.

It is also found rarely on mossy calcareous rocks, gravestones and walls.



A mature sycamore in a parkland in the Welsh Marches with Eagle's claw lichen

Reason for decline

Eagle's claw lichen requires:

- Veteran trees with less acidic bark e.g. Ash, elm, Sycamore, old oak
- Continuity of habitat i.e. successive generations of suitable trees
- Well-lit trunks
- Mild levels of nutrient enrichment, as found in less intensively managed farmland
- Clean air

As such its main threats are:

- Death or collapse of suitable trees e.g. loss of elm to Dutch elm disease and now the loss of Ash to ash dieback
- Loss of continuity of suitable trees on a site and across the landscape

- Shade as a result of unmanaged regeneration and/or invasive non-native species inc. Ivy which can be a particular issue on boundary trees and in the absence of grazing/browsing or other management
- Air pollution, especially acidification e.g. from nitrous oxides and sulphur dioxide
- Over enrichment by excessive amount of ammonia released by intensive farming

Habitat management

The aim of the following management advice is to ensure the long-term continuity and connectivity of Eagle's claw lichen habitat:

- As a species mainly found in agricultural landscapes on old trees in parks, pastures and along roads and track ways, management of veteran trees within farmland is a crucial issue.
- Maintain well-lit conditions in and around mature trees with basic bark in locations that support Eagle's claw lichen e.g. by thinning regeneration (whilst being mindful of the need to retain some younger trees) and controlling invasive species, native or non-native e.g. holly, *Rhododendron*.
- Ivy can be a particular problem, particularly on trees in hedgerows and should be controlled when young growth is invading trees that support Eagle's claw lichen or suitable ones nearby.
- Identify younger suitable trees to become future veterans and manage around them to create the right conditions.
- If no suitable trees exist plant future veterans, selecting species with naturally base-rich bark such as disease resistant elm or Ash (if available), Field maple, Sycamore, Beech and Horse chestnut close to existing populations, although not so close as to cause shade and competition issues.
- Remove or reduce sources of locally generated atmospheric pollutants e.g. by reducing stocking levels if excessive and by limiting fertilising of grasslands. If possible convert arable land adjacent to veteran trees to pasture, especially if the arable was created from pasture in the 20th century.

Survey methods

Surveying for Eagle's claw lichen requires a specialist lichen surveyor.

Further information

<https://www.britishlichensociety.org.uk/resources/species-accounts/anapychia-ciliaris-subsp.-ciliaris>

<http://wales-lichens.org.uk/species-account/anapychia-ciliaris-subsp-ciliaris>

The Back from the Brink Ancients of the Future project is led by Buglife in partnership with Plantlife and the Bat Conservation Trust.

