

****PRESS RELEASE: EMBARGOED UNTIL 17TH SEPTEMBER 2014****



England's first Red List for Vascular Plants.

The first England Red List¹ will be launched at Kew Gardens on 17th September. The List is a comprehensive and objective analysis² of changes in the distribution of our native flora³ and identifies our most threatened species.

Top findings of the Red List show that a fifth of England's wildflower species are under threat⁴, with the majority of these threatened species suffering a decline of 30% or more. Wildflowers associated with either highly acid or basic open habitats on infertile soils, such as Great Sundew (*Drosera anglica*) or Burnt-tip Orchid (*Orchis ustulata*), fare particularly badly. The analysis also identifies species that have suffered such severe declines in lowland areas of England that they meet the 'Threatened' criteria, despite being still relatively widespread and common in upland areas.

One major cause for concern is that a suite of wildflowers⁵ which many of us still think of as common and widespread across England, are now close to being listed as threatened.

Dr Pete Stroh⁶ of the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI), lead author of the Red List and project co-ordinator⁷ said "The modification or loss of vast swathes of our countryside throughout the past 60 years and more, particularly in lowland England, has been well documented. With such rapid change it is troubling - but perhaps not particularly surprising - to find out that species we have long thought of as common in the 'wider countryside' and under no immediate threat have declined to such an extent that they are now assessed as 'Near Threatened'. In many cases, this equates to a decline of more than 20% during what is, botanically speaking, the blink of an eye."

Fred Rumsey⁶ (NHM) said "Many people may be surprised to see some very familiar plants on this list – the extent of whose decline at an English level has been a revelation. It really shows the challenge we face in the most populous, developed and agriculturally productive areas of our country to preserve healthy ecosystems with flourishing biodiversity."

David Roy (CEH) said "The ERL is a landmark publication, using innovative analysis of one of the most comprehensive botanical datasets in the world. It highlights the unique contribution of expert volunteers (a type of citizen scientist) for identifying conservation priorities and understanding threats to our native wildlife".

Ian Taylor⁶ (Natural England) said "The scientific rigour brought to the England Red List by a partnership of the country's leading botanical organisations will enable us to target our conservation efforts more precisely and with greater confidence on those plants, habitats and landscapes revealed to be most urgently in need."

Dr Mike Fay⁶ (RBG Kew) said "This is an exciting new development, achieved through collaboration between government and non-government organisations, which allows us to focus on where the real problems lie."

Ben McCarthy (Plantlife)⁷ said "This report makes for stark reading and shows first-hand how England's countryside is in real trouble. Plantlife believes this report is the wake-up call needed and now urgent action needs to be taken to restore our remaining pockets of flower rich habitats, especially as so much of our other wildlife relies on them for food and shelter. We call on government and others to work with the botanical community to tackle the on-going challenge of habitat loss and fragmentation, ensuring the best sites are properly managed to help restore our wonderful wild flowers to the English countryside."

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For more information on the ERL please contact Dr Pete Stroh: peter.stroh@bsbi.org
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Twelve scientists from six organisations⁷ worked together on the England Red List and many will be at the launch at RBG Kew on 17th September to answer your questions. Details are on the attached invitation and we hope that you will be able to join us for the launch.

For more information about the launch, or to request high-resolution images of threatened plants, please contact Louise Marsh, BSBI Publicity & Outreach Officer: louise.marsh@bsbi.org Mobile: 07971 972 529

NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. Stroh, P.A., Leach, S.J., August, T.A., Walker, K.J., Pearman, D.A., Rumsey, F.J., Harrower, C.A., Fay, M.F., Martin, J.P., Pankhurst, T., Preston, C.D. & Taylor, I. 2014. *A Vascular Plant Red List for England*. Bristol: Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland. ISBN 9780953971862

2. A Red List uses a globally recognised and scientifically rigorous approach designed by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to assess and determine risks of extinction. The method is applicable to all species and provides information on status, trends and threats. The production of a first vascular plant Red List for England follows similar Lists for Great Britain (Cheffings & Farrell 2005) and Wales (Dines 2008) that have examined changes to our flora since 1930 and identified those species most at risk.

3. The analysis was carried out by Dr Pete Stroh and fellow scientists from the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH) and used data extracted from sources such as the BSBI's database. Many of the 13 million plant records analysed had been collected by BSBI volunteers and others since 1930.

4. Threat is not synonymous with rarity. A species assessed as threatened may have suffered considerable declines but still be relatively widespread, whereas a species that is rare or scarce may not be assessed as threatened because its population is relatively stable

5. Vascular plants (also termed 'higher plants') have lignified tissues for conducting water and minerals. They include all flowering plants, conifers and ferns. The catch-all term 'wildflowers' is often used as a proxy.

6. Dr Pete Stroh is a Scientific Officer employed by the BSBI. He was responsible for co-ordinating, writing and delivering the England Red List and is the lead author. Co-authors include scientists from the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, Natural England, Natural History Museum, Plantlife and Royal Botanic Gardens Kew.

7. An England Red List Working Group was set up in 2012 consisting of 12 scientists from 6 different organisations: Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland, Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, Natural England, Natural History Museum, Plantlife and Royal Botanic Gardens Kew.