

Introduction

Water Violet is a nationally uncommon water plant found in slow flowing streams and pools. It is often associated with fluctuating water levels and can be very prolific if left to grow unchecked. Its characteristic masses of finely divided, light green leaves and five petaled, pinkish-white flowers make it a very distinctive and attractive plant.

Nationally it is uncommon but it is not rare and is not a national BAP, nor is there any special legal protection for it.

In Scarborough, however, it is known from only one location.

Our objectives for Water Violet are:

**To maintain the present population of Water Violet in its natural location.
To enhance the present population and extend its range.**

In the past it is likely to have been much more widespread than today. Drainage and intensive management of ditches and watercourse have reduced its range considerably. This is mirrored in the local situation where its only known natural site is in a ditch near Folkton, in the Vale of Pickering,

This is, as one would expect, with much of the Vale originally being an extensive wetland. As such it is likely that, in this location, it is a relict of the original wetland flora of the Vale of Pickering.

The natural location is of particular interest as it is thought to be a section of the original channel of the River Hertford left in as part of the drainage system when the Hertford was canalised and the eastern end of the Vale drained.

Although there has been only one known location for many years, it has previously been much more prolific than at present. In recent years though it has decreased considerably in extent, largely due to the

increased maintenance regime of the ditch carried out by the Muston and Yedingham Internal Drainage Board as part of the annual management programme.

The primary reason for its decline in the past has been through drainage and possibly changes in water quality. The present decline is due to the increased maintenance of the ditch.

There are though, particular problems associated with the ditch in which it is found. The watercourse is one of the primary drains for the land close to Cayton. The prolific growth of the plant can block the watercourse fairly rapidly and impede drainage. This, coupled with the increasing drainage problems in the Vale caused by peat shrinkage and raised water-levels, makes it very difficult to allow the plant free growth without affecting the agricultural viability of the land.

This could become increasingly critical as climatic and topographical changes accentuate water levels in the surrounding land.

The plant has been selected for inclusion as a Biodiversity Action plan species because:

- Of its restricted distribution in the Scarborough area.
- Its historical links with the Vale of Pickering's natural state.
- It highlights the problems associated with maintaining wildlife in an intensive agricultural system.
- Any work to conserve it is likely to assist in conserving other species.

Status and Distribution

Regionally, Water Violet is known from very few locations. Its main stronghold being Askham Bog in York.

In Scarborough, it is found naturally in only one ditch near Folkton, adjacent to the Cayton Low Rd.

20 years ago, this ditch was often choked with a mass of Water Violet for upwards of a mile or more. Today this is restricted to a few scattered locations where it grows from the small pieces of plant left after cleaning out has occurred.

Water Violet



Ditch with Water Violet:
(Photograph by Graham Megson)

Links to Habitat Action Plans and Guidance Notes.

Priority habitats associated with Water Violet:

Open Water / Ponds

Action Plans have been prepared for those in bold.

What you can do to help:

Don't pick wild flowers.

Enjoy them in their natural environment.

It has been translocated to two other small sites, one in a pond at Mowthorpe, the other a ditch adjacent to Filey Dams. Both sites had established and were slowly spreading, however, the site at Filey Dams was inadvertently destroyed by development in 2004.

It is likely that the plant will remain at its natural location for the foreseeable future provided the management is not increased even further. This will though only be as a small, scattered, remnant population following annual cleaning of the ditch.

If the population here is to be allowed to increase, then there will be a requirement either to reduce the level of maintenance on the ditch or to create suitable backwaters where it can be allowed to grow unhindered.

The former is likely to affect agricultural land even if sections of the ditch are kept clear.

The later would require landowners to create backwaters or allow the channel to be widened in places and this will take up limited areas of land and require some engineering work. This will not require any reduction in maintenance but could actually increase it slightly to compensate for the presence of larger quantities of plant.

A further option is to either find or create new sites to which the plant can be translocated. This has been carried out successfully on several sites in the area although it has been difficult and slow. Ideally it would be best to allow the plant to develop in sections of the existing site to provide an adequate supply of material and be retained here until the new sites are well established.

Threats

In Scarborough, the primary threat still lies with the present management regime of ditches and its restricted distribution. In 2004, one of the three sites for Water Violet was destroyed from the actions of a site development manager, whilst the management regime of the IDB seriously affects the primary site.

Current Action

Two translocation sites have been established and agreement has been made to try to translocate further material to Filey Dams.

A watching brief is kept both on the natural site and the two translocation sites, though one of the latter sites was destroyed in 2004.



Water Violet:
(Photograph by Whitfield Benson)