

Tower mustard (*Arabis glabra*)



Definition

This plant is a biennial of light nutrient-poor, sandy soils, usually over chalk. Although its seeds appear to be viable for many years, they are dependent on open areas for germination. These conditions occurred in Breckland and the East Anglian Plain as a result of traditional management such as extensive grazing and occasional cultivation, but these are often no longer practical today.

1. Current status

1.1 National

Formerly fairly widespread in East Anglia and along the chalk ridge from Bedfordshire down to Hampshire and in Central England, it has suffered a severe decline since 1970, occurring in only about 30 10km squares between 1996 and 1999.

1.2 Local

A significant colony was discovered in 1998 on a roadside bank in Claydon Village, and there are a number of other earlier records, mainly from the Ipswich area, all of which are believed to be extinct. There are two recent records from Bury St Edmunds (2000 and 2004) and there is a number of other past records from this area. It has been regularly recorded at 3 sites in Breckland recently. Sporadic appearances have also occurred and more are likely. These may be due to its persistence in the seed bank or the accidental transfer of seeds by man (e.g. Mildenhall Woods).

1.3 Natural Areas

Breckland and East Anglian Plain

1.4 Protection

Classified as Vulnerable in 1999 Red Data Book. It has only general protection from uprooting under the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

2 Current factors causing loss or decline

The following changes in land management were largely responsible for the decline of Tower mustard and are now providing constraints on recovery.

- Habitat decline due to agricultural intensification.
- Habitat neglect, resulting in loss of open areas for regeneration.
- Overgrazing by rabbits, sheep, deer and cattle.

3 Current action

- Regular monitoring of Breckland sites.
- Regular monitoring of Claydon Roadside Nature Reserve.
- Further new sites may be found as a direct result of the countywide survey in progress for a new Suffolk Flora.
- Sussex University is currently undertaking research into this species on one of the Suffolk Breckland sites.
- Plantlife is also undertaking Autoecology studies on a site in Norfolk.

4 Action plan objectives and targets

4.1 National targets

1. Maintain the natural range of this species in Britain.
2. Establish populations at five sites within the historic range by 2008

4.2 Local targets

1. Maintain current sites and increase awareness.
2. Increase knowledge of former sites at Bury St Edmunds and Ipswich.

5 Tower Mustard: Proposed Action with Key Local Partners

Action	Date	Partners
A. POLICY AND LEGISLATION		
B. SITE SAFEGUARD AND MANAGEMENT		
Maintain and manage Claydon Roadside Nature Reserve	2005 2006 2007 2008 2009	SCC
Monitor and review Berner's Heath site to ascertain effectiveness of agreed actions.	2005 2006 2007	EN, SWT
Maintain suitable bare ground conditions at Mayday Farm FC depot.	2005 2006 2007 2008 2009	FE, EN
Consider Bury St Edmunds site for CWS status	2005 2006	SCC, SWT, SBRC
Continue to encourage the uptake of Breckland ESA agreements which undertake the management practices required to produce appropriate habitats	2005 2006 2007 2008 2009	Defra, FWAG
C. SPECIES MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION		
D. ADVISORY		
Ensure landowners and managers are aware of its presence and the importance of conserving the species by appropriate methods of management	2005 2006 2007 2008 2009	EN, SWT

Ensure agri-environment officers are aware of its sites	2005 2006 2007 2008 2009	FWAG, EN, SWT
E. RESEARCH AND MONITORING		
Undertake regular monitoring of all extant colonies	2005 2006 2007 2008 2009	EN, SWT
Maintain communication with national autoecological research currently being undertaken in Norfolk.	2005 2006 2007 2008 2009	FE, EN, SWT
Encourage local research and survey, especially where linked to farmland and heathland management	2005 2006 2007 2008 2009	EN, FWAG, BSBI, SWT
F. COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLICITY		
Provide information on the importance of this species for urban population of Claydon	2005	SWT
Raise awareness among farmers and landowners and the general public of the need for periodic disturbance to provide suitable habitat	2005 2006 2007 2008 2009	FWAG, SWT