

This Species Action Plan sets out to maintain and improve cornflower populations on Caravan Club-owned sites, and has been drafted for Club Site Teams and Site Wardens. It provides background information on the cornflower and makes recommendations on sympathetic habitat management for this species.

Introduction

In the 19th Century the cornflower was regarded as a common weed of agricultural land, and often cursed by farmers for blunting scythes. Changing agricultural practices have since brought the species to the brink of extinction in the UK. Individual plants may briefly appear as escapees from gardens and wildflower seed, but only one self sustaining population is thought to remain in the wild.

The Caravan Club audit 2006 revealed that 55 Club sites may support this species

How to recognise this species

- Striking bright blue floral heads 1.5 - 3 cm long
- Outer florets enlarged into trumpets and the inner florets have some red-purple coloration
- Erect branches 20 - 50 cm high
- Lower leaves 10 - 20 cm long, slender and stalked while those above are shorter and un-stalked



Credit: Roger Key/Natural England

Current status

- Once common across the country, wild cornflowers are now extremely rare in the UK
- Today only one self sustaining population remains
- The cornflower is classified as endangered within the UK and is protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

Factors affecting decline:

- Increasing use of herbicides and fertilisers
- Competition from new crop varieties used
- Reduction in crop rotation practices
- Loss of set aside land

Ecology/management requirements

Habitat: Traditionally associated with arable fields, usually within sandy, acidic soil, but can also be found on waste ground. In agricultural settings it favours field edge refuges and organic crop rotation practice. The presence of this species is almost entirely dependent on appropriate management.

The cornflower is an annual plant and flowers from May - August. Seeds usually germinate the following spring, however seeds can remain viable for decades underground. The cornflower is often found growing alongside the corn marigold *Chrysanthemum segetum*.

How to look after this species

	Site safeguard and management	Species management and protection
DO'S	<p>DO <u>Alert</u> the relevant agencies/authorities (CCW, NE, SNH, WOAD) to the (wild) presence of this species</p> <p>DO <u>Promote favourable management</u> on sites where it is known that this species occurs</p> <p>DO <u>Restore or create</u> further sites in suitable areas</p>	<p>DO <u>Boost existing populations</u> by harvesting seeds and sowing them in sandy acidic soils</p> <p>DO <u>Sow wildflower seed mixes</u> on suitable soils, where seed mixes are sourced locally</p> <p>DO Use <u>mechanical scythes</u> for cutting, as the extra rotations will increase seed dispersal</p> <p>DO After cutting, <u>allow hay to dry in situ and then remove</u> from the grassland (this allows seeds to fall, but avoids enrichment of the soil leading to domination by a few common grasses)</p>
DON'TS	<p>DON'T <u>Develop habitat</u> currently supporting or likely to support cornflower (i.e. with pitches, paths, or buildings), or allow areas to become invaded by scrub</p> <p>DON'T <u>Allow visitors to pick wildflowers</u></p>	<p>DON'T Cut wildflower areas <u>before late summer</u> to allow cornflowers to set seed</p> <p>DON'T Use herbicides and fertilisers on any sites where cornflower is present</p>

For further information on this species visit:

The Caravan Club Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) for cornflower: <http://www.caravanclub.co.uk>