

Natural sites in the UK dating from 1987

For more information on this species visit our websites, details below

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Cornflower
(*Centaurea cyanus*)

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DESCRIPTION: This plant is distinguished by its bright blue flower, and can grow up to 1m tall, often rising above the arable crop. It has a slender greyish stem and the narrow leaves are grey-green and hairy. The lower leaves are long (10-20cm) whereas the upper leaves are much smaller.

LIFECYCLE: Annual herb, flowering from June to August. Mainly autumn/winter germinating with relatively short-lived seed.

HABITAT: An arable species, it is typically found in the margins of fields sown with winter cereals. It is most frequently recorded on sandy loam soils.

DISTRIBUTION: Widely distributed across Europe but has experienced decline in much of its range. It was once widespread throughout Britain, but there is now only a scattering of 'natural' sites (where the species is deemed to be long established), focused mainly in the south and east of England. Due to the high numbers of introductions of this species (from sown wild flower mixes) in recent years, the distribution of natural sites is difficult to distinguish.

UK STATUS: It has recently (2005) been re-classified as 'Least Concern' from the previous 'Endangered' status. This is largely due to the difficulty in distinguishing between long-lived 'natural' occurrences and recent introductions. It is thought that the small scatter of 'natural' populations remains at high risk of extinction in the wild.

UK RARITY: Its numbers have declined dramatically in the last 60 years and a recent audit (2005) has identified just over 100 sites that are thought to be 'natural' (dating back to 1987).

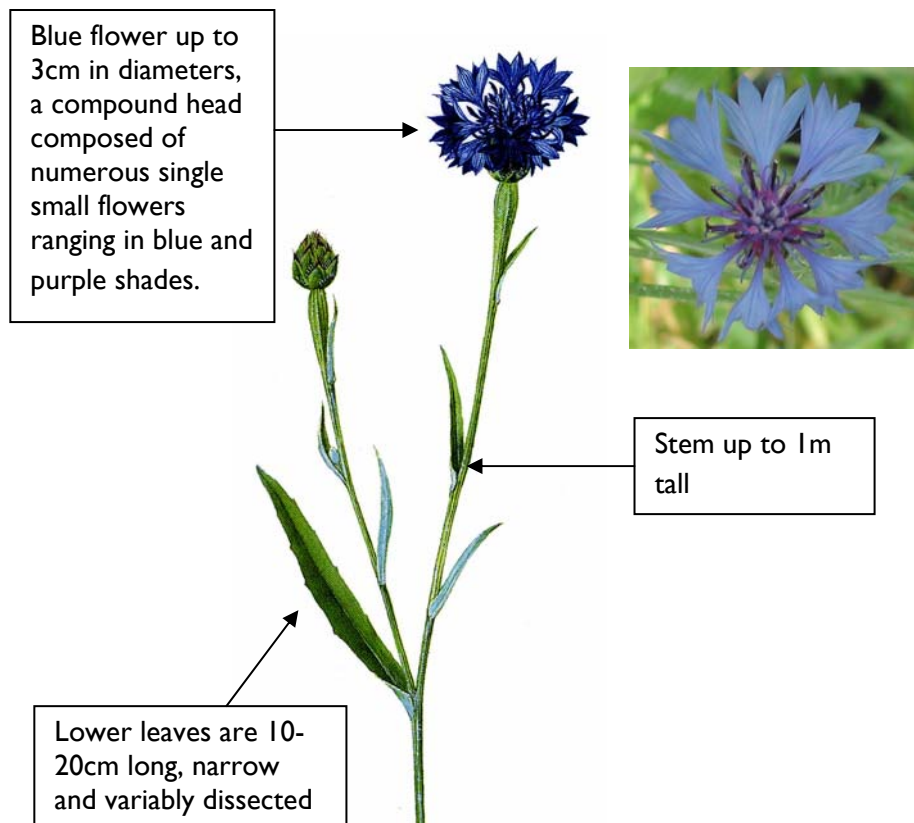
REASONS FOR DECLINE: The main causes of decline are a direct result of the intensification of arable farming. Key factors being the loss of certain crops (Rye and Flax) in which it was a frequent seed contaminant, improved seed cleaning and the introduction of broad-spectrum herbicides.

PROTECTION UNDER THE LAW: Listed as a Priority Species under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

HOW TO SURVEY?

In small populations (< 1000) individual flowering plants are relatively easy to distinguish and should be counted. For larger populations it may be necessary to calculate area occupied by approximate number of plants.

TIME OF YEAR: Best surveyed June to August when in flower. It is likely the survey period will be restricted by harvest in July and August.



HOW TO MANAGE HABITAT?

Ideal management on arable land involves annual autumn cultivation (plough or power harrow) without subsequent disturbance until the next year. If the species occurs as part of a rich community including spring germinating species, periodic spring cultivation will not be damaging to the Cornflower as it can grow well in spring sown crops and will help control autumn germinating pernicious weeds such as Black grass (*Alopecurus myosuroides*) and Sterile Brome (*Bromus sterilis*). No fertiliser or herbicide should be applied. The harvest of a crop (if any has been drilled) should be after plants have produced seed. For management on arable land the agri-environment scheme options that will provide the optimum conditions are un-cropped cultivated margins or plots followed by unfertilised conservation headlands. In a non-arable situation open ground should be restored and maintained annually.

WHEN TO CARRY OUT WORK? Cultivation or ground disturbance should be carried out from October to January.

HOW TO RESTORE TO LOST SITES? Seed is short-lived and production is sparse therefore restoring a lost site from the seed bank is unlikely, deeply buried seed may survive for longer.