



Current sites within the UK (2006)

For more information on this species visit our website

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ISBN: 1 904749-41-0 ©2006

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Plantlife International wishes to acknowledge the financial support of the Back from the Brink programme from English Nature, The Countryside Council for Wales, Scottish Natural Heritage and supporting members. Plantlife's Ponds & Puddles Project received generous funding from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.



Starfruit
(Damasonium alisma)

Starfruit (*Damasonium alisma*)

DESCRIPTION: Aquatic herb, with star-shaped arrangement of fruits. Its leaves are floating or submerged and the small white flower with yellow centers are produced (about 6mm diameter).

LIFECYCLE: Annual, or occasionally perennial, flowering June to August.

HABITAT: Muddy, poached margins of ponds with seasonally fluctuating water levels.

DISTRIBUTION: Predominantly recorded in Western Europe with scattered records from southern and eastern Europe. Historically scattered in southern-central counties of England, by 1990 it was restricted to three native sites, two in Buckinghamshire and one in Surrey.

UK STATUS: Classified as Critically Endangered and is therefore considered to be facing an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild.

UK RARITY: Present sporadically at 8 sites in the UK.

REASONS FOR DECLINE: The main cause of its decline, and the main threat to its future, is the disappearance of ponds in pastures where cattle trample the mud as they drink. Also the spread of non-native invasive plants and the over-deepening of pools.

PROTECTION UNDER THE LAW: Protected under Schedule 8 of the Wildlife Countryside Act 1981. This makes it an offence to intentionally pick, uproot or destroy any plants. Starfruit is also a Priority Species under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

HOW TO SURVEY?

Censuses of Starfruit generally involve counts of the total number of plants observed on a particular day – i.e. a ‘snap-shot’ count. Count adult vegetative, flowering or fruiting individuals during the summer period when individual plants are most obvious in the shallow water or exposed damp mud of the draw-down zone. It is also worth noting general habitat condition, and vital to record the presence of invasive plants.

TIME OF YEAR: June to August.

HOW TO MANAGE HABITAT?

Starfruit relies on exposed muddy banks of ponds. Where grazing is not possible this is best recreated by mechanical management (eg excavator scrapes). It is also vital that the water level is allowed to naturally fluctuate in order to expose the seeds in the summer (this may involve allowing the pond to completely empty). The incorporation of ponds into grazing compartments is an ideal form of management for the species. This can be achieved either by introducing grazing to a site,

increasing existing grazing compartments to encompass existing ponds, or creating ponds within grazing compartments in suitable habitat that is linked to an existing Starfruit site.

WHEN TO CARRY OUT WORK? Excavation of banks should be carried out between October and December, but ensuring that overwintering plants are not damaged where present.

HOW TO RESTORE TO LOST SITES? Starfruit seeds appear to be extremely long-lived (in the region of 50 years). Scraping banks to disturb the mud, removing competitive vegetation and ensuring the correct fluctuation of water levels should activate any dormant seed. Several successful re-introductions have been carried out; further information on these is available from Plantlife.

