

26 River Water-dropwort species action plan

26.1 Introduction

The River Water-dropwort *Oenanthe fluviatilis* is a submerged aquatic plant of lowland rivers with a moderate flow. It prefers base-rich waters of less than 0.5 m depth with a clay substrate. An inconspicuous plant, it has bright green submerged leaves with narrow leaflets, typically adapted to its flowing water habitat. It frequently lacks flowers. It was in Hertfordshire that the River Water-dropwort was first recognised as a distinct species.

26.2 Current status

This species has a localised distribution in Europe, known from Denmark and Germany. In the UK it is a nationally uncommon plant, recorded in less than 100 10 km grid squares, mostly in southern and eastern England.

In Hertfordshire it was historically recorded in the lower stretches of the Lee and its main tributaries, centred around Hertford, and in the Colne (Dony *et al.*, 1967). Currently it is known from the lower Ash, the Beane and the Small River Lee near Cheshunt. However, its premiere site is the New River, where it is frequent to abundant from Great Amwell down to the county boundary at Waltham Cross. This is potentially one of its most important locations in the UK.

26.3 Current factors causing loss or decline

26.3.1 River management

Unsympathetic river management which drastically alters the in-channel structure is likely to be the main cause of decline. In the past, river maintenance for flood alleviation was achieved principally by widening, deepening and straightening. A population in the Small River Lee was almost destroyed by such unsympathetic management in the 1970s.

The cutting of aquatic weeds may also cause problems. Angling clubs may all but eliminate submerged weeds through uninformed management. The abundant aquatic weeds in the New river are regularly cut by machine, the effect on the River Water-dropwort is unknown.

26.3.2 Water quality

River Water-dropwort favours clear, unpolluted rivers. Poor water quality may have contributed to its decline, particularly in the main rivers. Low flows in some rivers may have accentuated the water quality problems.

26.4 Current action

No current action to specifically maintain or enhance populations of this species is known. However, through its programme of Catchment Management Plans (CMP)/Local Environmental Agency Plans (LEAP), the Environment Agency is addressing general problems caused by past poor management and poor water quality.

26.5 River Water-dropwort Action Plan

Objectives, actions and targets

Objective 1: To ascertain the current distribution in the County

Target: a) Complete countywide survey and map results on to GIS by 2004
b) Conduct a re-survey programme by 2008

Action code	Action	Target start date	Target end date	Lead partner	Other partners
RW/A/1.1	Collate existing records and map on to GIS		Dec 2003	HBRC	Botanical consultant, EA, HNHS
RW/A/1.2	Survey/re-survey all known and recent past sites and establish population size		Dec 2003	HBRC	Botanical consultant
RW/A/1.3	Produce a distribution report including habitat quality and species requirements		April 2004	HBRC	Botanical consultant
RW/A/1.4	Map new details onto GIS		Dec 2003	HBRC	Botanical consultant
RW/A/1.5	Re-survey and monitor species distribution	2008	2008	HBRC	

Objective 2: To protect, maintain and enhance the current populations of River Water-dropwort

Target: Advisory information disseminated by 2005, appropriate river management in place by 2007

Action code	Action	Target start date	Target end date	Lead partner	Other partners
RW/A/2.1	Assess key stretches of river supporting River Water-dropwort as Wildlife Sites	Oct 2005		HBRC	WSP
RW/A/2.2	Disseminate report to relevant organisations as advisory information on river management for the species		May 2004	HBRC	EA, TW, HNHS, CMS
RW/A/2.3	Enable a meeting with relevant landowners to guide appropriate management (consider ELS/HLS)		April 2006	CMS	Landowners, HBRC
RW/A/2.4	Ensure appropriate river management policy and activities are included in relevant plans		As reviewed	EA	TW, HMWT
RW/A/2.5	Implement appropriate river management at key sites	Jan 2006	Ongoing	EA	Landowners, TW, CMS

Relevant Action Plans:

Hertfordshire Plans

Wetlands

National Plans

Rivers and streams Habitat Statement

Abbreviations (Partners)

CMS – Countryside Management Service

EA – Environment Agency

HBRC – Hertfordshire Biological Records Centre

HMWT – Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust

HNHS – Hertfordshire Natural History Society

WSP – Wildlife Sites Partnership (HMWT, HBRC, CMS, FWAG, EA, EN, DEFRA, Chilterns AONB)

TW – Thames Water

Contact:

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