



Chalk Fragrant Orchid (*Gymnadenia conopsea*)

Biodiversity Action Plan | Cummey Yannoo Beiyen-Feie



Background

A beautiful and scented orchid that was formally found in many locations in the north of the Island. As of 2024, it has not been found for 25 years and is considered extinct (as of 2022). It was last recorded at Blue Point (shooting range) in 1999.

Its reintroduction to the Isle of Man would help reverse a local extinction. By using an existing conservation project (the Shaking Grass Action for Wildlife project), the resource implications for this introduction is modest.

Description



Credit: Ivor Leidus (from Wikipedia commons)

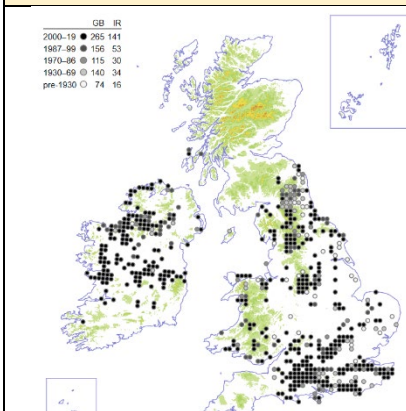
The Chalk (or Common) Fragrant Orchid is a perennial orchid that overwinters as a tuber. Rosettes appear in spring and the plant flowers mostly from June to August reaching 60cm (more commonly 30-40cm).

Flowers are normally mauve to purple, but white plants are also known.

It is mostly pollinated by moths and sets dust-like seed that is wind-dispersed.

Like most orchids it relies upon fungal partnerships to germinate and spends many years developing prior to the first leaf appearing.

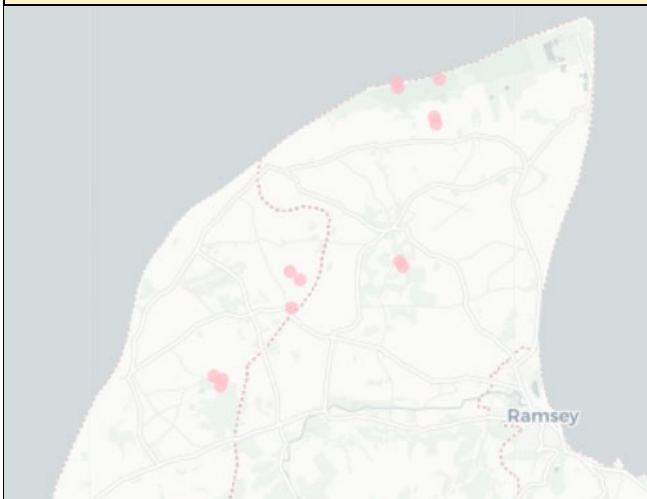
British Isles Distribution



The BSBI distribution map of this species shows it to be widespread in England, Wales and Ireland, but absent from most of Scotland.

There may be some errors in this map due to the splitting of fragrant orchids into three species (post-millennium), but this is unlikely to alter the overall range pattern.

Isle of Man Distribution



First recorded in 1943 in the Ballaugh Curragh and last recorded in 1999 at Blue Point (Ayres), with a total of 17 records on NBN Atlas IOM, though many of these are probably duplicates.

Most records occurred in the 1970s, with the last record prior to 1999 being in 1977.

This species was not found during the Phase 1 or 2 surveys.

Sites include Ballaugh Curragh, Rhendoo Curragh, Blue Point ranges, Ayres Dunes, Ayres Slacks and a damp meadow near Andreas.

Most records are classed as unverified but come from reliable sources such as David Allen and Marjorie Devereau.



Habitat and Ecology

As the name suggests this species is mostly recorded from chalk and limestone grassland, where it can occur in great abundance. However, it is also found in dunes, dune slacks and fens (the three habitats where it was recorded on the Isle of Man). This species grows in sunny, short, grassland conditions, and is rapidly pushed out in the event of agricultural improvement or abandonment. Grazed grassland or meadow managed grassland are the typical habitats.

Legal protection

A Schedule 7 Species (Wildlife Act 1991).

Black-listed (locally extinct) in Plants of Conservation Concern in the Isle of Man 2022.

Threats

While Allen¹ listed the species as rare but increasing in 1984, with around 100 spikes recorded in one Ballaugh Curragh meadow, no records were listed in the 1980s and just a single outlier record occurred in 1999. It has not been recorded since.

The most likely location in Ballaugh Curragh that it occurred is a Close Taggart Meadow, which has been ploughed and lost (for some time now). The Rhendoo Curraghs were lost to agricultural improvement in late 1980s. The Andreas location appears to now be agriculturally improved. The Ayres locations appear to be intact (though the slacks are now subject to occasional serious flooding events), but no recent records of the species have been recorded.

The underlying cause for extinction on the Isle of Man would appear to be agricultural improvement.

Reason for BAP

The species has recently gone extinct in the Isle of Man.

Aims

To reintroduce a species lost to the Isle of Man.

To use nursery grown stock (of British origin) to reintroduce the species to the MWT Billown Nature Reserve (extension area, outside of the ASSI). From here it is hoped the species will spread by seed within site, and eventually into the wider countryside. While suitable locations are fragmented, the example of Bee Orchid which is now known to occur four sites in the south-east of the Island outside its original location in Billown.

Linked BAPS

Autumn Ladies Tresses Orchid BAP
Shaking Grass Action for Wildlife Project and related BAPs

Delivery Options

Active

Challenges

Translocate plants from GB nursery-grown stock to Billown extension

The heavy soils of the Billown extension site may be challenging for this species and the site exists in intensively farmed region of the Island.

Delivery Plan

Strategy

Lead

Translocate plants from GB nursery-grown stock to Billown extension site:

- Order 10-20 plants per annum for 3 years
- Plant in a wide variety of the extension site including well drained and damp areas. Most will be in holes with added limestone and horticultural grit.
- Planting will be early autumn of early spring (in line with established guidelines)²
- Grazing will be excluded from Feb to July

MWT (with Colas as landowner)

Action

Timing

Responsibility

Plant

Sept '25, '26

MWT

Graze

July-Oct, annually

MWT

Monitor

July, annually

MWT

¹ Allen, D.E. (1984). *Flora of the Isle of Man*. Manx Museum. Douglas

² <https://britishorchids.co.uk/product/chalk-fragrant-orchid/>



Annual Updates	
Year	
2024	Seek project approval – MWT. Approved by DEFA 20/11/24.

