



Slender Sandwort (*Arenaria leptoclados*)



Biodiversity Action Plan | Cummey Yannoo Beiyen-Feie

Background

Slender Sandwort is a protected plant with limited distribution.

This Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) has been reformatted from a Rare Species Action Plan, produced by Wildflowers of Mann in 2004, and approved by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry in the same year.

Description



An annual of bare, sunny ground with high pH. This species is very similar to Thyme-leaved Sandwort.

British Isles Distribution

Slender Sandwort has a wide British/Irish distribution, becoming less common or rare in west Wales, northwest England, western Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Isle of Man Distribution

On the Isle of Man, it has previously been recorded in the north but seems now to be confined to the southeast coast and Ballasalla area. It used to be recorded in Billown Quarries as well, but was not recorded during extensive searches in 2022, or at the time of the Area of Special Scientific Interest designation in 2006.

Records for Slender Sandwort have been very sparse, partly because they flower before the main botanical survey season and partly because, when it was formerly considered to be a subspecies of Thyme-leaved Sandwort, it was not separated by field workers very often. The species appears to have declined significantly as many of its habitats have become overgrown or un-grazed.

David Allen classed this as an introduced species, but without clarification. On the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland atlas it is classed as native. Its presence on the Scarlett to Strandhall coast, would imply a native distribution here.



Habitat and Ecology

Upgraded from being a sub-species of thyme-leaved sandwort to a full species in the APG3 classification (2009).

This is a small annual of dry/summer, parched conditions, particularly sand and limestone. It sometimes occurs in old lime-mortared walls. Slender Sandwort is one of a large suite of small 'winter annuals' of low-fertility soils. They are able to complete their life cycle by germinating in autumn, growing in winter and flowering in spring.

Like most such annuals, it is a very uncompetitive plant and is only able to grow where low fertility, and parched summer conditions, retain a low sward with lots of bare spaces for germination. These conditions occur in semi-natural niches such as shallow soils, over rock or large-grained sandy soils. They also occur in the built environment on walls, waste places, pavements etc. These habitats are often maintained through late spring/summer herbicide applications that remove competitive perennials.

Legal protection

Not listed on Schedule 7 of the Wildlife Act 1990 and amber-listed under *Plants of Conservation Concern in the Isle of Man 2022*.

Threats

Hard to identify and poor records makes conservation difficult. Many sites are probably lost to tidiness.

Reason for BAP

Critically endangered (suspected).

Aims

Identify distribution and introduce to MWT Billown Nature Reserve.

Linked BAPS

Shaking Grass Action for Wildlife and limestone grassland BAPs.

Delivery Options

Active

Challenges

Survey of southeast coast.

This will take time due to the size of the plant and rocky complexity of habitats where the species may occur.

Collect and sow seeds at MWT Billown Nature Reserve.

2022

Ideal habitat relies on expansion of MWT Billown Nature Reserve. Many rare and axiophyte calcareous species rely on summer parched conditions, but as the name of the species implies, Slender Sandwort prefers substrate that remains well drained and with very low winter fertility.

It is hoped that over the coming decades, the Billown site will expand as quarries are worked out. This will create a much more viable site, as summer parched niche habitat areas can be created multiple times. It will hopefully recolonise



		Rosehill Area of Special Scientific Interest. Maintaining grazing on site will be critical to keeping the open sward.
Larger-scale conservation around the southeast coast.		Not yet achievable.
Strategy		Lead
Determine the present distribution for this species, through survey in May and June along the southeast coast.		Manx Wildlife Trust
Verify that the Rushen Abbey plants are the correct species.		Manx Wildlife Trust
Action	Timing	Responsibility
Verify ID of Rushen Abbey plants.	April 2023	Manx Wildlife Trust
Monitor sown plants at MWT Billown Nature Reserve.	2023/24	Manx Wildlife Trust
Reinforce reintroduction to MWT Billown Nature Reserve as a new niche habitat is created.	2024 onwards	Manx Wildlife Trust
Survey southwest coast (Strandhall to Derbyhaven) for species.	2023 onwards	Manx Wildlife Trust
Assess and review plan.	2027	Manx Wildlife Trust
Annual Updates		
Year		
2022	Seed sown at MWT Billown Nature Reserve.	
2023	Seedlings established at MWT Billown Nature Reserve, but probable identification is Thyme-leaved Sandwort. Plants should be re-examined in 2024.	

