

the
species
recovery
trust

2022 Progress Report

Dwarf Milkwort

The 2022 project was partly
funded by Natural England



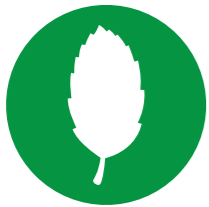
Summary



In 2022, two of the three native sites were surveyed in detail. Plants were found at both, however numbers are declining or are perilously low



Habitat restoration work was carried out at Purple Hill and Magpie Bottom



The 2021 introductions have seen mixed results. Success at Queendown Warren and potential failures at Fackenden Down



Early analysis of results from the introductions suggest Dwarf Milkwort is resilient to dry conditions but requires very little competition





Background

Kentish Milkwort (*Polygala amarella* subsp. *austriaca*) is known from just three native sites in Kent. At the stronghold, Godmersham, the population remains healthy, but there was a decline in numbers in 2022. The other two sites support very small numbers, and in the case of Purple Hill, none have been recorded in the last 3 years.

With its increasing vulnerability to extinction, two introductions were made in 2021 - to Queendown Warren and Fackenden Down. These two locations provide slightly different calcareous grassland environments, and although these re-introductions are in the very early stages, there is ground for some optimism at one of the sites.

Habitat management continues to be the most important aspect of the work surrounding this species. With thanks to KWT and their team of volunteers, we've been able to reduce scrub and sward density in these important sites. This will be completed regularly over the coming years.

Full details on the species can be found in the [Species Handbook](#)



Locations and counts

Site	Historic records	2019	2021	2022	Highest recent count and year
Pa1 Magpie Bottom	2015: 169	0	2	3	169 (2015)
Pa2 Purple Hill	2015: 2 plants, 2016: 4 plants	0	0	Not surveyed (access issues)	4 plants (2016)
Pa3 Godmersham	2016: 36 plants, 2018: 20 plants	233	237 (May), 49 (June)	162	237 (2021)
Pa9r Queendown Warren (new intro site)	-	-	17 plants introduced	17	17 (2021 & 2022)
Pa15r Fackenden Down (new intro site)	-	-	18 plants introduced	0	18 (2021)

View interactive map [here](#)





Godmersham

Being Kent's stronghold, Godmersham is an extremely important site for this species. Since we first started recording in 2013, numbers have fluctuated greatly from year to year. In 2022, 162 plants were located in roughly the same locations as the last few years. This is down from 237 in 2021, and 233 in 2019.

Being such a minute plant to locate, it is difficult to ascertain whether these fluctuations are due to survey errors, changes in habitat suitability, or just high variability in numbers year on year.

The chalk downland appeared to be in very good condition, so it will be critical to examine the population over the next two years to ascertain whether the 2022 record was a one-off, or whether enhanced habitat management is required.



Magpie Bottom

Magpie Bottom continues to support a perilously small population, with three plants recorded in 2022, which is an increase from the 2 plants recorded in 2021. With such a steep decline since 2015, when 169 plants were recorded, we are concentrating on perfecting the management at this site.

With the sward becoming denser, and scrub encroaching into the area, the decision was taken to complete some localised scarification and scrub removal in the winter of 2022. Unfortunately, the plan to graze with cattle wasn't achievable, so instead sheep have been used. With the wet conditions, it is hoped that this will create some additional disturbance as well as keeping the sward cropped tight.

Close monitoring of this site will continue over the next two years, and habitat restoration will remain a priority.



Purple Hill

Unfortunately, no monitoring visit was undertaken at Purple Hill in 2022, due to access reasons. However, the population is dangerously low and so vital habitat restoration was undertaken in the latter part of 2021, and again in early 2022.

Kent Wildlife Trust went ahead in February with a volunteer day, removing further scrub along the boundary of the field. The site borders an old chalk quarry which once opened up will provide much needed bare ground/chalk. As demonstrated by the introduction at Queendown (see page below), the importance of bare ground and limited competition is integral to the species survival.



A plant found at Purple Hill in 2013



Purple Hill in 2021 - quarry on right hand side of fence, covered in dense scrub



Chalk grassland bank shown in photo above

Purple Hill in 1986 - quarry site in centre of photo - note the bare chalk present



Queendown Warren - winter flowering plant



New seedling flowering at Queendown Warren

Introductions

In 2021, two introductions were made at two chalk downland sites in Kent, 18 plants at Fackenden Down and 17 at Queendown Warren.

Queendown Warren

Queendown Warren is an interesting site, comprising a newly created chalk bank, which when first visited was fairly void of vegetation. Being such thin soils, it is being colonised at a very slow rate. This site was chosen to examine how the species fared on thin, almost absent soils. As suspected, the plants have done really well in these conditions, despite the extremely dry conditions of 2022. No watering was undertaken and all plants survived, and excitingly new seedlings germinated and flowered. Unfortunately, later in the year there was some rabbit damage, but we are keeping a close eye on this and will consider fencing if it becomes a big problem.

Although it's very early days, we can start to draw conclusions which substantiate our understanding of the plants ecology. It's clearly a hardy little plant, being resilient to drought conditions, but cannot cope with moderate to high levels of competition. This is really important and will feed into our habitat restoration techniques for the native sites.

Fackenden Down

Unfortunately, no plants were re-found in 2022 despite multiple visits to the site during the summer. Plans here are to resurvey in 2023 to check for natural regeneration from parent plants, and then potentially introduce more plants in 2024.

Looking forward

Project aims 2020-2030



Monitor all native and introduction sites yearly - supplement introductions



Continue with habitat restoration at Magpie Bottom and Purple Hill



Continue to liaise with landowners & managers on improving grazing management across all sites



Coordinate a steering group meeting to maintain momentum with site practitioners and in particular build links across the sites



Explore historical sites for potential re-introduction



The Species Recovery Trust is a charity set up to tackle the loss of some of the rarest species in the UK.

There are over nine hundred native species in the UK that are classed as under threat, with several hundreds more currently widespread but known to be in significant decline. The countryside is now bereft of many species that were a familiar sight a mere generation ago.

A small number of these species are on the absolute brink of existence, poised to become extinct in our lifetimes; our goal is to stop them vanishing.

Our aim is to remove 50 species from the edge of extinction in the UK by the year 2050. In addition we are reconnecting people with wildlife and the natural world through training programmes and awareness raising.



A photograph of a forest floor in spring. The ground is covered with a dense carpet of small purple bluebells. In the foreground, a large, moss-covered tree stump lies on the ground. The background is filled with tall, slender trees with fresh green leaves, suggesting a young forest or woodland. Sunlight filters through the canopy, creating dappled light on the ground.

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