

Irish lady's-tresses

Description

This attractive wild orchid is distributed across North America but is confined to Ireland and western Great Britain in Europe. The wide separation from the British and Irish populations and the Americans raises questions about their origin. Many think that the seed was carried over by migrating birds.

The plant grows to about 30cm tall, but often much shorter, with long, narrow leaves arranged up the stems. The flowers are tubular, whitish or cream-coloured, scented, and arranged in three slightly twisted rows along the spike.



The flowering period is from end July to late August. The flowers are insect-pollinated. Seed capsules split open and tiny seeds are wind-dispersed. Plants are perennial, tending to multiply vegetatively by formation of new root tubers and shoots and death of older parts. During winter food is stored in the fleshy tuberous roots. Like most orchids, the roots are infected by a fungus, called a mycorrhizal fungus, which assists the orchid in absorption of important nutrients from the soil.

Distribution

It is now known from a number of sites around Lough Neagh, Lough Beg, the Mourne Mountains, the Antrim Hills, and the shore of Upper Lough Erne.

Action

Most of the Northern Ireland sites lie within Areas of Special Scientific Interest

One site is situated within the Upper Lough Erne candidate Special Area of Conservation

One site lies within the North Antrim Coast candidate Special Area of Conservation

Two sites lie within the Lough Neagh Special Protection Area

The species is protected under the Wildlife (N.Ireland) Order, 1985.

Sites are monitored on an ad hoc basis by various groups.

Further Information

<http://www.habitas.org.uk/priority/species.asp?item=2298>

MLA Species Champion