

Killarney fern

Description

The fern is named after Killarney in SW Ireland where it was once abundant. However, it is now greatly diminished because of collecting. In Northern Ireland the sporophyte is an extremely rare plant with just one extant site, but the sexual stage (gametophyte) is locally frequent in County Fermanagh.



Like almost all other ferns, the Killarney fern exhibits alternation of generations in which the spores germinate to produce the gametophyte stage which in turn produces male and female sex organs. The female organ contains an egg, which when fertilised, develops into the mature sporophyte plant. However, it has been observed that the gametophyte can persist for years without producing any sporophytes and in parts of the range of the species, sites for the gametophyte far outnumber sites for the sporophyte.

Distribution

The sporophyte seems to survive only as a single individual plant in a shallow cave near the seashore in County Antrim. A nineteenth century site in Strabane Glen, County Tyrone has disappeared. The gametophyte is locally abundant in the Correl Glen – Lough Navar Forest area of County Fermanagh.

Action

UK Species Action Plan published in 1995

One gametophyte site is situated in a National Nature Reserve (Correl Glen)

Several sites are contained within Lough Navar Forest, maintained by the Forest Service

Strabane Glen, once lost 19th century site, is within an Ulster Wildlife Trust Reserve

Further Information

<http://www.habitas.org.uk/priority/species.asp?item=2028>

MLA Species Champion

