



25.1 Introduction

The Cornflower *Centaurea cyanus* is an annual plant of arable fields, on dry, friable soils, both calcareous and acidic. The seeds, which are believed to remain viable for several years, generally germinate during the following spring with a second flush in late summer. It flowers between May and August.

25.2 Current status

Cornflower once occurred throughout the UK and was a troublesome weed of arable land. Between 1930 and 1960 it was recorded from 264 10 km grid squares but by 1985 had declined to fewer than 50. Today, self-sustaining populations are thought to be confined to single sites in Suffolk, the Isle of Wight and Lincolnshire. Isolated plants still occur over a large area of south and east England but many are due to introductions from wild flower seed mixtures. In Europe as a whole, Cornflower is not threatened and is still widely distributed but has declined in most of the north-west. In the UK it is now classified as *Endangered*.

In Hertfordshire it was apparently frequent as a cornfield weed especially on the chalk (Dony *et al.*, 1967). In the 1950s it still occurred regularly in a few fields to the east of Baldock. In recent years an irregular population has been recorded from a small area of arable fields in the London Colney area. This

population is suspected to be native. Other scattered records are all thought to result from introduced seed, although some may result from chance germination of buried seed.

25.3 Current factors causing loss or decline

25.3.1 Agricultural changes

The following agricultural changes were largely responsible for the decline in the Cornflower and are now providing constraints on its recovery.

- Increased use of herbicides and fertilisers.
- The development of highly competitive crop varieties.
- The destruction of field edge refugia.
- The demise of traditional crop rotations.

25.4 Current action

Nationally, research is underway to determine the ideal conservation management. In addition, Cornflower is being re-introduced to a number of locations.

Cornflower is being considered in the Farmland Action Plan (Chapter 9, Section 9.7).