

26 RIVER WATER-DROPWORT SPECIES ACTION PLAN

26.1 INTRODUCTION

The River Water-dropwort *Oenanthe fluviatilis* is a submerged aquatic plant of lowland rivers with a moderate flow. It prefers base-rich waters of less than 0.5 metres depth with a clay substrate. An inconspicuous plant, it has bright green submerged leaves with narrow leaflets, typically adapted to its flowing water habitat. It frequently lacks flowers. It was in Hertfordshire that the River Water-dropwort was first recognised as a distinct species.

26.2 CURRENT STATUS

This species has a localised distribution in Europe, known from Denmark and Germany. In the UK it is a nationally uncommon plant, recorded in less than 100 10 km grid squares, mostly in southern and eastern England.

In Hertfordshire it was historically recorded in the lower stretches of the Lee and its main tributaries, centred around Hertford, and in the Colne (Dony 1967). Currently it is known from the lower Ash, the Beane and the Small River Lee near Cheshunt. However, its premiere site is the New River, where it is frequent to abundant from Great Amwell down to the county boundary at Waltham Cross. This is potentially one of its most important locations in the UK.

26.3 CURRENT FACTORS CAUSING LOSS OR DECLINE

26.3.1 River Management

Unsympathetic river management which drastically alters the in-channel structure is likely to be the main cause of decline. In the past, river maintenance for flood alleviation was achieved principally by widening, deepening and straightening. A population in the Small River Lee was almost destroyed by such unsympathetic management in the 1970s.

The cutting of aquatic weeds may also cause problems. Angling clubs may all but eliminate submerged weeds through uninformed management. The abundant aquatic weeds in the New river are regularly cut by machine, the effect on the River Water-dropwort is unknown.

26.3.2 Water Quality

River Water-dropwort favours clear, unpolluted rivers. Poor water quality may have contributed to its decline, particularly in the main rivers. Low flows in some rivers may have accentuated the water quality problems.

26.4 CURRENT ACTION

No current action to specifically maintain or enhance populations of this species is known. However, through its programme of Catchment Management Plans (CMP)/Local Environmental Agency Plans (LEAP), the Environment Agency is addressing general problems caused by past poor management and poor water quality.

26.5 RIVER WATER DROPWORT ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES

To maintain and enhance the current populations of River Water-dropwort.

26.6 PROPOSED ACTIONS

26.6.1 Policy and Legislation

RW1. Identify key stretches of river supporting River Water-dropwort as Wildlife Sites, by 1998.

Action: HERC, HMWT.

26.6.2 Site Safeguard and Management

RW2. Key stretches of river to be identified in LEAPs at the next review and other appropriate documents to ensure that river management takes this species into account.

Action: EA.

RW3. Identify degraded stretches of river adjacent to current, or at historical, River Water-dropwort locations, by 2001. Promote enhancement schemes.

Action: EA, HMWT.

26.6.3 Species Management and Protection

RW4. Undertake review of cutting policy on New River, by 1999, to determine whether there is any impact on River Water-dropwort distribution.

Action: TWU, HMWT.

26.6.4 Advisory

RW5. Ensure all relevant landowners receive appropriate advice on river management, by 2003.

Action: EA, HMWT.

26.6.5 Research and Monitoring

RW6. Undertake survey to ascertain current distribution, by 2000.

Action: EA, TWU, HERC, HNHS, BSBI.

RW7. Map current distribution in New River, by 1999.

Action: TWU.

RW8. Collate available information on the ecological requirements of the species, by 2000.

Action: EA, HERC, HMWT.

26.6.6 Communication and Publicity

RW9. Use River Water-dropwort as an example of good river habitat quality and publicise the Action Plan in wider work on rivers and wetlands.

Action: EA, HMWT.