

Ditrichum cornubicum Paton

Cornish path-moss

Status: **Endangered (EN)** B1,2c

Class: Bryopsida

Order: Bryales

Family: Ditrichaceae

Description and biology This recently described species (Paton 1976) is a very small, dull green acrocarp growing to a maximum height of 5 mm, either as scattered shoots or denser patches. The bluntly pointed, lanceolate leaves become more crowded higher up the stem and have a broad nerve. Microscopic examination is necessary for identification. *Ditrichum cornubicum* is restricted to acid soils contaminated by copper, in areas of old mine spoil, where the vegetation is open or sparse. It is a pioneer species unable to compete with larger plants, and is particularly characteristic of disturbed ground and the edges of tracks and paths. Only male plants are known, but the plant reproduces vegetatively by means of rhizoidal tubers.

Distribution and habitat: Endemic to Europe. This species is known at present from only two sites in East Cornwall, with numerous separate small colonies. One site is protected and the other is under consideration. *D. cornubicum* has disappeared from its only other known site, in West Cornwall, where it was seen in 1963.

History and outlook: The main threats to this species may include encroachment of coarse vegetation, excessive churning up of the soil by vehicles, the resurfacing of tracks and development of the sites for tourism. Collecting by botanists might also be a threat, given the small size of the remaining population. Careful management is needed to ensure the continued existence of open ground that is not too heavily disturbed by vehicles. As a threatened endemic, *D. cornubicum* is the subject of a Biodiversity Action Plan, and it is included on a list of the world's most threatened bryophytes (Hallingbäck and Hodgetts 2000).

Status December 2004: The Populations at the only 2 known sites in the world are doing well following some years when population seemed to decline, but this is a dynamic species that needs disturbance, fresh substrate and open conditions. It probably persists through unfavourable periods as tubers. It is being monitored and management is specifically aimed at this species.

References: Hallingbäck, T. and Hodgetts, N.G. (compilers). 2000. *Mosses, Liverworts, and Hornworts. Status Survey and Conservation Action Plan for Bryophytes*. IUCN/SSC Bryophyte Specialist Group. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland and Cambridge, UK.

Paton, J. 1976. *Ditrichum cornubicum*, a new moss from Cornwall. *J. Bryol.* 9: 171—175.

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