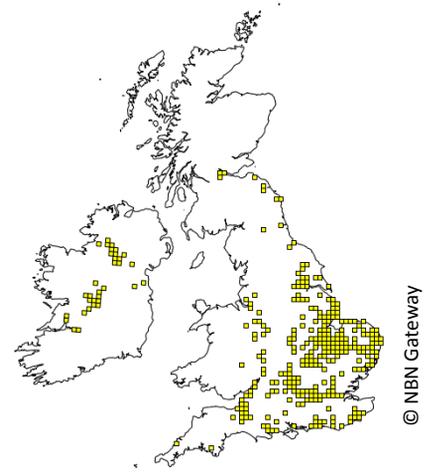


Greater Water-parsnip - *Sium latifolium*

Current Status

Greater Water-parsnip is a large robust upright perennial (up to 200cm) with grooved hollow stems and large umbels of small white flowers. It is found on the outer margins of ponds, rivers, wet meadows and ditches.

Greater Water-parsnip has declined rapidly over the last 200 years, mostly due to the drainage of wetlands and loss of suitably managed habitats. It is classified as Scarce in the UK, due to its still widespread but declining range (Figure 1). It is a Priority Species for conservation in both England and Wales. Like many umbellifers, this plant is poisonous, so wash your hands after handling it.



© NBN Gateway

Figure 1. Current distribution of Great Water-parsnip in the UK.

Habitat Requirements

Greater Water-parsnip likes damp or wet calcareous habitats, usually in areas of winter flooding. It occurs in meadows and pastures in the flood plains of rivers, in marshes and fens, and in emergent and fringing vegetation by rivers, streams, canals, ditches, lakes and ponds (Figure 2 and 3).



Figure 2. Greater Water-parsnip growing by the side of a pond.



Figure 3. Greater Water-parsnip growing in a slump on bank of a ditch, just beyond the reach of the grazing animals.

Threats

- **Changes in grazing and bankside management** - Greater Water-parsnip is particularly sensitive to the right amount of disturbance. Not enough disturbance and the habitat become scrubbed over, too much grazing and the plants are eaten and the habitat trampled. With intensification and increased numbers of stock on smaller fields and fencing of pond and river margins, the conditions at many historic sites are now unsuitable.
- **Land use changes** - particularly urban encroachment and the intensification of agriculture, resulting in the loss of ponds and wetlands, habitat fragmentation and isolation and deterioration of habitat and water quality.

Greater Water-parsnip - *Sium latifolium*

Identification



Key Features:

- Greater Water-parsnip is a large, robust plant, up to 200cm tall
- Hairless, hollow, green stems with 7 ridges
- Stem is strongly paraffin or petrol scented
- Stem leaves are 1-pinnate, 3-7 pairs of leaflets
- Leaflets are ovate to lanceolate and finely toothed
- Leaflets are rarely held in a horizontal plane, i.e. they tend to grow from the stem leaf face to leaf face
- Leaflets are attached directly to leaf stem (no leaf stalk) and can be up to 12cm long and 4cm wide
- White flowers (4mm) held in umbels at the end of the plant stem
- Several bracts and bracteoles (specialised leaflets below the flow heads)
- Flowers July - August, the plants die back soon after flowering

Umbels of white flowers



Leaflets held at an angle rather than horizontal



Finely toothed

Base of leaflets attached directly to leaf stem

Similar looking species

Few other wetland plants can be mistaken for Greater Water-parsnip. Its size and distinctive leaves, set it apart from other umbellifers growing in wet habitats.

Lesser Water-parsnip *Berula erecta*

The only species similar to Great Water-parsnip is Lesser Water-parsnip. However, there are several differences which should rule out confusion. Lesser Water-parsnip is a smaller more delicate plant (up to 100cm), with smaller but more coarsely toothed leaflets. Lesser Water-parsnip stems do not smell strongly of paraffin.



Lesser Water-parsnip

Leaves and umbel smaller and more delicate than Greater Water-parsnip

Leaves are coarsely toothed

