

# Species Action Plan

## Stepping Stones Project

Last updated: February 2024

**Common name:** Mountain Pansy

**Scientific name:** *Viola lutea*

**Conservation status:** Declining in Shropshire

**Description:** The largest of our native pansies, this species may be completely yellow, blue or a mix of both colours

**Habitat:** Unimproved, upland acid and neutral pastures, heathland edge and ffridd

**Ecology:** Preferring north-west facing slopes on moderately acidic and free-draining soils with low nutrient status. Flowering is from May to September, peaking in June, although peak time appears to be moving to later in June and the flowering period lengthening. Mountain pansy spreads both vegetatively and by seed.

**Distribution and threats:** Found in the uplands of the north and west of Britain, this species has declined extensively due to changes in land use and management and now possibly, climatic changes.



Above: UK distribution of *Viola lutea* (source: NBN Atlas March 2023).

Below: Mountain pansies near the Stiperstones



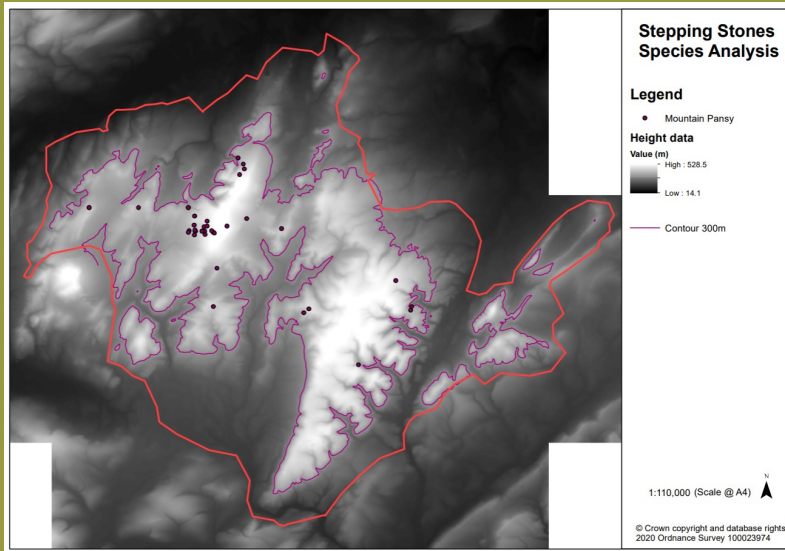
Mountain Pansy *Viola lutea*



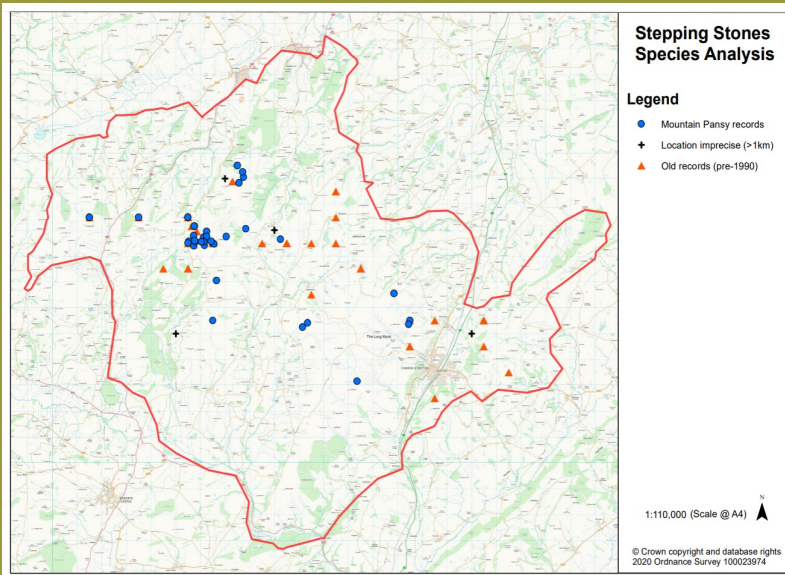
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# Mountain Pansy in the Stepping Stones Project area



Above: distribution of *V. lutea* in the Stepping Stones Project area, in relation to the 300m contour



Above: distribution of *V. lutea* in the Stepping Stones Project area

records may indicate the loss of species rich acid grasslands within the project area, however they need to be re-visited to ensure that they are not being under recorded.

Mountain pansy is found on both the Long Mynd and Stiperstones at average altitudes of around 400m (see left). Old records indicate that the average altitude for mountain pansy occurrence was around 360m and that this species once had a greater range and frequently grew at lower altitudes.

The species may be under-recorded as most records tend to be close to sites of public access or where monitoring schemes are in operation such as the closely monitored population on the Stiperstones National Nature Reserve. The key areas seem to be the acid grassland on and around the Stiperstones, Stapeley Hill common and the Long Mynd golf course. Old

## Conservation for Mountain Pansy

Trueman & Cohen (2021) carried out a long term study of the acid grasslands on the Stiperstones NNR which suggested that some of the grassland enclosures were showing a trend towards becoming more acidic, following the end of the practice of adding lime to the soil and as a result mountain pansies were becoming less abundant in these fields. Liming trials were carried out at Blakemoorgate and Blakemoor Flat and these have resulted in some recovery of the grassland. However the abundance of mountain pansies has not responded and is likely to be linked not only to the acidity of the soil but also the requirement of low nutrients and summer grazing with a break every 2-3 years to allow for flowering.

Mountain Pansy *Viola lutea*

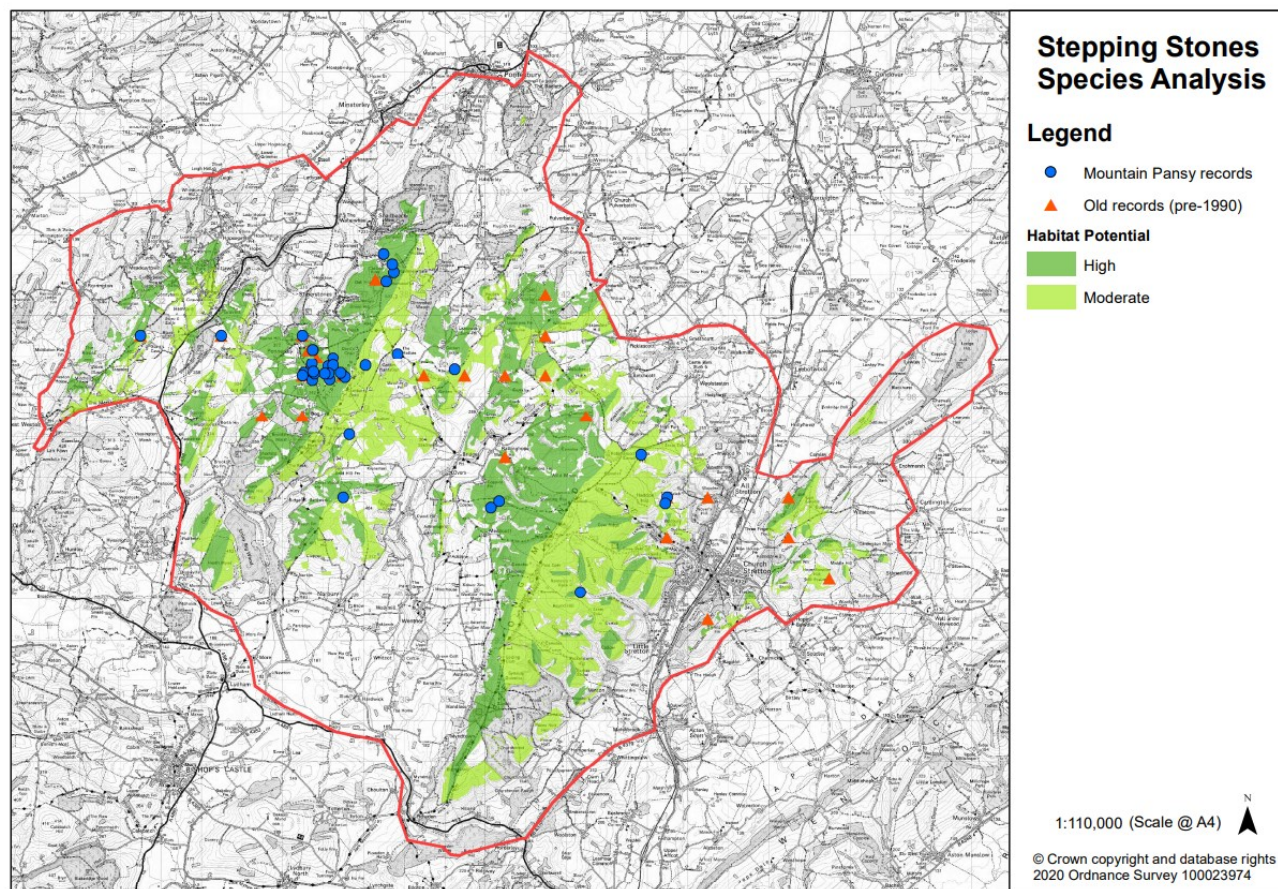


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# Mountain Pansy habitat creation opportunities in the Stepping Stones project area

The map below shows the predicted habitat suitability for mountain pansy overlaid by existing records of this species.



Mapping software was used to identify where the preferred habitat types for mountain pansy (acid grassland, heathland and neutral grassland) occur above 300m (area shown in light green). This selection was further refined by picking out hillsides that faced between west and north, with these areas upgraded as having 'high potential' for mountain pansy (area shown in dark green). Extensive areas therefore exist for habitat restoration for this and other acid grassland species.

## Conservation objectives for Mountain Pansy

- Maintain accurate and up-to-date records of numbers of mountain pansy on sites where they are known to occur.
- Increase the extent of mountain pansy on existing sites by appropriate management.
- Through targeted management and restoration enable the spread of mountain pansy to sites showing high habitat potential, extending this to sites of moderate potential over time.
- Raise awareness of the status and habitat needs of mountain pansy amongst local communities, encouraging land owners and farmers to manage land in a way that allows the spread of this iconic wild flower.

Mountain Pansy *Viola lutea*



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# Conservation actions for Mountain Pansy

- By 2025, utilising SWT, NE Stiperstones and Community Wildlife Group volunteers, to enlist local people who can assist land managers in carrying out maintenance, restoration, creation and monitoring of existing and potential mountain pansy habitat.
- By 2025 produce an inventory of all existing mountain pansy sites, recording habitat condition and management requirements.
- By 2025 to undertake mountain pansy surveys of all areas where historic records were found and by 2026 surveys of areas from the opportunity mapping that show a 'high potential' for the species. Include condition monitoring and site management requirements.
- Land managers to restore or create new mountain pansy habitat e.g. by bracken and gorse control and possibly liming. Selection of sites to be informed by the condition monitoring above. Target of 3 sites per year.
- Consider local seed/green hay collection and distribution to hasten spread of mountain pansy on suitable sites.
- By 2026, possibly through an MSc, to have an improved knowledge from research into the reproductive ecology and biology of mountain pansy to understand how this species spreads vegetatively and by seed.
- By 2025 to ensure that mountain pansy is recognised in NELMS as a priority species in the targeting statement for the Shropshire Hills requiring tailored management and advice.

*Actions to be reviewed and updated annually*

## Further help and advice

### Locally:

Natural England, Stiperstones NNR office;  
Upper Onny Community Wildlife Group;  
Marches Meadow Group.

### Nationally:

[bsbi.org/wp-content/uploads/dlm\\_uploads/  
Viola\\_lutea\\_species\\_account.pdf](https://bsbi.org/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/Viola_lutea_species_account.pdf)



## About Stepping Stones

Stepping Stones is an innovative landscape-scale conservation programme. The aim is to connect wildlife habitats by strengthening or creating 'stepping stones' and corridors of habitat between the Long Mynd and Stiperstones, and beyond. In practice, this means creating and linking areas of heathland, flower-rich grasslands and broadleaved woodland by a network of wildlife-rich hedgerows, road verges, hillsides and streamside wetlands.



### Stepping Stones

Creating and linking wildlife-friendly spaces



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Mountain Pansy *Viola lutea*