**Rumex acetosella**

(Sheep sorrel  
field sorrel  
red sorrel)

Common Name(s) | Full Scientific Name | Family Name Common | Family Scientific Name | Images | Synonyms | Description | Similar Species | Reproductive/Dispersal Mechanisms | Distribution | History of Introduction in New England | Habitats in New England | Threats | Early Warning Notes | Management Links | Documentation Needs | Additional Information | References | Data Retrieval | Maps of New England Plant Distribution

**COMMON NAME**

Sheep sorrel  
field sorrel  
red sorrel

**FULL SCIENTIFIC NAME**

*Rumex acetosella* L.

**FAMILY NAME COMMON**

Knotweed family

**FAMILY SCIENTIFIC NAME**

Polygonaceae

**IMAGES**

Habit  
Incursion  
Close-up of Inflorescence
NOMENCLATURE/SYNONYMS

**Synonyms:** *Acetosella acetosella* (L.) Small  
*Acetosella tenuifolia* (Wallr.) A. L?ve  
*Acetosella vulgaris* (Koch) Fourr.  
*Rumex angiocarpus* Murb.  
*Rumex tenuifolius* (Wallr.) A. L?ve

DESCRIPTION

Botanical Glossary

*Rumex acetosella* is a dioecious, herbaceous perennial with creeping rhizomes. This plant measures 10-40 cm (4-16 in.) in height and the roots can reach depths of 1.5 m (5 ft.). The stems of this plant are slender and reddish in color. The alternately arranged leaves have three lobes. The terminal lobe is narrowly lanceolate while the lateral lobes are much smaller and triangular in shape. The terminal lobe measures 2-12 mm (0.08-0.5 in.) in length. All the leaves have an ocrea at their base which is a thin, membranous sheath that surrounds the stem where the petiole meets it.

The flowering stalks of these plants can be half as long as the plant. The flowers are nodding on short, jointed pedicels. The male flowers are yellowish in color and the obovate inner tepals measure 1.5-2 mm (0.06-0.08 in.) in size. The female flowers are reddish in color and the tepals are broadly ovate in shape. The flowers appear from late May to June. The shiny, golden brown achenes of this plant are 3-angled and measure around 1.5 mm (0.06 in.) in length. The plant fruits from June to October.


SIMILAR SPECIES

*Rumex acetosa* L. (Garden sorrel)

*Rumex acetosa* is similar in appearance to *R. acetosella*, but it is a larger plant.

REPRODUCTIVE/DISPERsal MECHANISMS

*Rumex acetosella* can reproduce both vegetatively as well as by seed. Vegetative spread is by means of creeping rhizomes. The
seeds are dispersed by both wind and insects.

**DISTRIBUTION**

*Rumex acetosella* is native to most of Europe, Russia, the Middle East and North Africa. It is known to grow in alls of the United States.

**HISTORY OF INTRODUCTION IN NEW ENGLAND**

It is not known exactly how this plant made its way to New England. It was listed as one of the "worst weeds" in 1889 by Halstel. In 1890, Rand mentioned the plant travels "in the footsteps of man" when he found it at the Rangely Lakes in Maine. It was mostly found near logging camps in the woods. Likely its seeds came over in the fur of livestock from England or by some other accidental means.

**HABITATS IN NEW ENGLAND**

Abandoned Field  
Abandoned Gravel Pit  
Agricultural Field  
Edge  
Open Disturbed Area  
Pasture  
Railroad Right-of-Way  
Roadside  
Utility Right-of-Way  
Vacant Lot  
Yard or Garden

This plant prefers areas with very poor, acid soil with low nitrogen. It does not grow well in calcareous soils.

**THREATS**

*Rumex acetosella* has been named a noxious weed in at least 23 states. Its roots can get down 1.5 m (5 ft.), making it difficult to remove. In New England, this plant is not a threat when it is found in heavily disturbed areas such as people's lawns, roadides and waste areas. However, it can threaten agricultural fields, and if it were to get into a natural area, could form a monoculture that would threaten native plant species. It has been seen on rock outcrops and rocky summits.

**MANAGEMENT LINKS**

Oregon State University Weed Science Program
DOCUMENTATION NEEDS

Documentation required: Picture of plants in flower or fruit
Best time for documentation: Summer

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Integrated Taxonomic Information System
Taxonomic information about the species

PLANTS Database
General information and map

USDA Forest Service Fire Effects Information System (FEIS)
Extensive information about the ecology of this plant

Virginia Tech Weed Identification Guide
Pictures and description of plant

Arizona Weeds
Description of plant

Oregon State University Weed Science Program
Biology of the species

REFERENCES


DATA RETRIEVAL

Select a task by clicking the radio button and then click "Submit Selection."

- Formatted display as table
- Export as comma-delimited text file

Submit Selection

MAPS OF PLANT DISTRIBUTION IN NEW ENGLAND

Select a study area by clicking the radio button and then click "Submit Selection."

- The whole New England area
- One or more states
- One or more counties
- One or more towns (county sub-divisions)

Submit Selection