Catalog of Species Search Results

:: Catalog of Species Search

Rumex acetosella

(Sheep sorrel
field sorrel
red sorrel)

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


Habitat


Seedlings

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.

Page References Fernald 571, Gleason & Cronquist 130, Holmgren 113, Magee & Ahles 431, Newcomb 402, Peterson & McKenny 310,380. See reference section below for full citations.

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, roadsides 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

Escarre, J., C. Houssard and J.D. Thompson. 1994. An experimental-study of the role of seedling density and neighbor relatedness in the persistence of Rumex acetosella in an old-field succession. Canadian Journal of Botany-Revue Canadienne De Botanique 72 (9): 1273-1281.

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DATA RETRIEVAL

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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)

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