

OV8

Veronica persica-*Alopecurus myosuroides* community *Alopecuro-Chamomilletum recutitae* Wascher 1941

Constant species

Alopecurus myosuroides, *Bilderykia convolvulus*, *Elymus repens*, *Polygonum aviculare*, *Stellaria media*, *Veronica persica*.

Physiognomy

The *Alopecuro-Chamomilletum* is the most distinctive weed assemblage in which the annual grass *Alopecurus myosuroides* is found. Its tufts can be very abundant here, along with *Elymus repens*, *Polygonum aviculare* and *Stellaria media*, each of which can also show locally high cover. *Veronica persica* and *Bilderykia convolvulus* are also constant, though generally in smaller amounts.

The characteristic mayweed of this vegetation, *Chamomilla recutita*, is only occasional overall but *Matricaria perforata* is frequent, along with *Chenopodium album*, *Capsella bursa-pastoris*, *Sinapis arvensis*, *Sonchus asper*, *Senecio vulgaris*, *Avena fatua*, *Poa annua*, *Plantago major*, *Polygonum persicaria* and *Cirsium arvense*. Among the more common occasionals are *Convolvulus arvensis*, *Euphorbia helioscopia*, *Solanum nigrum*, *Urtica urens* and the scarce goosefoot *Chenopodium hybridum*.

Habitat

This assemblage is typical of winter-sown cereals and other field crops on loamy and clayey soils that occur in the warmer and drier south-east of England but which are protected from drought by their heavy texture.

A. myosuroides is native across much of Europe but is only common in Britain in the more Continental parts of the country where the July mean is above 15 °C (Naylor 1972), being especially abundant in the south-east Midlands and East Anglia. It can get a head start among arable crops in this region by autumn germination and survive through the winter as a rosette, flowering from May to August of the following year. Even on very wet or waterlogged soils, it does not seem to suffer in the coldest months and a high water requirement

when growth recommences may account for the scarcity of the plant on very sharply-draining soils (Barallis 1968).

Other species in the assemblage appear most prolifically in the spring but spring-sown cereals can suppress the growth of *A. myosuroides* itself. Closely-spaced crops can also overwhelm what is apparently a somewhat puny grass, whose problematic character probably depends on its ability to compete with cereal crops for nitrogen (Wellbank 1963, Naylor 1972). It is also notoriously resistant to many herbicides and this weed assemblage has shown a striking increase in infestation with the concentration on cereal monocultures in recent decades. Disturbance and compaction can check seedlings so cultivation after harvest or the hoeing of vegetable crops can help eliminate the plant but the seeds can remain dormant for some years and light stimulates germination, so tilling can expose seed and encourage establishment of a new crop of the grass.

Areas of waste ground on suitable soils within the range of *A. myosuroides* can also carry this community.

Zonation and succession

Characteristically, the *Alopecuro-Chamomilletum* occurs within or around the edges of arable fields, sometimes with other weed assemblages typical of heavier soils like the *Polygonum-Ranunculus* sub-community of the *Poa-Senecio* community where *Anthemis cotula* is a distinctive associate. Repeated disturbance from year to year effectively prevents any succession.

Distribution

The community occurs widely on suitable soils within the range of *A. myosuroides*, concentrated around the Fenland fringes and scattered west to Dorset.

Affinities

The *Alopecuro-Matricarietum* was first described from The Netherlands by Wasscher (1941), though it has been

subsumed by various authors since, including Westhoff & den Held (1969), in the *Veronico-Lamietum*. If that course were adopted with British vegetation of this kind, it would constitute a distinctive sub-community with preferentially frequent *A. myosuroides*, like the *alopecu-retosum* of Westhoff & den Held (1969). These authors placed this syntaxon in the *Polygono-Chenopodium* while Silverside (1977) located it among the more distinctly basiphilous associations of the *Fumario-Euphorbion* alliance.

Floristic table OV8

<i>Veronica persica</i>	V (1–2)
<i>Polygonum aviculare</i>	V (1–9)
<i>Elymus repens</i>	V (1–6)
<i>Alopecurus myosuroides</i>	IV (1–8)
<i>Stellaria media</i>	IV (1–6)
<i>Bilderdykia convolvulus</i>	IV (1–6)
<i>Chenopodium album</i>	III (1–3)
<i>Capsella bursa-pastoris</i>	III (1–5)
<i>Sonchus asper</i>	III (1–3)
<i>Senecio vulgaris</i>	III (1–3)
<i>Sinapis arvensis</i>	III (1–3)
<i>Avena fatua</i>	III (1–3)
<i>Plantago major</i>	III (1–3)
<i>Polygonum persicaria</i>	III (1–3)
<i>Matricaria perforata</i>	III (1–6)
<i>Poa annua</i>	III (1–4)
<i>Cirsium arvense</i>	III (1–4)
<i>Convolvulus arvensis</i>	II (1–6)
<i>Euphorbia helioscopia</i>	II (1–3)
<i>Chenopodium hybridum</i>	II (1–3)
<i>Solanum nigrum</i>	II (1–5)
<i>Urtica urens</i>	II (1–3)
<i>Sisymbrium officinale</i>	II (1–3)
<i>Galium aparine</i>	II (1–3)
<i>Chamomilla recutita</i>	II (1–8)
<i>Geranium dissectum</i>	II (1)
<i>Coronopus squamatus</i>	I (1–3)
<i>Rumex crispus</i>	I (1–3)
<i>Trifolium repens</i>	I (1–5)
<i>Chamomilla suaveolens</i>	I (1–3)
<i>Sonchus oleraceus</i>	I (1–3)
<i>Euphorbia peplus</i>	I (1–3)
<i>Lamium purpureum</i>	I (1–2)
<i>Papaver rhoeas</i>	I (1–2)
<i>Sonchus arvensis</i>	I (1–2)
<i>Aethusa cynapium</i>	I (1–3)
<i>Atriplex patula</i>	I (1–3)
<i>Atriplex prostrata</i>	I (1)
<i>Lapsana communis</i>	I (1–3)
<i>Anthemis cotula</i>	I (1–2)
<i>Urtica dioica</i>	I (1)
Number of samples	13
Number of species/sample	16 (10–28)
Vegetation cover (%)	74 (50–100)