



*Championing UK's most special species:
the wildlife of UK's Overseas Territories (UKOTs) and
Crown Dependencies (CDs)*

FACT-SHEET ON:

Gibraltar Campion *Silene tomentosa*
UK Overseas Territory: Gibraltar

Importance: The Gibraltar Campion is endemic to the territory. It was thought to be extinct but rediscovered in 1994 on the Upper Rock. Its rediscovery prompted much surprise, it being unusual for a fairly conspicuous plant to have avoided detection in such a small and well-recorded area as the Rock. The Nature Protection Act 1991 conferred legal protected status on the Gibraltar Campion. The species has highly attractive, bi-lobed flowers which vary from white through pale pink to violet.

Ecosystem: The species is found only in the Gibraltar Nature Reserve, which occupies 40% of the total area of Gibraltar. The Nature Reserve features complex topography and a range of semi-natural vegetation types, including maquis and scrubby garrigue, vegetated cliffs, and areas of planted pine and olive trees. Besides being a nature reserve, the site is also open for recreational purposes and contains a range of visitor attractions. As a result of these multiple uses and the proximity of the urban environment, the flora of the Upper Rock is subject to much disturbance and pollution.

Threats: Historically, Gibraltar Campion is likely to have experienced habitat loss from development of areas of the Rock for settlement and military installations. The potential habitat area for the species is now approximately coincident with the boundaries of the Gibraltar Nature Reserve. Whilst the reserve is still actively managed towards conservation goals, some of the firebreaks that were traditionally maintained have been allowed to lapse. This will have reduced the amount of open habitat space favoured by the Gibraltar Campion among other characteristic plants. The Nature Reserve is also suffering from the rapid spread of invasive non-native plants, ranging from Hottentot Fig *Carpobrotus edulis* to the African Flag *Chasmanthe floribunda*. These fast-growing invasives form dense mats and stands that smother the native vegetation and prevent regeneration from seed.

Needs: As outlined in the 2016 Gibraltar Nature Reserve Management Plan, there is a pressing need for continued habitat management and reintroduction efforts in order to maximise the potential for the Gibraltar Campion and other plant species to thrive within the reserve. In addition, continued *ex situ* conservation of the species in living collections at the Gibraltar Botanic Garden and Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew in the UK, as well as preservation of seeds in the UK's Millennium Seed Bank, will help maintain a reservoir of genetic diversity for future reintroduction programmes.



Above: Gibraltar Campion. CC-BY Bart Van Thienen (Wikimedia)
Below: Some of the habitats on either side of the summit ridge of Gibraltar in the Upper Rock Nature Reserve. © HM Government of Gibraltar

