

Australian Flatworm

Species Description

Scientific name: *Australoplana sanguinea*

AKA: Llyngyr lledog (Welsh)

Native to: Australia

Habitat: Gardens, nurseries, garden centres, parks, moorland, wasteland, pasture and arable land.

A small terrestrial flatworm between 20-80 mm in length and 2-5 mm wide. Having a flattened or oval cross-section, orange or pinkish-orange in colour, with a pink head end and two pale grey narrow lines running down the length of the body close to the mid-line. The head end has numerous discrete tiny eyes.

First recorded in the Isles of Scilly in 1980, the Australian flatworm has since spread along the southern coast of England and is now quite widespread, particularly in the south-west and north-west of England.

Australian flatworms prey on earthworms, posing a potential threat to native earthworm populations. Further spread could have an impact on wildlife species dependent on earthworms (e.g. badgers, moles) and could have a localised deleterious effect on soil structure.

The Australian flatworm is listed under Schedule 9 to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 with respect to England and Wales. As such, it is an offence to release or allow the escape of this species into the wild.

For details of legislation go to www.nonnativespecies.org/legislation.



Key ID Features



Identification throughout the year

Flatworms remain similar in appearance throughout the year.

Field Signs

Shiny black egg capsules similar in appearance to a blackcurrant can rarely be found in the soil surface in damp places, such as under plastic or other sheeting, rocks, flat stones and plant containers.

Similar Species

There are two native land flatworms (*Microplana terrestris* and *Microplana scharffi*) that can be similar in size to *Australoplana sanguinea*. However, both of these lack the dorsal stripe and are darker in colour.

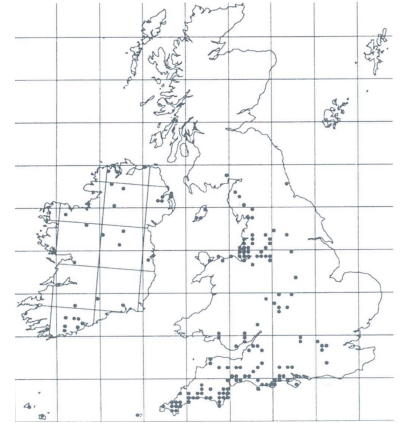
New Zealand flatworm

Non-native
(*Arthurdendyus triangulatus*)



Distribution

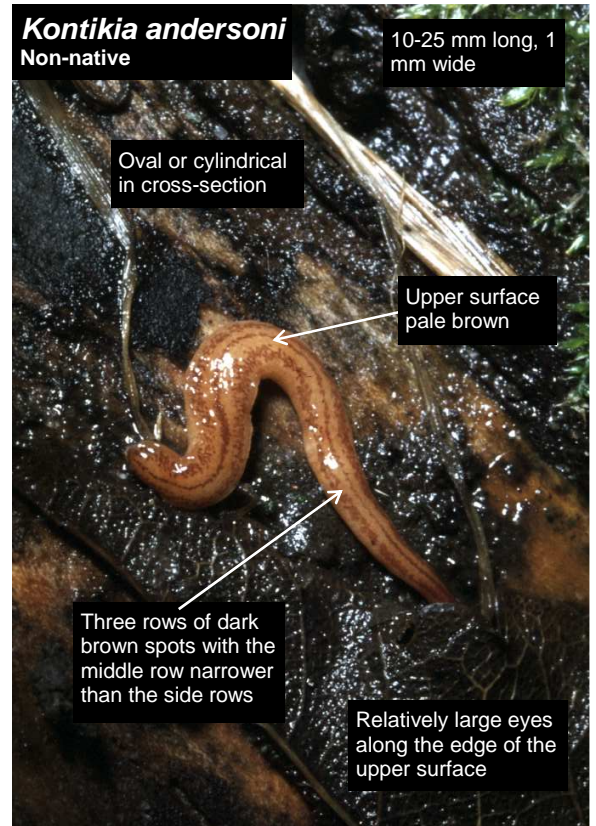
Widespread, particularly in south-west and north-west England. There have been very few findings from the east of the country and few from Scotland.



Source: Hugh D Jones, British Wildlife

Kontikia andersoni

Non-native



Upper surface is uniform dark grey-black or brown colour

Cylindrical body blunt at head end

A land flatworm

Native
(*Microplana terrestris*)

Two tiny eyes near to head end

Up to about 2 cm long and 1-2 mm wide

Under surface is pale

No longitudinal lines running down length of body

Round in cross-section

A land flatworm

Native
(*Microplana scharffi*)

Smooth when extended, but slightly flattened and creased when contracted

Yellow in colour when unfed, pinkish after eating earthworms and yellow-grey after eating slugs

2 - 5 cm long; 1 - 2 mm wide

References and further reading:

"Invasive alien species in northern Ireland" <http://www.habitas.org.uk/invasive/species.asp?item=50004>

Jones, H D (2005) British land flatworms. *British Wildlife*, 16, 189-194

Jones, H D (1995) The African and European land planarian faunas, with an identification guide for field workers in Europe. *Pedobiologia*, 42, 477- 489