

Non-native Land flatworms

Land flatworms have smooth bodies covered in mucus and range in shape from flattened to cylindrical. Unlike Earthworms and leeches their bodies are not segmented and they can be separated from slugs by the lack of tentacles and completely smooth bodies. Land flatworms can be found in dark, damp situations such as in the soil, leaf litter, at the bases of plants or under logs, stones and other objects.

There are at least three native species of Land flatworms in the UK, but more than ten non-natives. Non-native land flatworms are introduced accidentally in imported pot plants and new non-natives continue to be discovered in the UK. Once introduced they can reproduce rapidly, cannot be eradicated and pose a risk to native invertebrates such as earthworms by feeding on them. The following is a guide to species to look out for. Should you find any of these flatworms, take a photo or collect a specimen and report it using [iRecord](#). If you've found one in a recently purchased pot plant, please also report it through our [Potwatch](#) page.

Please note: Most of these species are illegal to release or allow to escape into the wild in England and Wales. It is also illegal to release any non-native flatworm in Scotland.

@Bart Everson



Moon flatworm (*Bipalium kewense*)

Size: to 35cm

Description: Easily identified by its crescent-shaped head. Buff with dark lines along the body. Eats earthworms. Reproduces by splitting in two.

Origin: South-East Asia

Known UK range: Scattered records, mainly from hothouses.

@Richard Lewington



Obama flatworm (*Obama nungara*)

Origin: South America

Size: To 7cm

Description: Broad, leaf-shaped body (Obama means 'Leaf animal' in Brazil's indigenous Tupi language). Eats earthworms.

Known UK range: A garden centre in Oxfordshire. Imported with a *Heuchera* plant from the Netherlands in 2016 (the species has become widespread in mainland Europe). Also in Co. Wicklow, Ireland in 2009.

@Katy Martin



New Zealand flatworm (*Arthurdendyus triangulates*)

Size: To 20cm

Description: Flattened body with a ridge along the back. Dark brown with pale, spotted margins and underside. Rests in a flat coil. Eats earthworms.

Origin: New Zealand

Known UK range: Widespread. Common in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

@Archie Murchi



Australian flatworm (*Australoplana sanguinea*)

Origin: Australia

Size: to 8cm

Description: Flattened body. Orange with a pink head (pinkish after feeding). Eats earthworms. Can be very abundant.

Known UK range: Widespread in South West England, with some populations in Wales and North West England.

@Hugh Jones



Brown Kontikia flatworm (*Kontikia andersoni*)

Size: to 2cm

Description: Oval or cylindrical body. Pale brown with three rows of dark brown spots running along the back.

Origin: Australia or New Zealand.

Known UK range: Northern Ireland, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. Also in Ireland and the Isle of Man.

@Jean-Lou Justine



Black Kontikia flatworm (*Kontikia ventrolineata*)

Size: to 2cm

Description: Oval or cylindrical body. Black with a pair of pale-grey lines running along the back. Eats snails.

Origin: Australia or New Zealand.

Known UK range: Devon and Cornwall, Liverpool and Scotland. Also in Guernsey and Ireland.

@Hugh Jones



Blue-spot flatworm (*Australopacifica coxii*)

Size: to 2cm

Description: Oval or cylindrical body. Black with iridescent blue flecks and lines along the back.

Origin: Australia

Known UK range: Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

Other Land flatworms in the UK

There are also some tropical non-native flatworms in Britain which survive only in hothouses in a few locations. New non-native species also continue to be imported, as shown by the recent discovery of the Obama flatworm. We would welcome reports of other flatworms found in any pot plants through our [Potwatch](#) page.

The UK does have a few native land flatworm species, but the commonest tend to be small (no more than 3cm) and plain black or grey. One native species, *Microplana scharffi* is yellow or pink but unlike the Australian flatworm it has a cylindrical body. If in doubt, snap a photo and send it to [iSpot](#).

Specimens can also be sent to land flatworm expert Dr Hugh Jones to verify their identity. Capture the flatworm in a small sealed pot with a piece of damp tissue, seal the pot in a parcel and address it to:

Dr Hugh Jones, 3239 Stopford Buildings, University of Manchester, Manchester M13 9PT



@Eduard Solà

A *Microplana* flatworm

Further information

Buglife Invasive Species Hub: www.buglife.org.uk/invasive-species-hub

Buglife invasive non-native invertebrate species:

<https://www.buglife.org.uk/campaigns-and-our-work/policy-and-legislation/invasive-non-native-invertebrate-species>

GB Non-Native Species Secretariat: Flatworms

<http://www.nonnativespecies.org/index.cfm?pageid=509>

OPAL New Zealand flatworm survey: www.opalexplornature.org/nzflatworm