Australian Flatworm

Species Description

**Scientific name:** Australoplana sanguinea  
**Native to:** Australia  
**Habitat:** Gardens, nurseries, garden centres, parks, moor-land, 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.

Australian Flatworms have been reported in Northern Ireland but records are considered to be quite low.

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.

As Australian flatworms are not ordinarily resident in Northern Ireland, under the Invasive Alien Species (Enforcement and Permitting) Order (Northern Ireland) 2019 it is an offence to release or allow this species to escape into the wild.

Key ID Features

- Numerous tiny eyes at head end
- Pointed at both ends
- Underside pale buff
- Orange or pinkish-orange in colour
- Completely smooth body surface
- 20 – 80 mm long, 3 – 8 mm wide
- Does not form coils when at rest
- Flattened to oval in cross section
- 20 – 80 mm long, 3 – 8 mm wide

Report any sightings via; CEDaR Online Recording - [https://www2.habitas.org.uk/records/ISI](https://www2.habitas.org.uk/records/ISI), iRecord app or Invasive Species Northern Ireland website - [http://invasivespeciesni.co.uk/report-sighting](http://invasivespeciesni.co.uk/report-sighting)
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
Invasive non-native

(ARTHURDENDYUS TRIANGULATUS)

Pointed at both ends

60 – 200 mm long, 10 mm wide

A land flatworm
Native

(MICROPLANA TERRESTRIS)

Cylindrical body blunt at head end

Two tiny eyes near to head end

Under surface is pale

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

Upper surface is uniform dark grey-black or brown colour

A land flatworm
Native

(MICROPLANA TERRESTRIS)

Round in cross-section

2 – 5 cm long; 1 – 2 mm wide

Kontikia andersoni
Invasive non-native

Oval or cylindrical in cross-section

Upper surface pale brown

Relatively large eyes along the edge of the upper surface

Three rows of dark brown spots with the middle row narrower than the side rows

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

Source NBN atlas Northern Ireland - https://northernireland.species.nbnatlas.org/species/NHMSYS0020744893

Check website for current distribution

References and further reading:

“Invasive alien species in northern Ireland”
http://www.habitas.org.uk/invasive/species.asp?item=50004
Photos from: Archie Murchie, Dr. Roy Anderson

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Adapted for Northern Ireland Environment Agency 2020