

New Zealand Flatworm

Species Description

Scientific name: *Arthurdendyus triangulatus*

AKA: *Artioposthia triangulata*

Native to: New Zealand

Habitat: Gardens, nurseries, garden centres, parks, pasture and on wasteland

This flatworm is very distinctive with a dark, purplish-brown upper surface with a narrow, pale buff spotted edge and pale buff underside. Many tiny eyes. Pointed at both ends, and ribbon-flat. A mature flatworm at rest is about 1 cm wide and 6 cm long but when extended can be 20 cm long and proportionally narrower. When resting, it is coiled and covered in mucus.

It probably arrived in the UK during the 1960s, with specimen plants sent from New Zealand to a botanic garden. It was only found occasionally for many years, but by the early 1990s there were repeated findings in Scotland, Northern Ireland and northern England.

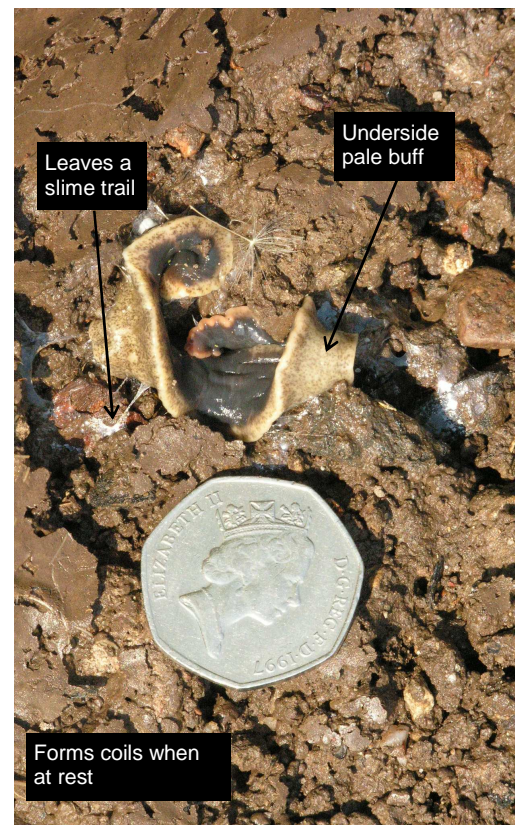
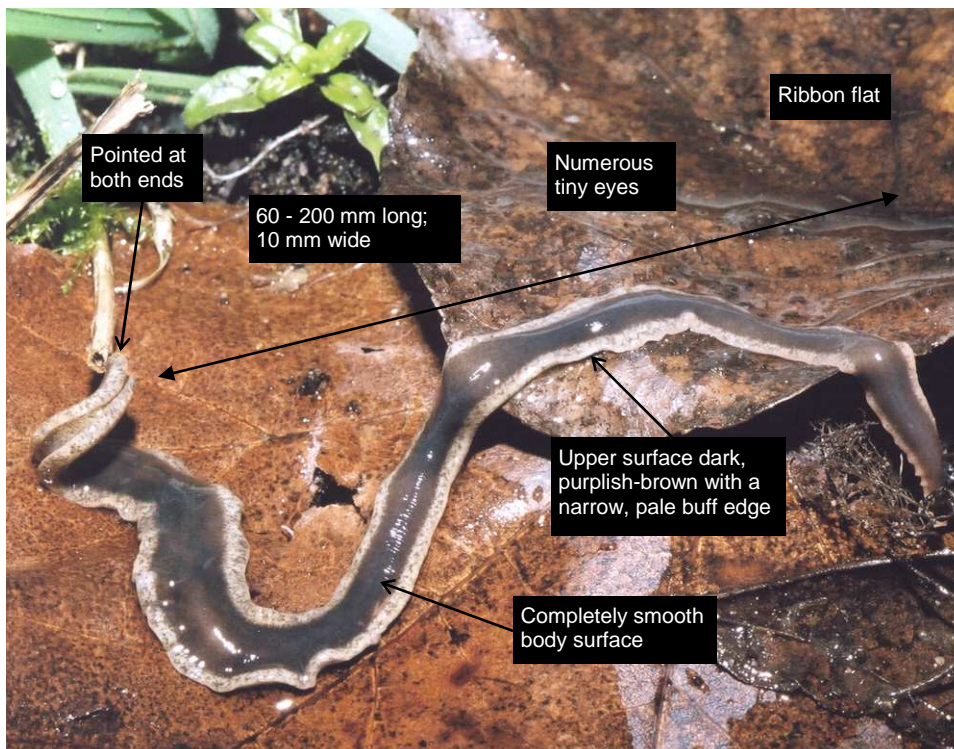
Native to New Zealand, the flatworm is found in shady, wooded areas. Open, sunny pasture land is too hot and dry with temperatures over 20°C quickly lethal to it.

New Zealand 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.

For details of legislation relating to non-native species please see: http://www.nonnativespecies.org/07_Legislation.cfm



Key ID Features



Identification throughout the year

Egg capsules are laid mainly in spring but can be found all year round. They are shiny black, 4-11 mm long and 3-8 mm wide, and resemble shiny smooth slightly flattened blackcurrants. They contain 5-8 pale young flatworms which emerge after 2-3 months and are creamy white/pink in colour.

Field Signs

The flatworm can sometimes be found coiled up and covered in mucus under stones, wood, plastic etc. left on the soil surface. Shiny black egg capsules similar in appearance to a blackcurrant, found in the soil.

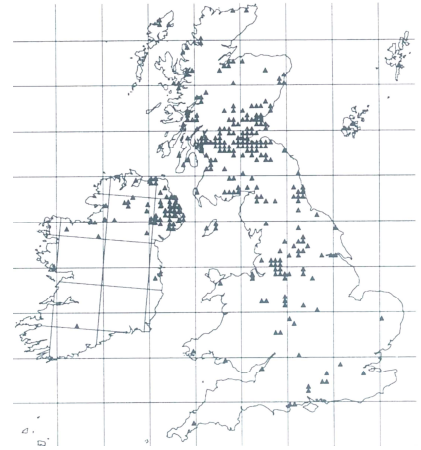
Similar Species

New Zealand flatworm is readily distinguished from earthworms and slugs (see illustrations). Other types of flatworm similar in appearance to the New Zealand flatworm have been found in the UK. This includes the orange-red Australian flatworm (*Australoplana sanguinea*) and grey *Kontikia ventrolineata*.

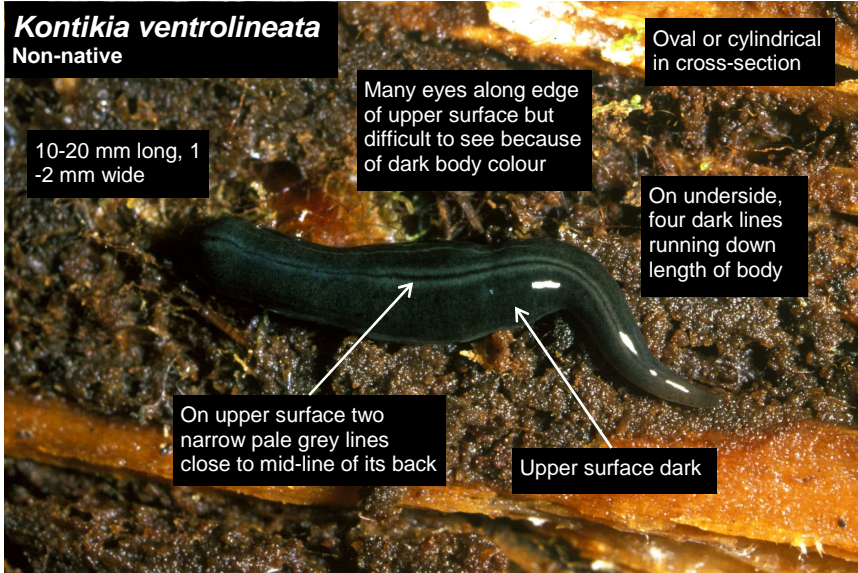
Distribution

There have been sightings throughout the UK as a result of its gradual spread. They prefer the cooler, wetter parts of the country and are mainly found in Scotland, northern England and Ireland where it has become locally abundant and widespread. It has been reported from central and southern England.

Source: Hugh D Jones, British Wildlife.



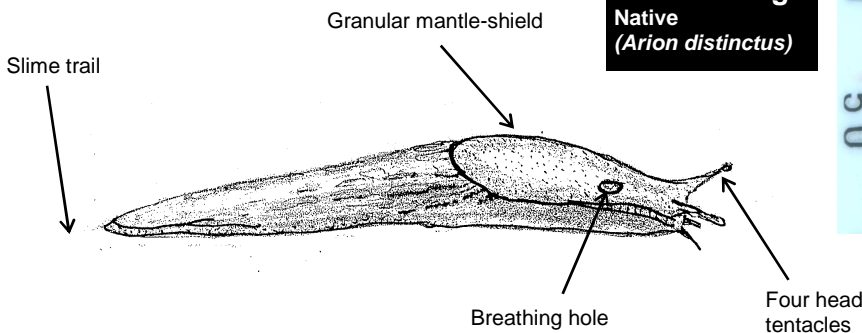
Kontikia ventrolineata Non-native



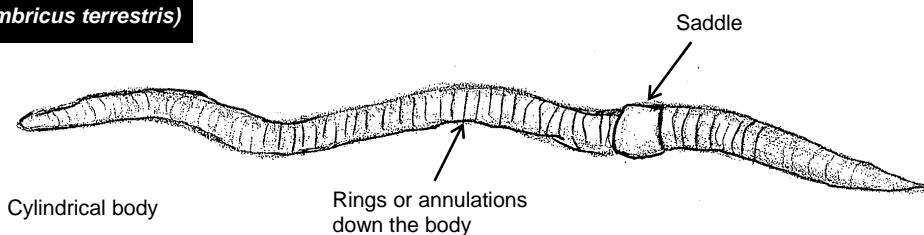
Australian Flatworm Non-native (*Australoplana sanguinea*)



Garden Slug Native (*Arion distinctus*)



Earthworm Native (*Lumbricus terrestris*)



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