

Mistletoe Information Sheet N^o3: Habitats and Hosts

Information about *Viscum album*, the native mistletoe of Britain & Northern Europe



Mistletoe Matters

www.mistletoe.org.uk

Mistletoe's habitats and hosts

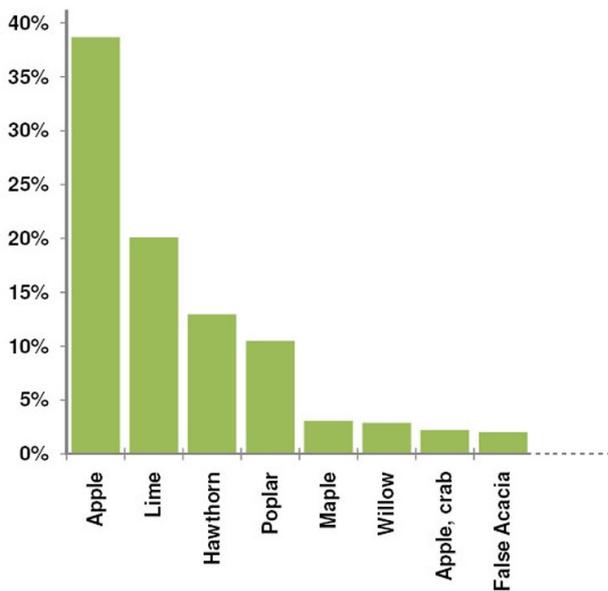
Mistletoes worldwide have particular host and habitat preferences – mostly growing on trees in relatively open situations, and often on just a few specific host species. Our mistletoe, *Viscum album* subspecies *album* has the widest host range of any known mistletoe, but it still has its favourites.

Hosts in Britain

In Britain the commonest host for mistletoe is cultivated (not wild) apple trees. But it also occurs on many other tree species, with other favourites including limes, poplars, and hawthorns.

The full British host list runs to many hundreds of tree species, and our species of mistletoe (*Viscum album* subspecies *album*), is thought to have the widest host range of any mistletoe species in the world.

The graph on the left, based on data from the 1990s National Mistletoe Survey, shows relative proportions on the most common hosts – the full list is very long and so if that graph had every species included it would continue to the right for many metres.

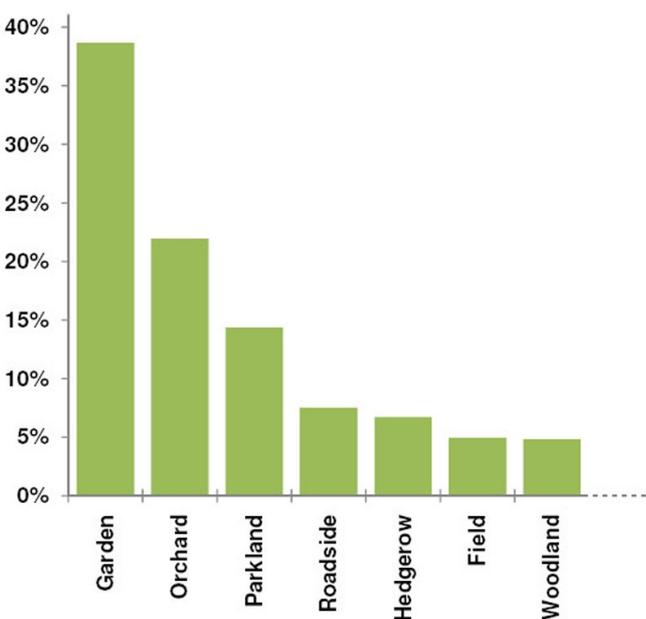


Habitats in Britain

Mistletoe's main habitats, other than the obvious need to be on a tree, are interesting.

Despite needing trees mistletoe is not generally a woodland or forest plant, preferring its hosts in open situations with plenty of light around the tree.

So favourite habitats include gardens, orchards, parkland (traditional and modern), churchyards etc. It is interesting to note that most of these are 'man-made' habitats – and that in a primeval Britain before woodland clearance mistletoe would probably have been less abundant than today.



Hosts in Europe



Viscum album's hosts in Europe are similar to those in Britain – a very wide range but with some definite favourites (apple, poplar, lime etc). A classic mistletoe-infested French poplar plantation is pictured left.

The main difference in mainland Europe is a slightly wider host range, with mistletoe often seen on some species (e.g. Birch, Sugar Maple) that it is rarely seen on in Britain.

There are some more technical differences too, as there are more subspecies of *Viscum album* on the continent than in Britain. There are three in

total, including the usual *Viscum album* subspecies *album* on the many deciduous hosts but also subspecies *austriacum* on pine trees and subspecies *abietis* on fir trees.



These evergreen tree mistletoes can be hard to spot (there are lots of them in the picture on the left, but they are surprisingly common, particularly in upland habitats.

A fourth subspecies is only found on Corsica, also on pines.

Habitats in Europe

Mistletoe habitats across Europe are, unsurprisingly, very similar to Britain, with much in gardens, orchards and other suburban habitats, and only found in woodland with fairly open structure, such as poplar plantations or, for the evergreen host species, the open forests of upland areas

Further reading:

Barney, CW, Hawksworth, FG & Geils, BW 1998 Hosts of *Viscum album* *Eur J For Path* 28: 187-208

Briggs, J (2011) Mistletoe - a review of its distribution, conservation and insect associates, *British Wildlife* 23:1 (Oct 2011); 23-31

Briggs, J (2011) 2011 Mistletoe (*Viscum album*); a brief review of its local status with recent observations on its insect associations and conservation problems, *Proc Cotts Nat Field Club*, XLV (II), 181-193