

Bird Vetch

Vicia cracca

Common Name: Bird or Tufted Vetch

Scientific Name: *Vicia cracca*

Family: Fabaceae

Description

Multiple weak stems and compound leaves with tendrils (that allow the plant to attach to other plants or objects) characterize this perennial plant. The distinct purplish/blue flowers are arranged in a one-sided spike and turn into brown or black seed pods once matured. Vetch seeds disperse by the ballistic action of drying seedpods.

Because Bird Vetch is spreading effectively via seeds and by underground horizontal rootstocks, infestations grow rapidly.



Photo: Michael Rasy Bugwood.org

Range in Yukon

It is found in most Yukon communities including Whitehorse, Dawson, Watson Lake and Haines Junction.

Similar Species

Like the garden pea, Bird Vetch has tendrils to help it climb other vegetation. In Yukon only four plant species, all vetches, have tendrils. Three of these are introduced including Bird Vetch. Spring Vetch (*V. sativa*) and Shaggy Vetch (*V. villosa*) are only known from historic collections in Dawson City. Purple Vetch (*V. americana*) is the only native Yukon vetch and is found in southeast Yukon, but has been introduced to Mayo and Rancheria. Purple Vetch has fewer flowers (3-9) per bunch than Bird Vetch (10-30).

Ecological Impact

This plant can overgrow herbaceous vegetation and climb over shrubs like alder and willow. It is known to invade undisturbed sites including spruce forests and south-facing slopes. Due to the fixation of nitrogen it may change the soil composition.

Control

Bird Vetch is difficult to eradicate once established. Hand-pulling can be effective for small infestations, but the area has to be monitored and retreated for several years. Mowing and herbicide control can also be used effectively, especially for larger areas.