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Hirudo medicinalis

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Taxonomy [\[top\]](#)

Kingdom	Phylum	Class	Order	Family
ANIMALIA	ANNELIDA	HIRUDINOIDEA	ARHYNCHOBELLAE	HIRUDINIDAE

Scientific Name: *Hirudo medicinalis***Species Authority:** Linnaeus, 1758**Common Name/s:**

English – Medicinal Leech

French – Sangsue Médicinale, Sangsue Officinale

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Assessment Information [\[top\]](#)

Red List Category & Criteria:	Lower Risk/near threatened ver 2.3
Year Assessed:	1996
Annotations:	Needs updating
Assessor/s	World Conservation Monitoring Centre
Reviewer/s:	
History:	1994 – Indeterminate (Groombridge 1994) 1990 – Indeterminate (IUCN 1990) 1988 – Indeterminate (IUCN Conservation Monitoring Centre 1988) 1986 – Indeterminate (IUCN Conservation Monitoring Centre 1986) 1983 – Indeterminate

Geographic Range [\[top\]](#)

Range Description:	The medicinal leech has been recorded throughout Europe as far east as the Ural mountain range. It has a patchy distribution.
Countries:	Native: Algeria; Armenia; Austria; Belgium; Bulgaria; Czech Republic; Denmark; Finland; France; Georgia; Germany; Greece; Hungary; Italy; Lithuania; Luxembourg; Moldova; Montenegro; Netherlands; Norway; Poland; Portugal; Romania; Russian Federation; Serbia; Spain; Sweden; Switzerland; Turkey; Ukraine; United Kingdom; Uzbekistan Regionally extinct: Ireland

Population [\[top\]](#)

Population:	It is scarce in France and Belgium, and is thought to occur in more than 20 scattered subpopulations in the UK.
Population Trend:	Unknown

Habitat and Ecology [\[top\]](#)

Habitat and Ecology:	Found in naturally occurring freshwater lakes, ponds, streams, and marshes. Usually rests at air/water interface near the shore. Has been used medicinally for the purpose of phlebotomy (drawing blood) for millennia.
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	and was popularized for this use in the nineteenth century. Currently used in microsurgery to reduce postoperative haematomas is quite effective. The species is commercially available for medical purposes. Several anticoagulants, such as the antithrombin compound hirudin, have been extracted from salivary tissues and have biomedical/pharmacological use.
Systems:	Terrestrial; Freshwater
List of Habitats:	5 Wetlands (inland) 5.4 Wetlands (inland) - Bogs, Marshes, Swamps, Fens, Peatlands

Threats [\[top\]](#)

Major Threat(s):	The medical use of leeches might explain their wide distribution across Europe, as they are thought to have been released into ponds once they had been used for bleeding patients. It is also thought that in the past over-collecting reduced their numbers in some areas. Over-collecting for medical purposes is unlikely to be a threat today, given the protected nature of this species and the ability to breed leeches commercially at leech farms. Perhaps a more significant issue is the conversion of grazing marshes (the prime habitat of the species) to arable cultivation - resulting in lowering of water levels, pollution, and fewer host species. Invasion of scrub around ponds has also been a problem in places.
List of Threats:	2 Agriculture & aquaculture 2.1 Annual & perennial non-timber crops 2.1.3 Agro-industry farming

Conservation Actions [\[top\]](#)

Conservation Actions:	Listed under Appendix III of the Bern Convention, Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), Annex V of the Habitats Directive.
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Bibliography [\[top\]](#)

Citations:	<p>Baillie, J. and Groombridge, B. 1996. <i>1996 IUCN Red List of Threatened Animals</i>. International Union for Conservation of Nature, Gland, Switzerland.</p> <p>Groombridge, B. (ed.). 1994. <i>1994 IUCN Red List of Threatened Animals</i>. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland and Cambridge, UK.</p> <p>IUCN. 1990. <i>1990 IUCN Red List of Threatened Animals</i>. Gland, Switzerland and Cambridge, UK.</p> <p>Wells, S.M., Pyle, R.M. and Collins, N.M. (compilers) 1983. <i>The IUCN Invertebrate Red Data Book</i>. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland and Cambridge, UK.</p>
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Citation: World Conservation Monitoring Centre 1996. *Hirudo medicinalis*. In: IUCN 2011. IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Version 2011.1. <www.iucnredlist.org>. Downloaded on **24 June 2011**.

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