

Codium fragile subsp. *tomentosoides*

GREEN SEAFINGERS is a green seaweed. Native to Japanese shores it has sponge-like green fronds.

It is also known as Oyster thief.

It is protected in Britain under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Fragile is derived from Latin *frango* (to break, break in pieces, shatter) meaning ‘fragile, brittle or (occasionally) wilting quickly’.

The fronds are eaten in Japan.

Green seafingers turns up on shores far distant from its homeland. Authorities suspect that the seaweed has migrated long distances primarily on ships’ bottoms, as spores in ballast tanks or on the shells of shellfish such as oysters. It was first collected from waters around the Netherlands in 1900 and since then (possibly, authorities ponder, accelerated by shipping movements during the Second World War) has slowly spread to other parts of Europe. Its appearance on British shores was noted in 1939 when it was first found at Steer Point in Devon on the south-western coast. Sightings of it on north-western Atlantic shores, specifically Nova Scotia, were recorded in 1996 in an area which had been frequented by oyster fishermen.

This subspecies is invasive and tends to swamp native plants – although at the turn of the 20th/21st Centuries authorities have begun to notice the possible return of some of the ousted native species in some places. It is not popular with fishermen as it can hinder harvesting oysters and, as it is tenacious, makes the shellfish more difficult to clean for market. Its tenacity (and buoyancy) seem to be important factors in explanations of its significant impact on foreign shorelines. Driven *en masse* in a storm (and doggedly clinging to rocks) it does not fragment like other seaweeds and can sweep a sandy beach and transform it into a stony one by the time the storm has subsided.