Pilosella officinarum

[Synonyms : *Hieracium longisquamum*, *Hieracium pilosella*, *Pilosella longisquama*]

MOUSE-EAR HAWKWEED is an annual or perennial. Native to Europe it has small dandelion-like bright sulphur yellow flowers that are sometimes tinged with dark red or purple beneath.

It is also known as Blood of St. John, *Clust y Llygoden* (Welsh), *Épervière piloselle* (French), Felon herb, *Gråfibbla* (Swedish), *Havikskruid* (Dutch), Hawkweed, Herb of nails, *Kleines Habichtskraut* (German), *Langhaariges Habichtskraut* (German), Mouse bloodwort, Mouse ear, *Pelosella* (Italian), Pilosella, and *Piloselle* (French); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of quick-sightedness.

Officinarum means 'of the shop (usually the apothecary's or herbalist's)'. Certain plants used for medicinal purposes, whether of actual or legendary value, were kept readily available and acquired this name.

Mouse-ear hawkweed is associated with several European superstitions and customs. Not least among these it was used as a love oracle for example by plucking off the petals one by one (saying 'yes' and 'no' alternately for each petal) it was believed that one could ascertain whether sweethearts would meet. Then in the practice of children blowing the seed head (in the same way that common dandelions are used to tell the time today) they were sure they could find out whether they lived in the north, the south, the east or the west. It was also thought mouse-ear hawkweed would protect a horse from a shoeing injury in the smithy if a piece of the plant was put under the bridle.

The plant eventually came to be known to North American Indian tribes and authorities note that the Iroquois Indians took a plant infusion to treat diarrhoea.

In line with the tradition that eagles fed on the plant herbalists used to recommend it for the treatment of some eye complaints – but its employment for this purpose has now disappeared. It was also used in treating respiratory diseases (including asthma, bronchitis, whooping-cough and consumption), piles, jaundice, diarrhoea, enteritis, fever and liver disorders. Externally the plant was an ingredient in compresses applied to heal wounds.

It is the birthday flower for 21st November.

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