

## Habitat Action Plan: Lowland Dry Acid Grassland

### Current status and Importance

- Lowland acid grassland typically occurs below 300m on nutrient-poor, free-draining soils (pH 4 to 5.5) overlying acid rocks or sands and gravelsand.
- It often occurs as an integral part of lowland heath landscapes and as grazing pasture.
- As with other lowland semi-natural grassland types, acid grassland has undergone substantial decline in the 20th century although no figures are available on rates of loss.
- The decline is mostly due to agricultural intensification, although there have been some losses to afforestation and natural regeneration through relaxed grazing pressure.
- Within Kirklees this habitat often occurs within mosaic of woodland, scrub and heathland, which is a distinctive feature of the valley slopes and the wildlife communities found there.



Photograph Copyright Peter Wakely/ Natural England

### Species Use

- Acid grassland is characterised by a range of plant species such as: Heath Bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*); Sheep's-fescue (*Festuca ovina*); Common Bent (*Agrostis capillaris*); Sheep's Sorrel (*Rumex acetosella*); Wavy Hair-grass (*Deschampsia flexuosa*); and Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*). The presence and abundance is dependent upon community type and locality.
- Dwarf shrubs, such as Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) and Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*) can also occur but at low abundance. Lowland acid grassland often forms a mosaic with dwarf shrub heath.
- Acid grasslands can have a high cover of bryophytes (non-vascular land-based plants) and parched acid grassland can be rich in lichens. Within Kirklees, pollution is likely to have reduced the value in this context.
- The bird fauna of acid grassland is very similar to that of other lowland dry grasslands.
- Many of the invertebrates that occur in acid grassland are specialist species which do not occur in other types of grassland. The habitat is important to the small heath butterfly (*Coenonympha pamphilus*), a BAP priority species.

### Conservation Issues

- Agricultural intensification by use of fertilisers, herbicides and other pesticide, liming, re-seeding or ploughing for arable crops.
- Neglect leading to rank over-growth, and Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and scrub encroachment.
- Over-grazing which is sometimes associated with supplementary feeding causing localised sward damage.
- Afforestation or natural regeneration due to a lack of grazing pressure.

- Development activities such as mineral and rock extraction, road building, housing and landfill.
- Atmospheric pollution and climate change, the influence of which is not fully assessed.

## Objectives

- Arrest the depletion of unimproved lowland acid grassland.
- Secure favourable condition where opportunities arise.
- Restore suitable areas to lowland acid grassland where opportunities arise.
- Continue with work to map the total extent of the habitat.
- Undertake work to establish the value of grassland sites across the district.

## Target areas for habitat management and creation

- Valley Slopes where the habitat is part of an ecological network within an over-arching forest mosaic.
- Pennine Foothills, again where the habitat tends to occur on steeper slopes.
- For further information, please see the Biodiversity Opportunity Zones Map at [www.kirklees.gov.uk/biodiversity](http://www.kirklees.gov.uk/biodiversity)

## Targets

- To be decided

## Key Links and Organisations

Site protection: Kirklees Council, Forestry Commission.

Management through Environmental Stewardship in Kirklees: Natural England, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group.

Management and restoration: Coalfield Heathland Project (Sheffield Wildlife Trust), the Kirklees BAP: Guidance for the management of Flowering Grasslands: Kirklees Council Environment Unit.

Grassland site inventory for Kirklees: West Yorkshire Ecology, Kirklees Council Environment Unit.

Grassland surveys: Kirklees Wildlife and Landscape Advisory Forum, West Yorkshire Ecology.

## See Also

- [UK Biodiversity Action Plan: Lowland Dry Acid Grassland](#)
- [UK Biodiversity Action Plan: Lowland Heath Habitat Action Plan](#)
- Guidance for the management of Flowering Grasslands: Kirklees Council Environment Unit ([www.kirklees.gov.uk/biodiversity](http://www.kirklees.gov.uk/biodiversity))