

Habitat Action Plan: Semi-natural Pasture

Current status and Importance

- Semi-natural pasture refers to areas of grassland which have been little improved and retain a semi-natural species mix.
- The in-bye pastures of the uplands are a vital component of the South Pennines and Dark Peak Special Protection Areas, even though they are outside its boundaries.
- Like farmland in general, this habitat has seen much change over the years due to agricultural improvement, leading to a loss in species diversity.
- For Kirklees, there is limited quantitative or qualitative data to assess the extent of the changes but changes are known to have occurred in both lowland and upland areas.
- The habitat is much fragmented in the lowlands of Kirklees; less so in the uplands.



Species Use

- Pasture which has been little improved can contain a rich variety of plants, especially so in lowland areas.
- Damp or marshy areas, often with characteristic rushes and sedges present, add to this plant diversity and they are important feeding sites for wading birds in the uplands.
- Can be important for both fungi and invertebrates but less is known about these groups.

Conservation Issues

- Agricultural intensification, including ploughing, reseeding, drainage and fertiliser application. This leads to reduced species richness and a lack of structural diversity in the sward.
- A shift in grazing patterns, including increased stocking rates, reduced cattle grazing and increased grazing by sheep and horses. Again, this leads to changes in the vegetation type and structure. It may also cause soil compaction, reducing rainwater percolation and increasing peak run-off flows to rivers and reducing drought resistance.
- Abandonment leading to rank over-growth and scrub encroachment.
- Application of herbicides and other pesticides.

Objectives

- Arrest the depletion of unimproved pasture and semi-natural grassland.
- Secure favourable condition at existing sites where opportunities arise.
- Bring additional areas into favourable management.
- Restore areas of pasture especially where core areas of interest remain.
- Continue with work to establish and map the total extent of the habitat and important species groups.

Target areas for habitat management and creation

- Mid-altitudinal Grasslands, especially where there are existing strongholds of grassland breeding bird populations.
- Pennine Foothills, especially where restoration will benefit BAP priority species.
- For further information, please see the Biodiversity Opportunity Zones Map at www.kirklees.gov.uk/biodiversity

Targets

- To be decided

Key Links and Organisations

- Site protection: Kirklees Council, Peak District National Park Authority, Natural England.
- Management through Environmental Stewardship in Kirklees: Natural England, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group.
- Grassland management and restoration: Twite Species Recovery Project (RSPB),
- The Kirklees BAP: Guidance for the management of Semi-natural Pasture: 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

- Kirklees Twite Species Action Plan.
- Guidance for the management of Semi-natural Pasture: Kirklees Council Environment Unit.

(Both available at www.kirklees.gov.uk/biodiversity)