

NEUTRAL GRASSLAND HABITAT ACTION PLAN



Introduction

This action plan covers grasslands that are unimproved or semi-improved. This includes the two UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Priority Habitats



Floodplain grazing marsh: English Nature

'Lowland meadows' and 'Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh'.

Lowland meadow is defined as 'most forms of unimproved neutral grassland across the enclosed lowland landscapes of the UK' It includes grasslands cut for hay and those where livestock grazing is the main land use.

Floodplain grazing marsh is defined as: 'periodically inundated pasture or meadow with ditches that maintain water levels. The ditches are rich in plants and invertebrates.

Most areas are grazed or cut for hay or silage'.

These habitats support declining wetland birds. The key to their conservation is appropriate management.

Historically, this was a characteristic habitat of the washlands of the rivers Ure and Swale.

Status

National

The exact extent of high species diversity Neutral grassland in the UK is not known but was estimated in 1994 to be about 25,000 hectares. There has been the loss of 97% of semi-natural grassland in southern England since the 1930's.

Regional

In the Yorkshire and Humber region, the majority of this habitat survives in the Derwent Valley, on the Humberhead Levels and along the River Hull. The total figure is not known.

Neutral grassland is a characteristic habitat of the Vale of York and Mowbray Natural Area.

Local

This habitat occurs on ten Sites of Interest for Nature Conservation (SINC).

The English Nature Grazing Marsh Survey gives the total amount for Hambleton as 358ha, which is 0.3% of the district. This is fragmented along the river valleys of the Swale, Cod Beck and becks in the Howardian Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and is

spread across nine sites in five distinct areas. Not all of these sites are designated as SINC's.

- River Swale - west of Thrintoft
- River Swale - around Maunby.
- Cod Beck - north of Thornton-le-Street
- Holbeck - south of Ampleforth (shared with Ryedale)

- Dalby Bush Beck – south of Terrington (shared with Ryedale)

The exact amount of lowland meadow habitat and the number of sites in the District are not known.

All three priority species breed at Nosterfield Local Nature Reserve. Most sites are known for their ornithological interest, but a few for their botanical interest.

Hambleton Priority Species

- Lapwing
- Redshank
- Yellow wagtail

Other Species

- Water vole (UK BAP)
- Curlew
- Snipe
- Barn owl
- Reed bunting (UK BAP)

Status of Priority Species

The lapwing breeds in the uplands and also on poorly drained land in the lowlands. It has declined moderately in England and in the lowlands since 1987. Important numbers winter in the region.

The redshank has contracted its range and declined moderately in the UK since 1987, possibly due to land drainage. It is a rare breeding bird in the district.

The yellow wagtail has declined rapidly along waterways since the 1980's and has contracted its range towards central England. The optimum habitat is tussocky pasture grazed by cattle. It is

now a scarce breeding bird in the District. All three species will benefit from targets 1 and 2.



Yellow wagtail: Dr Peter Evans

