

MAGNESIAN LIMESTONE GRASSLAND HABITAT ACTION PLAN



Introduction



Calcareous grassland: Graham Megson

'Lowland calcareous grassland' is a UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Priority Habitat that includes grassland formed

on either chalk or limestone deposits. Magnesian Limestone grassland occurs on outcrops of Magnesian Limestone laid down during the Permian period, 225 million years ago. In terms of both its geographical position and climate, it fits between the lowland southern chalks and limestones and the upland northern carboniferous limestone. Magnesian Limestone grassland supports a unique assemblage of plant and invertebrate species, including over 13 nationally scarce plants and 84 nationally scarce invertebrates. Magnesian Limestone grassland is listed on the European Community Habitats Directive.

Status

National

Magnesian Limestone is found in a narrow band between Nottinghamshire and Tyne and Wear. The U.K. resource is 50,000 hectares.

Regional

In the Yorkshire and Humber region, Magnesian Limestone forms a narrow north-south band. Where it outcrops, important calcareous habitats occur. Approximately 9000 hectares (20% of the national resource) occurs here.

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

Local

In Hambleton the Magnesian Limestone outcrops in the Bedale and Nosterfield

area, giving a small proportion of calcareous sites. Many of these have been lost to non-natural influences. Only three hectares of Magnesian Limestone grassland survives, situated on five sites. All of these are Sites of Interest for Nature Conservation (SINC's) and some are under Countryside Stewardship (CS) agreements.

- Nosterfield limekilns
- Henge (Nosterfield)
- Masham road verge (near Bedale)
- Langthorne covert (near Bedale)
- East Tanfield quarry (near West Tanfield)

Hambleton Priority Species

None

Other Species

- Orchids (*Orchidaceae*)
- Skylark (UK BAP)
- Dingy skipper butterfly

Requirements

- Grazing at appropriate levels depending upon site requirements. Grazing will be for maintenance of favourable sites or for restoration, for example where coarse species have established.
- Mowing at sites where grazing is impractical.
- Grazing or cutting timed for the autumn.
- Scrub management.
- No grass re-seeding.
- No fertilizer input.
- Available management options in agri-environment schemes.

Current Action

- No sites in Hambleton have been designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's).
- All five sites are designated SINC's.
- Some sites are under CS agreements.
- There is a CS option to manage calcareous grassland.



Common spotted orchids (*Dactylorhiza maculata*): Peter Waterton

Threats

- Agricultural changes, including input of fertilizers, pesticide application, changes to stocking densities and conversion to arable.
- Mineral (gravel) extraction.
- Loss of grant scheme agreements.
- Development, e.g. infilling, of quarries and other workings where calcareous grasslands have developed after cessation of working.
- Disturbance, such as arson, tipping and erosion.

Other Possible Partners

- Landowners
- Swale and Ure Washlands Project

Objective

Safeguard and manage the remaining remnants of this habitat and re-create it where opportunities allow.

Targets

1. Retain all current Magnesian Limestone grassland sites in Hambleton.
2. Increase extent of Magnesian Limestone grassland in Hambleton by 33% (one hectare).
3. All sites to be under favourable management.
4. Establish the importance of existing sites for populations of dingy skipper butterfly.
5. Ratify sites as SINC if qualifying criteria are met.

Actions

	Partners	Target No.
Policy and Legislation		
Ratify sites as SINC if criteria met.	NEYEDC, NYCC	5
Site Safeguard and Management		
Encourage owners to manage Magnesian Limestone Grassland habitat, through agri-environment schemes or similar.	FWAG DEFRA	1,3
Encourage landowners to re-create this type of habitat in appropriate areas.	FWAG DEFRA, LUCT	2

