

## **HABITAT ACTION PLAN FOR LOWLAND WET GRASSLAND (UKBAP EQUIVALENT: COASTAL AND FLOODPLAIN GRAZING MARSH)**

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### **HABITAT DEFINITION**

Lowland wet grassland can be defined as periodically flooded pasture or meadow, and includes floodplain grassland, washlands and water meadows. Almost all areas are grazed and some are cut for hay or silage. Sites typically possess ditches; they may contain seasonal water-filled hollows and permanent ponds; may contain areas of emergent swamp communities but not extensive areas of tall fen species like reeds. Lowland wet grassland is generally neutral in character but normally not botanically species rich and any semi-improved/unimproved neutral grassland is considered as part of the lowland neutral grassland resource and not lowland wet grassland. The majority of lowland wet grassland in Nottinghamshire will typically fall into the National Vegetation Classification communities MG7, MG8, MG9, MG10 and MG13.

Wet grassland is particularly important for the number of breeding waders such as snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* and curlew *Numenius arquata* it support, as well as wintering wildfowl including Bewick's and whooper swans *Cygnus columbianus* and *C. cygnus* and wigeon *Anas penelope*. Other species associated with the habitat include skylark *Alauda arvensis*, meadow pipit *Anthus pratensis* and yellow wagtail *Motacilla flava*. To be beneficial to breeding waders the minimum target should be to have lowland wet grassland in blocks of 10 ha.

### **CURRENT STATUS**

The exact extent of lowland wet grassland in the UK is not known, although it is a habitat that has decreased in extent by more than 40% since 1930, primarily as a result of drainage and agricultural improvements, and the UK Biodiversity Action Plan estimates some 300,000 ha of grazing marsh (including that in coastal areas) survives nationwide. Within this total, unimproved seasonally-flooded grasslands are less widely distributed with MG8 *Cynosurus - Caltha* flood-pasture now scarce and localised, with probably <1000 ha cover in England and Wales.

In Nottinghamshire, it is not clear what the distribution and extent of wet grassland ever was. However, before the post World War Two land drainage, flood protection and

agricultural intensification schemes, the immense floodplains of the River Trent and its tributaries are likely to have included significant areas of wet grassland.

Wet grassland is currently a scarce resource in Nottinghamshire, and in 1993 English Nature (now Natural England) estimated that 2700 hectares existed within the County. However, caution needs to be exercised when classifying grasslands as much of the remaining grassland in river valleys no longer functions as wet grassland but is better considered as neutral grassland. Current data suggests that approximately 160 hectares of the habitat now exist in the county, with the distribution shown in Annex 1.

## **THREATS**

The main factors currently affecting Nottinghamshire's lowland wet grassland are:

- Small size and fragmented nature of the overall resource and individual sites.
- Climate change.
- Agricultural intensification, including land drainage, and switches from extensive grassland management to silage or arable regimes.
- Insufficient water supply and inappropriate hydrological regimes for wet grassland sites, generally as a result of insensitive flood protection schemes, land drainage, and water abstraction.
- Poor water quality at some sites due to pollution of water courses from industry, domestic sewage and agricultural run-off (although water quality is generally improving).
- Lack of knowledge about extent and quality of resource.

## **CURRENT INITIATIVES - EXAMPLES**

- The OnTrent Initiative highlights the issues facing the River Trent floodplain through influencing policy, raising awareness and promoting projects including wet grassland habitat.
- In January 2010 the Heritage Lottery Fund awarded a Trent Vale Landscape Partnership bid for the On Trent 'Trent Vale' project. Wet grassland is one of the target habitats for this project.
- Natural England HLS target areas for the Trent include objectives to restore wet grassland along the valley.
- The Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust and Natural England are involved in nature reserve management for wet grassland in the Trent, Idle and Erewash Valleys.
- Natural England and the Environment Agency are working with landowners to implement Water Level Management Plans for a number of sites. The principle aim is

to see SSSI's retain wetter condition through a combination of off river structures and in field options.

- Isle of Axholme Strategy is investigating the potential of turning off a number of pumps (pumping water from the Idle into the Trent) as they reach the end of their economic life. This could see larger areas of grassland along the River Idle getting wetter and potentially some arable land being converted to wet grassland.
- The RSPB and EA are developing a lowland wet grassland reserve at Beckingham Marshes, which will amount to some 90ha in its first phase.
- RSPB has appointed a regional Advisor as part of the Nature After Minerals project to develop restoration plans on key mineral sites across the East Midlands including the Trent Valley. Wet grassland will be a key habitat for this project.
- Nottinghamshire County Council has funded the restoration of the western meadow at Carburton with further restoration of the Middle Meadow planned by Natural England. The total site is approximately 16ha in size.

## TARGETS

The following targets were agreed by the HAP target review group.

Target Type	Target Text	Units	2005 Baseline	2010 Target	2015 Target
Maintain Extent	Maintain the extent of all existing lowland wet grassland.	Ha	350	350	561
Achieve Condition	Maintain and improve by management existing lowland wet grassland.	Ha	42 (12%, existing habitat in favourable condition)	245 (70% of total habitat resource)	350 (100% of 2005 baseline resource)
Restoration	Improve the condition of relict habitat so that it qualifies as lowland wet grassland.	Ha		211	1910
Expansion	Encourage the re-establishment and increase the area of lowland wet grassland.	Ha			

(N.B. these figures will be updated as new targets are set during 2011)

Baseline data was based on a survey of grassland sites of SINC status by the Nottinghamshire Biological and Geological Record Centre (NBGRC), 70ha of restored wet grassland at Thoresby and Clumber by the Sherwood Forest Trust (SFT), and an estimate of unaccounted for sites. The breakdown of baseline data is as follows:

## Nottinghamshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan

(in ha)	Favourable Condition	Unfavourable Condition	Resource Total
Non SSSI Sites and SFT sites	41	299	340
Unaccounted for sites	1	9	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>42 (12%)</b>	<b>308 (88%)</b>	<b>350</b>

Expansion and Restoration targets were combined and based on an assumption of planned restoration projects and objective targets. The group agreed that they should accept no loss of resource.

Planned projects counted included:

- 1ha, by 2005, at Hoveringham (Tarmac)
- 10ha, at Lound (NWT)
- 1ha, at Attenborough (NWT)
- 34ha, at Slaynes Lane (Tarmac)
- 2ha, at Cromwell
- 90ha, by 2010, at Beckingham Marshes (RSPB/EA)
- 15ha, by 2010, at Tiln North (Tarmac)
- 10ha, by 2010, at Sturton Le Steeple (Lafarge)
- 15ha, by 2015, at Newington
- 20ha, by 2015, at Sturton Le Steeple (Lafarge)
- 35ha, by 2015, at Lound
- 40ha, by 2015, Erewash Valley
- 180ha, by 2015, at the Holmes area (including Besthorpe, Muskham and Dunham Bridge)
- 220, by 2020, at the Holmes area (including Besthorpe, Muskham and Dunham Bridge)

2015 'maintain extent' target is a cumulative figure based on achieving 2010 restoration/expansion targets. The 2020 expansion target has not been included in the targets table, but planned expansion projects equate to a further 1020ha to be restored.

### **PROPOSED ACTION**

#### **Policy and legislation**

1. Ensure the incorporation of relevant (inter-)national law, policies and guidance into all plans and policies relating to the protection, enhancement and management of lowland wet grassland habitat.

**ACTION:** Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

2. Through planning control or other land use consultation processes, allow no further loss of areas of lowland wet grassland habitat and seek opportunities to enhance existing areas and create new areas through approved development.

**ACTION:** Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

3. Ensure agri-environment, forestry and other funding schemes include appropriate management options and design measures to suit local nature conservation needs.

ACTION: Government Agencies.

### **Site safeguard and management**

4. Review the extent of SSSI coverage of grassland habitat and consider notifying further sites as necessary.

ACTION: Government Agencies.

5. Designate SINCs and declare Local Nature Reserves on appropriate areas of habitat or instigate other appropriate measures for their protection.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

6. Promote the uptake of positive management with owners of SSSIs, LNRs, SINCs and any other areas of lowland wet grassland habitat.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

7. Carry out appropriate habitat management on sites controlled by BAP partners.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

8. Ensure sites containing lowland wet grassland habitat have appropriate management plans that are working towards improving site management and condition

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

9. Acquire land to ensure good habitat management or to create habitat.

ACTION: NGO's.

### **Advisory**

10. Provide formal or informal training in management techniques for lowland wet grassland habitat to land managers, site wardens, volunteers, etc.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

11. Establish demonstration sites or projects to demonstrate/publicise good habitat management techniques.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

### **Future research and monitoring**

12. Establish and maintain a monitoring programme (a site register) to determine progress towards county HAP targets.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

13. Ensure that areas of lowland wet grassland habitat are periodically resurveyed to establish extent and condition. Update resulting habitat inventory every 5 years and revise targets and HAPs if necessary.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

### **Communications and publicity**

14. Improve public awareness and appreciation of lowland wet grassland habitat by providing appropriate interpretation, education and access (where appropriate).

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

15. Improve awareness of the value of, and appropriate management techniques for lowland wet grassland habitat among site owners and occupiers.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

### **WHAT YOU CAN DO**

- Help your local branch of RSPB, NWT or the Nottinghamshire Birdwatchers to monitor birds on wet grassland sites.

## SPECIES LIST

The following are examples of Species of Conservation Concern (Appendix A) which are likely to benefit from this action plan:

- |                              |                                   |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| ➤ Common pipistrelle         | <i>Pipistrellus pipistrellus</i>  |
| ➤ Otter                      | <i>Lutra lutra</i>                |
| ➤ Water shrew                | <i>Neomys fodiens</i>             |
| ➤ Water vole                 | <i>Arvicola terrestris</i>        |
| ➤ Grass snake                | <i>Natrix natrix</i>              |
| ➤ Great crested newt         | <i>Triturus cristatus</i>         |
| ➤ Bewick's swan              | <i>Cygnus columbianus</i>         |
| ➤ Curlew                     | <i>Numenius arquata</i>           |
| ➤ Lapwing                    | <i>Vanellus vanellus</i>          |
| ➤ Redshank                   | <i>Tringa totanus</i>             |
| ➤ Snipe                      | <i>Gallinago gallinago</i>        |
| ➤ Teal                       | <i>Anas crecca</i>                |
| ➤ Wigeon                     | <i>Anas Penelope</i>              |
| ➤ Blackneck moth             | <i>Lygephila pastinum</i>         |
| ➤ Marsh pug moth             | <i>Eupithecia pygmaeata</i>       |
| ➤ Pinion-streaked snout moth | <i>Schrankia costaeastrigalis</i> |
| ➤ Small water-pepper         | <i>Persicaria minor</i>           |
| ➤ Tasteless water-pepper     | <i>Persicaria laxiflora</i>       |

**The SoCC is currently under review and when this process is complete it will influence all the Habitat Action Plan species lists.**

**ANNEX 1 – distribution of Lowland Wet Grassland in Nottinghamshire**

[map to be inserted when available]