



Harbottle Crag © NBP Photographer John Williamson

Working with Wildlife

Heather Moorland Habitat Action Plan

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Latest version	January 2008

Description

Heathlands are dwarf shrub, mainly heather-dominated habitats that develop over mineral soils of low pH and over very shallow peat. Upland heathland dominates extensive areas of the unenclosed uplands in Northumberland, especially the drier eastern areas where conditions are less conducive to blanket bog formation. Such habitats are dominated by ling heather with bell heather, bilberry, a range of grasses, sedges, mosses and lichens and, in the wetter areas, cross leaved heath and deer grass.

Upland heathland often occurs in combination with mire and grassland habitats. This plan covers both wet and dry heath. The UK has the most extensive examples of upland heath in Europe, and also a significant proportion of its lowland heath (although Northumberland has very little of the latter). Consequently, a number of the types of heath found in Northumberland are listed on Annex I to the EC Habitats Directive; Northern Atlantic wet heaths with cross-leaved heath, dry heaths, and juniper formations on heath.

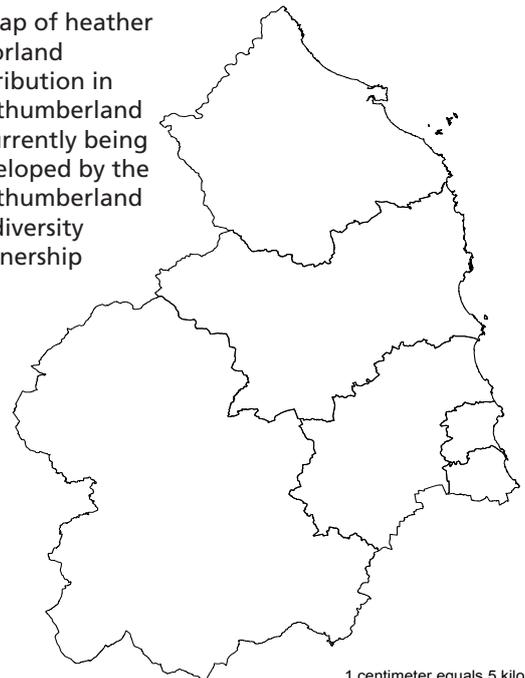
Conservation Status

Habitats Directive, Annex I
 UK Biodiversity Action Plan Habitat
 North East Biodiversity Action Plan Habitat

Current Extent in Northumberland

Approximately 40,000 hectares of upland heath (including heath and acid grassland mosaics) occurs in Northumberland; about 15% of the total occurring in England (based on the UK BAP figure of 470,000 hectares). This occurs in four main areas; the granite and andesite plateaux and slopes of the Cheviots, the Fell Sandstone moorlands that occur in an arc to the east and south of the Cheviots, below the blanket bog clad summits of the Border Hills, and on Millstone Grit plateaux in the east of the North Pennines.

A map of heather moorland distribution in Northumberland is currently being developed by the Northumberland Biodiversity Partnership



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Current Factors Causing Loss or Decline

- Inappropriate burning particularly on short rotation and on sensitive sites
- Inappropriate management through over grazing
- Creation of moorland tracks
- Windfarms
- Recreational pressure
- Vehicular use including all terrain vehicles and motorbikes

Associated Action Plans

Blanket Bog

Black Grouse

Upland Waders

Further Information

This heather moorland action plan links to the upland heathland UK BAP action plan, whose lead partner is Natural England.

Lunn, A, 1976, The Vegetation of Northumberland

Targets

Maintain the current extent of heather moorland in Northumberland of 40,000 hectares, including distribution and range of habitat types.

Achieve favourable or recovering condition by appropriate management of 20,000 hectares of heather moorland currently in unfavourable condition by 2010.

Restore 100 hectares of heather moorland in Northumberland on 'white ground' by 2015.

Code	Priority Actions	Date
HM A01	Accurately estimate the amount of heather moorland in good condition	2008
HM A02	Identify key sites for restoration	2008
HM A03	Establish environmental stewardship agreements for sites in poor condition including burning plans and grazing levels	2010
HM A04	Re-seed areas ensuring that the current vegetation and grazing pressure is controlled	2015
HM A05	Promote a precautionary approach to planning applications for development on or near heather moorland including windfarms and new tracks	ongoing
HM A06	Raise awareness about the importance and management of Northumberland's heather moorland and its associated species through publicity material, events and training	ongoing
UW A01	Compile a list of the key upland fields that are used as nesting and feeding sites by wading birds	2008