



Plessey Woods Country Park © NBP Photographer John Williamson



## Lowland Meadows & Pastures Habitat Action Plan

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Latest version	January 2008

### Description

Lowland meadows and pastures are species-rich grasslands with a near neutral pH, usually occurring below 250m in altitude. These grasslands are characterised by low nutrient inputs and are traditionally managed with either a summer hay cut followed by grazing (meadows) or by grazing (pasture). Most examples are found on farmland but fragments do exist in non-agricultural settings such as churchyards and roadside verges.

Northumberland's species-rich lowland grassland is almost exclusively examples of the National Vegetation Classification (NVC) community MG5 – crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus* – black knapweed *Centaurea nigra* grassland.

This action plan also includes the range of grasslands in meadows and pastures which are either inundated with water periodically, permanently moist or water logged. They are collectively referred to in this plan as 'wet grassland'. Sites may contain seasonal water-filled hollows and permanent ponds. Wet grassland is particularly important for breeding waders such as snipe, lapwing and curlew.

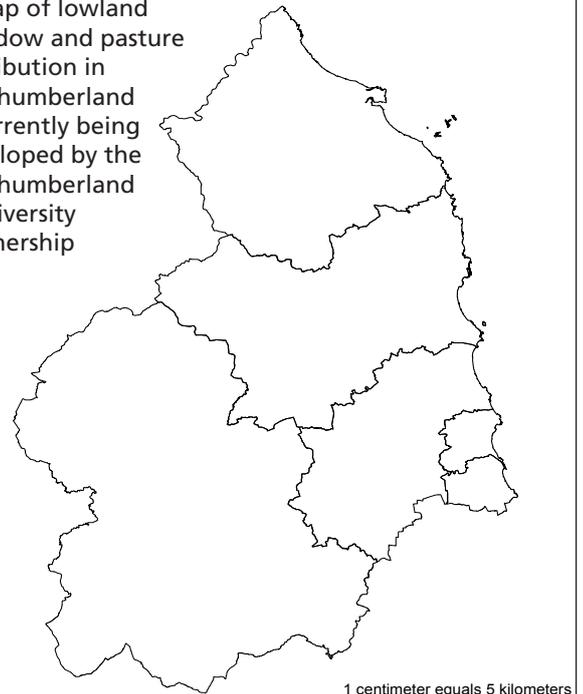
Many areas of pasture-dominated agriculture have been improved by more efficient land drainage which has allowed conversion to arable cultivation. Fragmented pockets of semi-natural grassland can still be found on road verges, railway embankments, old quarries and along ancient rights of way.

### Conservation Status

UK Biodiversity Action Plan Habitat – lowland meadow & coastal and floodplain grazing marsh  
 Environmental Impact Assessment (Agriculture) (England) Regulations 2006  
 North East Biodiversity Action Plan – lowland meadow & coastal and floodplain grazing marsh

### Current Extent in Northumberland

A map of lowland meadow and pasture distribution in Northumberland is currently being developed by the Northumberland Biodiversity Partnership



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In 1994 there was estimated to be less than 14,000 ha of species-rich, neutral grassland remaining in the UK. This includes both lowland meadows and pastures. Northumberland has about 93ha of species-rich neutral grassland, although this figure may undergo revision as new sites are discovered. This represents less than 1% of the national resource.

Northumberland's species-rich grassland is mostly located within the southeast of the county. The best examples occur at the Arcot Hall Grassland and Ponds Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) (17.2ha), Willow Burn Pasture SSSI (7.1ha) and Darras Hall Grassland SSSI (2.7ha). A significant proportion of the species-rich grassland remaining in the county occurs on brownfield land, such as abandoned quarries and industrial sites, and also roadside verges.

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The extent of wet grassland in Northumberland is currently unknown and it is hoped that the Natural England grassland inventory will help to determine how much exists.

### Current Factors Causing Loss or Decline

- Land drainage due to agricultural intensification
- Overgrazing
- Neglect
- Development
- Inappropriate Tree Planting
- Atmospheric Pollution
- Ecologically insensitive flood defence works constructed in the past

### Associated Action Plans

Farmland Birds

Lowland Heathland

Ponds, Lakes & Reservoirs

Trees and Hedges

Whin Grassland

### Further Information

This lowland meadows and pastures action plan links to the lowland meadow UK BAP action plan, whose lead partner is the Countryside Council for Wales and the coastal and floodplain grazing marsh UK BAP action plan whose lead partners are Natural England and Faber Maunsell.

JNCC UK Habitat Classifications web page - <http://www.jncc.gov.uk/page-1425#1464>

### Targets

**Maintain the current extent of lowland meadow and pasture in Northumberland by 2010.**

**Achieve favourable or recovering condition by appropriate management of lowland meadow and pasture currently in unfavourable condition by 2010.**

**Restore 20 hectares of species rich lowland neutral grassland in Northumberland by 2015.**

**Increase the extent of species rich lowland neutral grassland by 25 hectares in Northumberland by 2015.**

Code	Priority Actions	Date
LMP A01	Identify all remaining areas of species-rich lowland neutral grassland, not included within the Grassland Inventory	2008
LMP A02	Use the grassland inventory data to add a numeric value to the maintain extent target and to develop numeric values for the achieve condition, restoration and create targets	2008
LMP A03	Carry out a survey of existing data on the wet grassland resource in Northumberland	2008
LMP A04	Assess whether to create a separate wet grassland action plan	2008
LMP A05	Review the extent of Local Wildlife Site coverage of lowland meadows and pastures and update as necessary	2008
LMP A06	Ensure that the significance of lowland meadow and pasture type communities is recognised in the development control process, including those on brownfield sites	ongoing
LMP A07	Promote grassland creation and management as part of regeneration schemes/developments	ongoing
LMP A08	Undertake the re-establishment of lowland meadow and pasture vegetation on species poor grassland, establish monitoring and appraise its potential role in the conservation of this habitat	ongoing
LMP A09	Promote the appropriate management of lowland meadows and pastures and relevant financial incentives among land managers	ongoing
LMP A10	Promote the North East's regional grazing project 'flexigraze' to land managers	ongoing
TC A04	Develop sympathetic roadside verge management practices where practical and ensure that these are implemented	2010