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*Working with Wildlife*

## Whin Grassland Habitat Action Plan

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Latest version	January 2008

### Description

Whin grassland only occurs on the thin soils that are present on the rocky outcrops of the Great Whin Sill and its associated dykes. It occurs typically on sill dip slopes, but also on ledges of scarp slopes and in quarries. Cluffed scarp slopes generally have different, fern-rich, vegetation and are not the subject of this action plan. The habitat is mainly of botanical interest, although outcrops of the Whin Sill in north Northumberland formerly supported populations of the Durham argus butterfly (the northern English race *Arícia artaxerxes*) in association with its larval food plant, common rock-rose *Helianthemum nummularium*.

This particular habitat is almost unique to Northumberland, in that the Whin Sill complex is a local North East England formation and its Durham/east Cumbrian outcrops are in a different, upland environment. However similar igneous rocks, with a similar ecology, outcrop locally in southern Scotland, although (as far as is known) without supporting as wide a range of plant species. The habitat is an important part of the county's biodiversity.

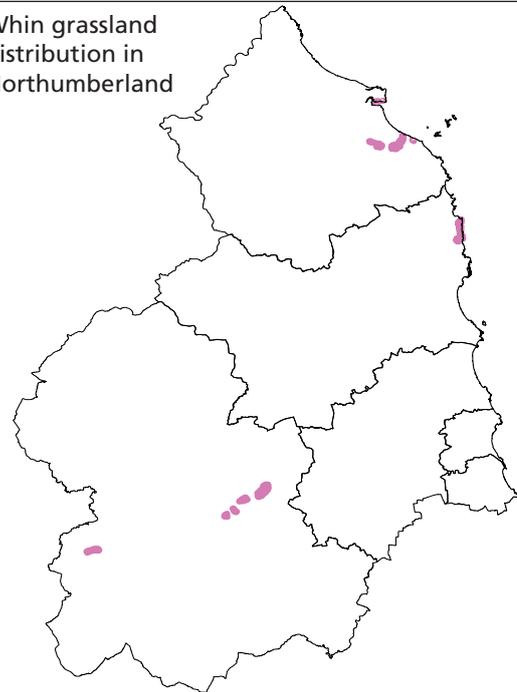
### Conservation Status

EC Habitats Directive, Annex I  
 UK Biodiversity Action Plan Habitat – lowland dry acid grassland  
 North East Biodiversity Action Plan - lowland dry acid grassland

### Current Extent in Northumberland

There are 19 sites of varied quality that exhibit characteristics that would normally be considered as whin grassland. Management is the key issue to the long term future of these localised remaining sites. Since the last reviews in 1980 and 1982 the number of key sites has declined significantly. Overgrazing and gorse encroachment and continued quarrying operations have all contributed to this loss. A limited number of sites are now managed using environmental stewardship and some sites also have statutory designations as protection, however many other sites still continue to suffer from inappropriate management. Further surveys of the 19 sites identified in the 2006 survey were carried out in 2007 to help to establish a programme of conservation measures.

Whin grassland distribution in Northumberland



1 centimeter equals 5 kilometers

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### Current Factors Causing Loss or Decline

- Scrub invasion and woodland planting
- Quarrying
- Agricultural improvement
- Alteration of the grazing regime
- Use as hard-standing for cattle
- Golf course management
- Human trampling
- Fragmentation and isolation

### Associated Action Plans

Lowland Meadows and Pastures

Lowland Farmland Birds

### Further Information

This whin grassland action plan links to the lowland dry acid grassland UK BAP action plans whose lead partners is Natural England

Beamsley, N (2006) An Audit of Whin Grassland in Northumberland May – July 2006, Northumberland Wildlife Trust

Douglas, C (1982) Report on a survey of whin grassland in north Northumberland. Northumberland Wildlife Trust.

Penn, S & Lee, H (1980) A survey of whin grassland flora from Walltown to Kirkwhelpington and including limestone grassland within the Northumberland National Park. Report to Northumberland Wildlife Trust Ltd.

### Targets

**Maintain the current extent of whin grassland in Northumberland of 19 sites by 2010.**

**Achieve favourable or recovering condition by appropriate management of whin grassland currently in unfavourable condition by 2010.**

**Restore whin grassland sites in Northumberland to offset historical losses by 2015.**

Code	Priority Actions	Date
WG A01	Use the results of the 2006 and 2007 surveys of whin grassland sites to determine numeric values for favourable condition and restoration targets	2008
WG A02	Collect seed from the most sustainable sites in order to create a source of local provenance	2008
WG A03	Identify appropriate sites for restoration using the survey data	2008
WG A04	Seek to prevent the loss of important sites to quarrying	ongoing
WG A05	Target agri-environment schemes at important sites, to help maintain good sites in favourable condition and to restore sites in unfavourable condition	ongoing
WG A06	Engage golf clubs in habitat management	ongoing
WG A07	Carry out a study on the desirability and practicality of re-establishing the Durham argus butterfly at selected sites, having regard to accepted guidelines	2009
WG A08	Carry out condition monitoring of whin grassland sites in Northumberland	ongoing
WG A09	Advise owners and occupiers of important sites about appropriate management	ongoing
WG A10	Advise members of the Quarry Products Association of the interest features of their sites	ongoing