

Lowland Meadows



Description

Lowland Meadows are taken to include most forms of unimproved neutral grassland in lowland areas. The Action Plan is not restricted to grasslands cut for hay, but also takes into account unimproved neutral pastures where livestock grazing is the main land use.

On many farms in different parts of the UK, use of particular fields for grazing pasture and hay cropping changes over time, but the characteristic plant community may persist with subtle changes in floristic composition. The diverse flora attract Bumble Bee and Brown Hare.

In non-agricultural settings, such grasslands are less frequent but additional examples may be found in recreational sites, churchyards, roadside verges and a variety of other localities.

National Status

It is estimated that between 1930 and 1984 in lowland England and Wales, semi-natural grassland had declined by 97% to an estimated 200,000ha.

Losses have continued during the 1980s and 1990s, and have been recorded at 2–10% per annum in some parts of England, due almost totally to changing agricultural management. Recent estimates suggest that only 5,000–10,000ha of *Cynosurus-Centaurea* grasslands remain in England and Wales.

Unimproved seasonally-flooded grasslands are even rarer. *Alopecurus-Sanguisorba* flood meadows cover less than 1,500ha in scattered sites in the River Ouse catchment. *Cynosaurus-Caltha* flood pasture probably covers less than 1,000ha in England and Wales.

Local Status

Some 76 sites of neutral grassland are listed in the area of which only one – Pye Flatts at Silkstone – is notified as an SSSI and only four others are listed in the Natural Heritage Site (NHS) register.

Legal Status

One site, Pye Flatts at Silkstone, has been notified as an SSSI and therefore has statutory protection.

Sites included in the Unitary Development Plan (UDP) as NHS sites have a presumption against development but have no protection against operations which do not require planning consent.

Unimproved neutral grasslands are also included in a variety of recent UK agri-environment schemes including ESAs and the DEFRA Stewardship Schemes.

The DEFRA Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) Regulations may apply.

Links with other Action Plans

SAP1	Hedgehog
SAP2	Bats
SAP5	Grey Partridge
SAP7	Kestrel
SAP9	Lapwing
SAP10	Barn Owl
SAP11	Skylark
SAP18	Glow Worm

Current Factors Causing Loss or Decline

- Agricultural improvement through drainage, ploughing, re-seeding, fertiliser treatment, slurry application, conversion to arable and a shift from hay-making to silage production.
- Decline in the perceived agricultural value of species-rich pasture and hay in farming regimes.
- Abandonment leading to rank over-growth, and bracken and scrub encroachment.
- Supplementary stock feeding, associated with increased stocking levels, which can lead to eutrophication as well as localised poaching.
- Application of herbicides and other pesticides.
- Atmospheric pollution and climate change, the influence of which is not fully assessed.
- Reduced inundation frequency and duration, in water meadows and floodplain grasslands associated with abandoned irrigation schemes. Water tables have also been lowered as a result of land drainage, flood alleviation engineering, surface and ground water abstraction, floodplain gravel extraction and other activities.
- Floristic impoverishment due to heavy grazing pressure and changes in stock species and breeds.

Current Local Action

- Pye Flatts Meadow SSSI has a favourable management regime.
- Harvested seed from this site has been used to create a new meadow at RSPB Old Moor.

Proposed Local Action

- Create new areas of Lowland Meadow on suitable sites in partnership with various landowners.
- Encourage participation among farmers in Environmental Stewardship and Countryside Stewardship Schemes.
- Continue to monitor the population of Brown Hare and encourage appropriate management.
- Encourage the management of meadows to benefit Bumble Bees.
- Extract past records and survey for Wall Butterfly.

BMBC Planning Policy Actions

- Designate Natural Heritage Sites (NHS) and declare Local Nature Reserves (LNR) on appropriate areas of Lowland Meadow habitat, or instigate other appropriate measures for their protection.
- Include habitat and species protection policies in development plans and/or supplementary guidance.
- Encourage the creation of new habitat through the requirement made under Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 9, to incorporate biodiversity enhancements into development wherever possible.

BMBC Development Control Actions

- Through planning control or other land use consultation processes, allow no further loss of areas of Lowland Meadow and seek opportunities to enhance existing areas and create new areas through approved development.