

## HABITAT ACTION PLAN: Lowland Wet Grassland

<p><b>Associated Species Action Plans</b></p> <p>Orchids</p> <p>Snipe</p>	<p><b>1 Current Status</b></p> <p>This plan covers the communities of wet grassland that can be found within the Birmingham and Black Country Region. These grassland range from periodically inundated, mainly by winter flooding, to permanently wet grasslands where the water level is generally at or just below the surface. These grasslands form one of the rarest habitat types within the Region and are now very fragmented due to urbanisation, loss of traditional agricultural practices and extensive drainage and flood prevention schemes.</p>
<p><b>Associated Habitat Action Plans</b></p> <p>Other grassland action plans.</p> <p>Lowland Heathland</p> <p>Canals</p> <p>Rivers and streams.</p>	<p>Within the Region, this habitat type is under recorded, probably due to its highly fragmented nature and occupation of small areas of land that are not easily mapped. The most recent data is from 1990, where all types of wet grassland totalled 671 ha, which is less than 5% of all habitat areas recorded.</p> <p>Among the communities of wet grassland that can be found within the Region are</p> <p><u>Meadow foxtail-Great Burnet grassland.</u></p> <p>This is found on seasonally flooded alluvial soils and clays. Traditionally, these grasslands were mown for hay and grazed, as such, they can be floristically rich. Within the Region, they are found along river and brook courses and on the clays which are flooded during Winter. Good examples of this community can be found at Jockey Meadows SSSI and Fibbersley in Walsall and along the River Cole and Chinn Brook in South Birmingham.</p>

### Yorkshire fog-Tufted hair-grass grassland.

This is found on permanently moist soils which are occasionally flooded during the winter. There are strongholds of this community type on the clays around Shelfield and Clayhanger in Walsall, where they can form rank, tussocky stands in abandoned and/or under grazed pastures. Where grazing levels are at their optimum, they can contain a diverse flora including Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*), Black knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*) and a variety of rushes, but they are always dominated by tussocks of tufted hair-grass.

### Yorkshire fog-Soft rush rush-pasture.

This community type tends to occur on clays and impervious bedrocks that have been re-seeded. The original seeding has not been successful allowing the colonisation of soft rush. Within the Region they form a mosaic with other grassland communities, which are over-grazed and poached. They also occur on abandoned pasture over clay, where it can form the dominant community.

### Purple moor-grass-Meadow thistle fen meadow.

This community type is mainly found in Southern Britain occurring on wet to dry peat and peaty mineral soils. Within the Region it is at its north-western limit, and as such it is a rare vegetation community, although it could have been much more extensive prior to the enclosures of wet heath areas. Remnants still occur in areas that were once the fringes of Brownhills Common, especially along the southern transitional zone between the peaty wet heath and the clays around Clayhanger, Brownhills and Shelfield.

This community, although highly fragmented, contains some of the Regions rarest plants. Good examples still occur around Clayhanger, despite the loss of the traditional management of grazing, they still contain Lesser skullcap (*Scutellaria minor*), Devil's-bit scabious (*Succisa pratensis*), Meadow thistle (*Cirsium dissectum*) and Greater bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus uliginosus*), which are characteristic species for this community type.

### Meadowsweet-Angelica mire.

This is a characteristic community of permanently moist neutral to base rich substrates, typically found around the fringes of open water and areas of impeded drainage. Within the Region, it is located on the base rich clays around ditches and on the wet pastures within the Rushall area of Walsall. Good examples occur at Park Lime Pits LNR and Hill Hook in Birmingham where the stands are dominated by Meadowsweet with Angelica, Ragged robin (*Lychnis flos-cuculi*), Common valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*) and Marsh marigold (*Caltha palustris*) amongst others.

## **2. Current factors affecting habitat**

**2.1** The remnant wet grasslands are in a highly fragmented state and due to their small size and scattered distribution they are very vulnerable to extinction. The current factors affecting this habitat type are:

- Mineral extraction,
- Urban development
- Conversion to grass leys,
- Over grazing, especially by horses,
- Loss of traditional low intensity agricultural practices,
- Canalisation of rivers and brook courses,
- Flood prevention schemes,
- Abandonment.
- Pollution from roads, industrial sites and intensively managed agricultural land.

### **3. Current action**

#### **3.1 Legal status**

There are two Sites of Special Scientific Interest within the Region that have been specifically notified, under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, for their wet grassland content. These are Clayhanger SSSI and Jockey Fields SSSI, both of which are within Walsall.

A large percentage of the remaining wet grassland has non-statutory protection as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation. These sites are noted in the relevant Unitary Development Plans of the local authorities and have protection clauses against development.

There are still some sites, which have no protection.

#### **3.2 Management, research and guidance**

At present, the management of wet grasslands is on an ad hoc basis. The good examples of grassland within Walsall can be found on land that is grazed with a low stocking density without the addition of artificial fertilisers.

The true extent and distribution of all the community types that comprise the wet grassland habitat needs to be discovered.

Further research into the management of wet grasslands is required which not only concentrates on the floristic diversity of this habitat but also its importance for birds and invertebrates.

**4. Action plan objectives and targets**

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Target</b>
1. Survey all potential wet grassland areas to a minimum phase2 standard.	By 2006
2. Ensure all quality wet grassland areas are defined in local plans, etc, and are designated as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation.	By 2006
3. Re-create 50 ha of quality wet grassland across the region.	By 2011
4. Bring all known wet grassland sites into favourable management.	By 2011
5. Provide advice to landowners and managers on managing wet grasslands for their optimum nature conservation value.	Ongoing
6. Carry out breeding bird surveys and over-wintering counts on wet grassland areas.	Ongoing.
7. Raise public awareness of lowland wet grassland and its value for wildlife	Ongoing.

## 5. Proposed action with partners to meet objectives

ACTION	POTENTIAL DELIVERERS		YEAR							Meets objective number
	Lead	Partner	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2011	
<b>5.1 Policy and legislation</b>										
Seek the inclusion of effective measures for habitat protection in the preparation of UDPs and other policy documents	EN	LAs, WT	As Unitary Development Plans and other documents are prepared							2
Create a grassland forum of interested parties to protect and enhance grassland resource	EN	ALL		•						All
Seek to protect all quality wet grassland as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation	LA	ALL	•	•	•	•	•	•		2
<b>5.2 Site and species safeguard and management</b>										
Produce best practice management regimes for lowland grassland and encourage best management practice	WT	EN, LAs, LOs, FWAG	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	4
Initiate management with management plans of all SINC lowland wet grassland	LAs	WT, EN	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	4
Identify sites for restoration / establishment of appropriate grassland communities and increase grassland resource by 50 ha	EN	ALL	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	3

ACTION	POTENTIAL DELIVERERS		YEAR							Meets objective number
	Lead	Partner	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2011	
Identify species as “flagship” species which require management of grassland habitat	EN	WT BC RSPB	•	•	•	•	•	•		4
Initiate management for individual species of importance	EN	ALL	•	•	•	•	•	•		4
<b>5.4 Advice</b>										
Provide information and advice to site owners / managers as to habitat value and management	EN	ALL	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	5
<b>5.5 Future research and monitoring</b>										
Undertake survey to determine extent of habitat area, value, state and management and produce detailed Grassland inventory	WT	EN LAs	•	•	•	•	•	•		1
Survey all potential wet grassland to Phase II	EN	WT	•	•	•	•	•	•		1
Survey breeding birds and carry out over-wintering counts on wet grassland	EN	WT	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	6
Support initiatives to identify best management practice	ALL		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	4
<b>5.6 Publicity</b>										
Promote awareness and positive perception of habitat	ALL		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	7

ACTION	POTENTIAL DELIVERERS		YEAR							Meets objective number
	Lead	Partner	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2011	
<b>5.7 Links to other action plans</b>										
Other grassland plans, Canals, Rivers and streams,										

## **6. Co-ordination and review**

This Biodiversity Action Plan will be implemented over 10 years with a first review after 5 years. A wet grassland working group will be set up to co-ordinate implementation and to report to the Biodiversity Steering Group. This group will meet at a minimum on a yearly basis.

Review will be carried out in conjunction with related Habitat and Species Action Plans as appropriate.

Review will consist of measuring achievement of targets. The group will, with the support of the Steering Group, develop and implement appropriate monitoring methods which will inform the review process.

The Action Plan will be revised and updated in the light of review results and any relevant changes in circumstances and/or additional information which becomes available during the review period.

In line with national guidance, the Steering Group will report to the UK Steering Group.