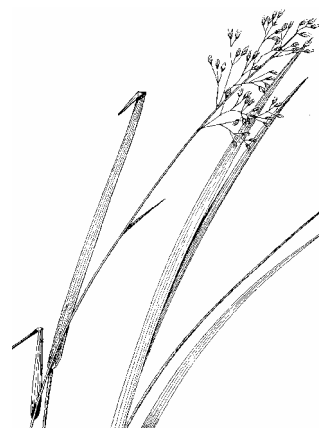


Action Plan Scope:

This action plan covers the UK BAP priority habitat Lowland dry acid grassland¹. This habitat typically occurs on nutrient poor, generally free-draining soils that have developed on acid rocks or superficial deposits such as sands and gravels. Lowland dry acid grasslands often occur as an integral part of lowland heath and upland fringe "ffridd" landscapes, on commons, and locally on rock outcrops, wind-blown sand and river shingle. They are normally managed as pasture, and usually grazed by sheep. In Gwynedd, lowland acid grassland often forms a vegetation mosaic with heathland, which is covered by the Lowland heathland HAP.



This Action Plan covers all unimproved and semi-improved acid grasslands below the ffridd wall (or below about 300m altitude), but is focused particularly on lowland examples, as most of the scarcer vegetation types and associated species are found here. On higher ground, lowland acid grassland is often a modified community that has replaced dwarf shrub heaths of primary conservation interest.

1. CURRENT STATUS

1.1 Legislation and priority status

International	Habitats Directive ^a Birds Directive ^b
UK and Wales	SSSI legislation ^c (some lowland dry acid grasslands) UK BAP priority CROW Act 200 ^d
Gwynedd	Llyn AONB Heritage Coast

1.2 Status in Wales and beyond

An estimated 40,000 ha of lowland acid grassland is found in Wales, mostly around the upland fringes. The total UK extent is uncertain. Lowland acid grasslands are particularly frequent around the fringes of the main upland zones, with the highest densities occurring in Blaenau Gwent and Merthyr Tydfil in the south, and Snowdonia and Gwynedd in the north. Approximately 700 ha of acid grassland in Wales occur in lowland SSSI s².

^a Lowland dry acid grasslands are included within some SACs under the "Habitats Directive" – Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora, although there is no corresponding habitat listed on Annex 1 of the Directive (JNCC report series).

^b A number of SPAs, designated under the "Birds Directive" – Council Directive 79/409/EEC of 2 April 1979 on the conservation of wild birds, contain tracts of Lowland dry acid grassland which form part of the habitat complex important for sustaining populations of dry grassland and heathland birds (UK Action Plan).

^c Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000.

^d Under Section 74 of the CROW Act 2000, the Welsh Assembly Government have produced a "List of Species and Habitats of Principal Importance for the Conservation of Biological Diversity". Crown Copyright 2003.

1.3 Status in Gwynedd^e

Together, Gwynedd and Snowdonia National Park are believed to hold almost 40% of Welsh lowland dry acid grassland, at a relatively high density of just over 5 ha/km². Here the habitat is still extensive around the upland fringes, and 4800 ha have been recorded from Gwynedd (12% of the Welsh resource) of which 28% is unimproved (these figures include half the cover of lowland acid grass/heath mosaic).³ Lowland dry acid grassland along the coast of the Llŷn Peninsula is particularly important feeding habitat for the chough.

2. FACTORS AFFECTING THIS HABITAT IN GWYNEDD

- § Agricultural improvement through cultivation, reseeding, application of fertilisers, and / or liming.
- § Use of herbicides and other pesticides.
- § Management neglect and undergrazing, leading to the development of a rank sward and encroachment by scrub and bracken.
- § Localised problems of overgrazing, sometimes associated with supplementary feeding.
- § Afforestation, particularly with softwoods on light sandy soils.
- § Development activities such as mineral and rock extraction, road building, housing and landfill.
- § There is a suggestion that atmospheric pollution and climate change have a detrimental effect, although the influence of this is not yet fully assessed.

3. ASSOCIATED GWYNEDD SAPS / HAPS

Cloddiau, Lowland heathland, Hedgerows, Rhos pasture

Bats, Chough, Lapwing, Farmland birds, Nightjar, Adder, Brown hare, Bumblebees, Hornet robberfly, Waxcaps

4. CURRENT ACTION IN GWYNEDD

4.1 Site and habitat protection

- § The most significant areas of Lowland dry acid grassland are included within SSSIs, and also within areas identified as potential Wildlife Sites.
- § Areas of lowland dry acid grassland normally fall within the scope of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Regulations for use of Uncultivated Land and Semi-Natural Areas for intensive agricultural purposes

4.2 Management and programmes of action

- § Agri-environment schemes such as the Llŷn ESA, Tir Cymen, and now Tir Gofal, have played a role in providing incentives to maintain and manage areas of lowland dry acid grassland.
- § Various research projects by non-governmental organisations such as the Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (formerly ITE) and Liverpool University are helping to increase biological and ecological knowledge of this habitat.

^e Within this document the term "Gwynedd" refers to areas outside the Snowdonia National Park area, except where specified otherwise.

4.3 Survey, research and monitoring

- § CCW Phase II Lowland Habitat Survey of Wales began in 1987 and was completed in 2004.
- § A study carried out in 1999 to identify potential Wildlife Sites in Gwynedd identified extensive areas of this habitat.

5. ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES^f

1. To maintain and protect the existing lowland dry acid grassland resource and secure its appropriate long-term management.
2. To restore areas of lowland dry acid grassland in suitable areas, in order to increase the total area of lowland dry acid grassland pasture by about 0.3%

6. PROPOSED ACTIONS

Code	Action	Partner(s) ⁹
Policy and legislation		
1	Consider developing a joint working group with SNPA to ensure effective implementation of Snowdonia and Gwynedd grassland action plans TARGET/TIMESCALE: By 2006	GC, SNPA, Relevant partners
2	Through the planning process, ensure developments in sensitive locations are compatible with conservation of lowland dry acid grassland TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	GC, Relevant partners
3	Ensure that all examples of lowland dry acid grassland that meet the relevant criteria are designated as Wildlife Sites TARGET/TIMESCALE: Start process of designation by 2007	GC, CCW, NWWT
4	Ensure that the EIA Regulations for Uncultivated Land and Semi-Natural Areas are implemented on all areas of Lowland dry acid grassland TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	WAG, Relevant partners
Species / habitat management and protection		
5	Promote and support grant schemes including Tir Gofal, Llŷn ESA and / or management agreements to secure favourable management and / or restoration of lowland dry acid grassland, taking into account the needs of associated LBAP species and habitats TARGET/TIMESCALE: Favourable management of 50%, Restoration of 15ha, by 2015	CCW, CLA, WAG, FUW, FWAG Cymru, GC, NFU Cymru
6	Implement the NGIP to bring about appropriate management and / or restoration and creation of lowland dry acid grassland TARGET/TIMESCALE: By 2008	GC, Relevant partners.
7	Ensure that conservation and enhancement of lowland dry acid grassland and associated LBAP species and habitats is considered within any relevant management plans or grant schemes (including NWMPs, WGS, Tir Gofal, ESA) by liaison (including consultation and provision of comments) between key organisations TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	CCW, WAG, FC, GC, NT, NWWT, RSPB
Advisory		
8	Provide integrated advice to landowners and managers on appropriate management of lowland dry acid grassland TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	CCW, CLA, WAG, FUW, GC, NFU Cymru, NT, NWWT
9	Produce and disseminate guidelines for appropriate methods for establishment of	CCW, CG, NWWT,

^f With efforts to be focused on the scarcer vegetation types especially where these form sizable stands or are part of semi-natural habitat. Examples of the commoner communities in situations remote from the upland fringes should also be given priority conservation attention, especially where these are large, include distinctive lowland floristic elements, or form parts of unmodified vegetation mosaics. Stands supporting populations of uncommon or declining species should also be given conservation priority.

⁹ Lead partner for this action is indicated by bold typeface, see section 7.2 for explanation of abbreviations

	new stands of lowland dry acid grassland of wildlife value TARGET/TIMESCALE: 2008	NT
Survey, research and monitoring		
10	Identify extent and quality of all lowland dry acid grassland sites through a programme inventory of available data (Phase I, CCW Lowland Grassland Survey, Wildlife Site and other surveys) and survey work, and identify key areas for establishing appropriate management or for restoration (former sites adjacent to, or close to, existing sites that are suitable for reversion) TARGET/TIMESCALE: By 2007	CCW, GC, NWWT, RSPB
11	Assist with research into and development of techniques for management and re-establishment of lowland dry acid grassland where appropriate and feasible TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	CCW, CEH, NWWT, UWB
Communications and publicity		
12	Raise awareness of lowland dry acid grassland and its conservation among landowners and managers by publishing articles in relevant publications and giving talks to relevant groups (e.g. publications and local meetings of NFU, FUW, CLA) TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	CCW, GC, NT, NWWT, RSPB
13	Raise public awareness of lowland dry acid grassland and associated species through media articles, open days, farm walks, interpretation and events TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	GC, CCW, NT, NWWT, RSPB

7. PARTNERS & OPPORTUNITIES

7.1 Overall lead partner for HAP

Countryside Council for Wales (CCW)

7.2 Key partners

Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH)

Country Land and Business Association (CLA)

Welsh Assembly Government (WAG)

Environment Agency Wales (EAW)

Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group Cymru (FWAG Cymru)

Farmers Union of Wales (FUW)

Forestry Commission (FC)

Gwynedd Council (GC)

National Farmers Union Cymru (NFU Cymru)

National Trust (NT)

North Wales Wildlife Trust (NWWT)

RSPB Cymru

Snowdonia National Park Authority (SNPA)

7.3 Opportunities

Farming unions, landowners and managers

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Line drawings: English Nature

9. ABBREVIATIONS

BAP: Biodiversity Action Plan, ESA: Environmentally Sensitive Area, HAP: Habitat Action Plan, JNCC: Joint Nature Conservation Committee, LBAP: Local Biodiversity Action Plan, NWMP: Native Woodland Management Plan, SAP: Species Action Plan, NGIP: Natur Gwynedd Implementation Project, AONB: Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, SAC: Special Area of Conservation, SPA: Special Protection Area, SSSI: Site of Special Scientific Interest, ESA: Environmentally Sensitive Area.

Version 1, 2005

¹ UK Biodiversity Group classification - Jackson, D.L. 2000. Guidance on the interpretation of the Biodiversity Broad Habitat Classification (terrestrial and freshwater types): Definitions and the relationship with other habitat classifications. JNCC Report No. 307.

² UK Lowland dry acid grassland Habitat Action Plan, UK Biodiversity Group – Tranche 2 Action Plans. Volume 11 – terrestrial and freshwater habitats. 1998.

³ Jones, P.S. et al, 2003. Priority habitats of Wales: a technical guide. CCW.