

Action Plan Scope:

This action plan covers the UK BAP priority habitat Lowland heathland¹, which is defined by the prominence of dwarf shrub species, including heather *Calluna vulgaris*, bell heather *Erica cinerea*, cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix* and, in Wales, western gorse *Ulex gallii*. Lowland heathland can broadly be classified into wet or dry types, with species such as purple moorgrass *Molinia caerulea*, deergrass *Trichophorum cespitosum* and cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix* along with *Sphagnum* mosses being more typical of the wetter heaths. Humid heath may also occur on the Llŷn where the oceanic climate supports heathland with characteristics of both dry and wet heaths. In Gwynedd, lowland heathland often occurs in mosaics with other habitats such as scrub, bracken, grassland, wet flushes, swamp, fen, rock outcrops and bare ground.



Upland heathland, which is normally taken to be heathland occurring above the ffridd wall (or above about 300m altitude), is covered by a separate Action Plan. However, on the fringes of the Snowdonia National Park and on the north Llŷn hills, which are influenced by the oceanic climate of the peninsula, the distinction between upland and lowland heath is not always clear.

Gwynedd is notable for holding relatively extensive areas of two types of coastal heathland which are uncommon in Wales: maritime heath which is characterized by spring squill *Scilla verna* and dune heath where sand sedge *Carex arenaria* is frequently found. These heathland types are covered by the Maritime cliff and slopes and Coastal sand dunes Action Plans respectively. Heathland vegetation occurring over deep peat (0.5 m or more) is covered by the Wetlands Action Plan. Certain mire communities may be classified as wet heath but are covered within the Rhos pasture action plan because of the abundance of purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*. However, different heathland types will often grade into one another and transition zones between different types can occur.

1. CURRENT STATUS

1.1 Legislation and priority status

International	Habitats Directive ^a (Annex I) Birds Directive ^b
UK and Wales	SSSI legislation ^c UK BAP priority CROW Act 2000 ^d
Gwynedd	Snowdonia BAP Llŷn AONB Heritage Coast

^a Lowland heathland is covered by two habitats listed in Annex I of the "Habitats Directive" - Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora, "European dry heaths" and "Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix*".

^b Specific areas of lowland heathland may be designated as SPA under the "Birds Directive" - Council Directive 79/409/EEC of 2 April 1979 on the conservation of wild birds.

^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.

1.2 Status in Wales and beyond

The UK has an important proportion (about 20%) of the international total of this habitat - approximately 58,000 ha². Lowland heathland is distributed throughout most of Wales, with a strong representation along the more oceanic western fringe. In Wales, the sum of all heathland types recorded below the ffridd wall is c. 12,500 ha³.

1.3 Status in Gwynedd^e

1400 ha of Lowland heathland have been recorded from Gwynedd, or 11% of the Welsh resource. Lowland heathland in Gwynedd occurs mainly on the Llŷn Peninsula. Indeed, west Gwynedd is one of the most significant areas for lowland heathland in the UK¹. In the late 1920s, wet heath was considered to be particularly characteristic of the Llŷn, however, today it is uncommon or absent over large areas - there has been an estimated decline of 95% of wet heath and 50% dry heath on Pen Llŷn during this period. Lowland heathland on the Llŷn is currently very fragmented, with c. 70% of known sites less than 5.0ha in extent.

More recently, and particularly since the disappearance of land reclamation and drainage grants, the advent of agri-environment schemes and the adoption of the EIA regulations^f, such large-scale losses have been halted. However, the threat still exists and piecemeal losses continue to occur with the quality of much of the remaining area also likely to be in decline as a result of poor, unsuitable management, including total neglect.

The heathland on the summits of the Llyn hills, such as Garn Fadryn and Garn Boduan is thought to be a type that is transitional to upland heath, with a greater cover of bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus*.

2. FACTORS AFFECTING THIS HABITAT IN GWYNEDD

- Neglect, particularly lack of grazing, which is an issue on numerous sites on Llŷn and elsewhere in Gwynedd. The lack of appropriate grazing stock, particularly heavy animals such as cattle and ponies on the Llŷn, is also a problem.
- Inappropriate agricultural practices such as overgrazing, and also agricultural improvement through cultivation, reseeding, application of fertilisers, and/or liming.
- Afforestation, encroachment of trees and scrub, and the simplification of vegetation structure due to lack of conservation management such as light grazing and cutting.
- Inappropriate burning of heath areas, particularly uncontrolled burns.
- Loss, fragmentation and disturbance from developments, including quarrying.
- Other activities e.g. fly tipping, dumping of vehicles.
- Atmospheric pollution and potentially climate change.

3. ASSOCIATED GWYNEDD SAPS / HAPS

Scrub woodlands, Cloddiau, Upland heathland, Lowland dry acid grassland, Maritime cliff and slopes, Coastal sand dunes, Rhos pasture, Wetlands

Bats, Chough, Farmland birds, Nightjar, Twite, Brown hare, Adder, Bumblebees, Marsh fritillary, Hornet robberfly, Pillwort, Golden hair lichen

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

^f EIA regulations for use of uncultivated land and semi-natural areas for intensive agricultural purposes.

4. CURRENT ACTION IN GWYNEDD

4.1 Site and habitat protection

- The most significant areas of Lowland heathland occur within sites designated as SAC and / or SPA. It is considered that Glannau Aberdaron and Ynys Enlli SPA have the most important areas of lowland heathland in Gwynedd.
- There are seven SSSIs in Gwynedd where lowland heathland is a major component (one of the most extensive of which is Mynydd Tir y Cwmwd a'r Glannau at Garreg yr Imbill SSSI), while other upland SSSIs may contain some lowland heath (e.g. Yr Eifl). Areas of Lowland heathland also occur within numerous areas identified as potential Wildlife Sites.
- Areas of lowland heathland 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.
- Lowland heathland occurs within the Llŷn Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and is recognised as an important feature of the area in the AONB Management Plan⁹. Actions within the Management Plan include ensuring appropriate heathland management through partnerships and co-operating on the Cadw'r Lliw yn Llŷn project.

4.2 Management and programmes of action

- Cadw'r Lliw yn Llŷn is an Objective 1 funded project lead by CYMAD, a local economic regeneration initiative, with the full backing and support of CCW, Gwynedd Council, National Trust, RSPB and Plantlife. The application was awarded 3 years of funding in 2004. The aim of the project is to deliver immediate action on ten lowland heathland sites and to prepare a feasibility report that will enable longer term phasing of heathland management works.
- Management agreements for lowland heathland currently take the form of Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) agreements (75% take up of the scheme within the Llŷn ESA area) and CCW's Section 15 agreements.
- There is provision for heathland management within the Tir Gofal agri-environment scheme, but take up of this scheme outside of the National Park is currently low due to the existence of the ESA scheme.
- CCW grant aid has enabled improved management of heathland by the National Trust in west Llŷn, including restoration of heathland on a previously afforested part of Mynydd Rhiw.
- The NWWT has undertaken a feasibility study into the restoration potential of current and historic heathland sites in Gwynedd.
- Appropriate management and / or restoration and creation of lowland heathland may be carried out with the implementation of the NGIP.
- At Moel-y-Ci, the recently established Environment Centre, based at Moel-y-ci Farm, is currently discussing long-term management of the heathland with CCW, which will also aim to prevent large accidental fires such as that experienced in recent years.

4.3 Survey, research and monitoring

- CCW has undertaken a survey of key lowland heathland sites in Wales, which included Gwynedd.
- Monitoring is carried out on SSSIs with existing management agreements, on selected ESA sites and on selected National Trust properties.

⁹ CROW Act 2000 requires local authorities to prepare a management plan for their AONB.

- CCW is undertaking research to determine the best method of managing *Ulex gallii* dominated heathland on the Llŷn.

5. ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES

1. To maintain and protect the existing area of lowland heathland in Gwynedd and secure its appropriate long-term management.
2. To restore and recreate areas of lowland heathland in suitable areas, in order to increase the total area of lowland heathland by about 4%
3. To raise public awareness, understanding and enjoyment of lowland heathland habitat.

6. PROPOSED ACTIONS

Code	Action	Partner(s) ^h
Policy and legislation		
1	Consider developing a joint working group with SNPA to ensure effective implementation of Snowdonia and Gwynedd heathland action plans. TARGET/TIMESCALE: By 2006	GC , SNPA
2	Through the planning process, ensure developments in sensitive locations are compatible with conservation of lowland heathlands. TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	GC , Relevant partners
3	Ensure that the EIA Regulations for Uncultivated Land and Semi-Natural Areas are implemented on all areas of lowland heathland. TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	WAG , Relevant partners
4	Ensure that all examples of lowland heathland, which meet the relevant criteria, are designated as Wildlife Sites. TARGET/TIMESCALE: Start process of designation by 2007	GC , CCW , NWWT
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 heathland, taking into account the needs of associated LBAP species and habitats. TARGET/TIMESCALE: Favourable management of 50%, Restoration of 50 ha, 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 heathland. TARGET/TIMESCALE: By 2008	GC , Relevant partners.
7	Ensure that conservation and enhancement of lowland heathland and associated LBAP species and habitats is considered within any relevant management plans or grant schemes (including NWMPs, WGS, Tir Gofal, ESA) and within forest redesign planning and forestry grant proposals, 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 heathland. TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	CCW , CLA , WAG , FUW , GC , NFU Cymru , NT , NWWT
9	Provide advice, as necessary, to GC Planning and Mineral Planning officers on safeguarding, restoration and recreation of areas of lowland heath. TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	GC , CCW , GAT , NWWT
Survey, research and monitoring		
10	Identify extent and quality of lowland heathland sites through a programme inventory of available data (Phase I, CCW Upland Vegetation Survey, Wildlife Site and other surveys) and survey work, and identify key areas for establishing	CCW , GC , NWWT , RSPB , NT

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

	appropriate management or for restoration (former sites adjacent to, or close to, existing sites that are suitable for reversion). TARGET/TIMESCALE: By 2010	
11	Establish an inventory of all nationally scarce, Red Data and priority BAP species within the habitat in Gwynedd. TARGET/TIMESCALE: By 2010	CCW, GC, RSPB, NWWT
Communications and publicity		
12	Raise awareness of lowland heathland 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	GC, CCW, NT, NWWT, RSPB
13	Raise public awareness of lowland heathland 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

CYMAD

Wales Assembly Government (WAG)

Forestry Commission (FC)

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (GAT)

Gwynedd Council (GC)

National Trust (NT)

North Wales Wildlife Trust (NWWT)

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)

Snowdonia National Park Authority (SNPA)

7.3 Opportunities

Farming unions, landowners and managers, local specialists

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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9. ABBREVIATIONS

BAP: Biodiversity Action Plan, SSSI: Site of Special Scientific Interest, CROW: Countryside and Right of Way Act, 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, SAC: Special Area of Conservation, SPA: Special Protection Area, NGIP: Natur Gwynedd Implementation Project, EIA: Environmental Impact Assessment, WGS: Woodland Grant Scheme, AONB: Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

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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 heathland Habitat Action Plan. *Biodiversity: The UK Steering Group Report. Volume II - Action Plans.* 1995. London HMSO.

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