

Action Plan Scope:

This Action Plan covers the UK Broad Habitat Purple moor-grass and rush pastures¹, locally known as "rhos". While 'rhos' can be found at a range of altitudes, it is in the lowlands where these pastures are of particular importance for biodiversity, and therefore this action plan is restricted to Purple moor-grass and rush pastures occurring below the fridd wall^a.

Rhos occurs mostly on undulating plateaux and hillsides, as well as in river and stream valleys and on low-lying coastal or inland floodplains. "Rhos" can also form part of an intricate mosaic with patches of other wetlands, wet heath, dry grassland and scrub. Where this vegetation occurs on deep peat it is included within the Wetlands HAP.

1. CURRENT STATUS

1.1 Legislation and priority status

International	Habitats Directive ^b (Annex I)
UK and Wales	SSSI legislation ^c (Some areas of rhos pasture) UK BAP priority Welsh S74 list ^d
Gwynedd	Snowdonia BAP

1.2 Status in Wales and beyond

Outside the UK 'rhos' occurs in the Republic of Ireland (where a major resource remains) and other oceanic and sub-oceanic regions. In the UK it probably reaches its northern limit in Argyll, with perhaps as much as 56,000ha left². It is estimated that 35,000ha of 'rhos' can be found in Wales, which is likely to be a high proportion of the total UK extent³.

Purple moor-grass and rush pastures are particularly prevalent in the South Wales Coalfield; Carmarthenshire and Glamorgan together include over one-third of the total area of this habitat in Wales.

^a In the uplands Purple moor-grass vegetation has often replaced blanket mire and wet heath communities, which are of primary conservation interest.

^b Some elements of Rhos pasture are listed on 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.

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

^d Welsh Assembly Government, *Going Wild in Wales - List of Species and Habitats of Principal Importance for the Conservation of Biological Diversity*. Crown Copyright 2003.

4. CURRENT ACTION IN GWYNEDD

4.1 Site and habitat protection

- Many areas of rhos pasture have been identified as potential Wildlife Sites: 253 of the 362 fen, marsh and swamp sites included within Gwynedd's potential Wildlife Site database are noted as supporting 'rhos'.
- Some examples of rhos pasture fall within sites designated as candidate SACs. Other areas are covered by SSSI legislation (e.g. Cappas Llwyd, Cors y Wlad SSSI).
- EIA regulations (uncultivated land etc^f) offer some protection against drainage and improvement of sites over 1 hectare.

4.2 Management and programmes of action

- Some areas of 'rhos' are covered by agreements under Tir Cymen (final ten year schemes commenced in 1998), Tir Gofal or the Llŷn ESA.

4.3 Survey, research and monitoring

- Countryside Council for Wales have undertaken an intensive site survey and evaluation programme, which has already led to the designation of further SSSIs for this habitat. This work has also facilitated the selection of two of these sites as candidate SACs
- Further research to identify restoration techniques has also been proposed as part of a Government-funded biodiversity research programme. Countryside Council for Wales is the nominated lead agency for co-ordinating the UK 'rhos' HAP

5. ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES⁹

1. To maintain the existing area of rhos pasture in Gwynedd and secure its appropriate long-term management
2. To restore areas of more modified or neglected former 'rhos', in order to increase the total area of rhos pasture by about 5%

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

⁹ With priority to be given to the scarcer and generally more species-rich lowland communities (especially where these form stands of c 0.5 ha or more), the commoner communities in situations remote from the upland fringes (especially when these form stands of 5 ha or more) and to ecologically diverse habitat mosaics

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 wetland action plans TARGET/TIMESCALE: BY 2005	GC , SNPA
2	Use planning conditions to ensure developments in sensitive locations are compatible with conservation of rhos pasture TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	GC
3	Ensure that all examples of this habitat which meet the relevant criteria are designated as Wildlife Sites TARGET/TIMESCALE: Start process of designation by 2005	GC , CCW, NWWT
Species / habitat management and protection		
4	Promote and support grant schemes including Tir Gofal, Llyn ESA and / or management agreements to secure favourable management and / or restoration of rhos pasture, taking into account the needs of associated LBAP species and habitats TARGET/TIMESCALE: Favourable management of 75%, Restoration of 15 ha, by 2009	CCW , CLA, DEPC, FC, FUW, FWAG Cymru, GC , NFU Cymru
5	Seek funding for land management by developing a biodiversity grant scheme, which would include grants for appropriate management and / or restoration and creation of rhos pasture TARGET/TIMESCALE: By 2005	GC , relevant partners
6	Ensure that conservation and enhancement of rhos pasture 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 , DEPC, FC, GC , NT, NWWT
Advisory		
7	Provide integrated advice to landowners and managers on appropriate management of rhos pasture. TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	CCW , CLA, DEPC, FUW, GC , NFU Cymru, NT, NWWT
Survey, research and monitoring		
8	Identify all rhos pasture sites and their quality through a programme inventory of available data (Phase One, Wildlife Site and other surveys) and survey work (information to be stored electronically), 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 2006	CCW , CEH, GC , NT, NWWT, UWB
9	Assist with research into and development of techniques for management and re-establishment of 'rhos' where appropriate and feasible TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	CCW , CEH, NWWT, UWB
10	Encourage surveys of other groups of species found on 'rhos' and also research into the management requirements of key species TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	CCW , BC, BTO, CEH, NWWT, UWB
Communications and publicity		
11	Raise awareness of rhos pasture 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
12	Raise public awareness of rhos pasture and associated species through media articles, open days, farm walks, interpretation and events TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	GC , CCW , NT, NWWT

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

7. PARTNERS & OPPORTUNITIES

7.1 Overall lead partner for HAP

Countryside Council for Wales (CCW)

7.2 Key partners

Butterfly Conservation (BC)

British Trust for Ornithology (BTO)

Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH)

Country Land and Business Association (CLA)

Department for Environment, Planning and Countryside (Welsh Assembly Government) (DEPC)

Forestry Commission (FC)

Farmers Union of Wales (FUW)

Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group Cymru (FWAG Cymru)

Gwynedd Council (GC)

National Farmers Union Cymru (NFU Cymru)

National Trust (NT)

North Wales Wildlife Trust (NWWT)

Snowdonia National Park Authority (SNPA)

University of Wales Bangor (UWB)

7.3 Opportunities

Farming unions, landowners and managers

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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9. ABBREVIATIONS

BAP: Biodiversity Action Plan, EIA: Environmental Impact Assessment, ESA: Environmentally Sensitive Area, HAP: Habitat Action Plan, JNCC: Joint Nature Conservation Committee, LBAP: Local Biodiversity Action Plan, NVC: National Vegetation Classification, NWMP: Native Woodland Management Plan, SAC: Special Area of Conservation, SAP: Species Action Plan, SSSI: Site of Special Scientific Interest, WGS: Woodland Grant Scheme

Version 1, 2004

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 BAP for Purple Moor-grass and rush pasture

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