

## Action Plan Scope:

This action plan covers the UK BAP priority habitat Upland heathland<sup>1</sup>, which is generally characterised by more than 25% cover of dwarf shrubs such as ling *Calluna vulgaris*, bell heather *Erica cinerea*, bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus*, crowberry *Empetrum nigrum*, and, in Wales, western gorse *Ulex gallii*. Where soils are wetter, cross leaved heath *Erica tetralix* grows alongside ling and other species, such as deergrass *Trichophorum cespitosum*, purple moorgrass *Molinia caerulea* while *Sphagnum* mosses are more abundant. In Gwynedd, upland heathland is commonly found in mosaic with acid grassland, blanket bog, flushes, scattered trees and scrub, bracken, rocky outcrops and acid scree and even on old slate quarries and tips.

Upland heathland is typically found on thin soils and peat (less than 0.5m deep), at altitudes of between approximately 300m and 650m, above the ffridd wall. Lowland heathland, which is normally taken to be heathland occurring below the ffridd wall (or below about 300m altitude), is covered by a separate Action Plan. However, upland heathland can often grade almost unnoticeably into montane heath above and into more lowland types of heathland at the lower altitudes. Indeed 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.

## 1. CURRENT STATUS

### 1.1 Legislation and priority status

International	Habitats Directive <sup>a</sup> Birds Directive <sup>b</sup>
UK and Wales	SSSI legislation <sup>c</sup> (some upland heathland) UK BAP priority CROW Act 2000 <sup>d</sup>
Gwynedd	Snowdonia BAP

### 1.2 Status in Wales and beyond

Heathlands have international conservation significance, and are largely confined to the British Isles and the western seaboard of Europe<sup>2</sup>. Britain and Ireland hold 75% of the European resource and the total UK upland heath resource amounts to between 2 and 3 million ha, of which c. 79,000 ha (3-4%) occurs in Wales<sup>3</sup>. Heavy grazing has resulted in the conversion of many Welsh heaths to grassland and is probably the main cause of this relatively low figure<sup>3</sup>.

Upland heathland is present in 20 of the 24 Welsh LBAP areas, but over 70% of the Welsh resource is found in only four areas; Snowdonia National Park, Powys, Brecon Beacons National Park and Denbighshire<sup>3</sup>. Very significant areas of the Welsh Upland heathland resource exists in a degraded and often heavily fragmented state<sup>4</sup>.

### 1.3 Status in Gwynedd<sup>e</sup>

A total of 2200 ha of upland heath have been recorded from Gwynedd (this includes approximately 1500 ha dry heath, 100 ha wet heath and half of the area of grass / heath mosaic (560 ha)). This is equivalent to 3% of the Welsh resource<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>a</sup> Upland 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*".

<sup>b</sup> Specific areas of Upland heathland are designated as SPAs designated under the "Birds Directive" – Council Directive 79/409/EEC of 2 April 1979 on the conservation of wild birds.

<sup>c</sup> Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000.

<sup>d</sup> 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.

<sup>e</sup> Within this document the term "Gwynedd" refers to areas outside the Snowdonia National Park area, except where specified otherwise

There are substantial areas of upland heath within Gwynedd on the fringes of Snowdonia National Park. Notable areas, in terms of their extent and quality, include parts of the Uwch Gwyrfai common above Rhosgadfan, Moel y Ci between Tregarth and Rhiwlas, and Cefn Du above Llanberis. In addition, the hills of north Llŷn, particularly Yr Eifl, support substantial areas of dry heath that, despite its very coastal location, is relatively more upland in terms of its character.

## 2. FACTORS AFFECTING THIS HABITAT IN GWYNEDD

- § Inappropriate agricultural practices such as overgrazing as well as agricultural “improvement” through cultivation, reseeding, application of fertilisers, and/or liming. Over-frequent burning is also an important factor in a number of areas.
- § Recreational pressure.
- § Afforestation.
- § Loss, fragmentation and disturbance from developments.
- § Other activities e.g. fly tipping, dumping of vehicles.
- § Atmospheric pollution and potentially climate change.



## 3. ASSOCIATED GWYNEDD SAPS / HAPS

Scrub woodlands, Lowland heathland, Inland rock, quarries, mines and screes, Lakes, ponds and ditches, Lowland Wetlands.

Brown hare, Lapwing, Chough, Ring ouzel, Twite, Farmland birds, Adder, Ashworth's rustic.

## 4. CURRENT ACTION IN GWYNEDD

### 4.1 Site and habitat protection

- § Areas of upland heathland occur within Eryri SAC (which lies outside the national park at Moel-y-Ci and Gwaen Gynfi).
- § Very few areas of upland heathland are included within SSSI s in Gwynedd. The only ones are the same part of the Eryri SSSI mentioned above and Yr Eifl, which grades from lowland into upland heath.
- § Upland heathland occurs within a number of areas identified as potential Wildlife Sites.
- § Areas of upland 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.

### 4.2 Management and programmes of action

- § There are very few management agreements, either Section 15 agreements with CCW or Tir Gofal schemes, in existence for upland heathland sites in Gwynedd at present. The common land status of areas such as Comin Uwch Gwyrfai is a complicating factor in achieving appropriate management of Gwynedd's upland heathland habitat. However, partnership funding has enabled the appointment of a coordinating officer for Uwch Gwyrfai to develop and implement an integrated management plan for the area.
- § At Cilgwyn, planning conditions have been invoked to ensure restoration of heathland habitat and retention of scree areas for parsley fern *Crytogramma crispa*.
- § CCW is currently preparing a management agreement template for common land that could assist in the future with securing improved conservation management of upland heath.
- § Appropriate management and / or restoration and creation of upland 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.
- § Further redesign plans for forestry plantations, such as at Donen Las, above Waunfawr, should take into account more effectively the importance of surrounding upland heathland habitat.
- § English Nature has recently published a compilation of guidance notes on upland management which could be of relevance and use in Gwynedd.

## 4.3 Survey, research and monitoring

- § None identified

## 5. ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES

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

## 6. PROPOSED ACTIONS

Code	Action	Partner(s) <sup>f</sup>
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 upland heathlands TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	GC, Relevant partners
3	Ensure that all examples of upland heathland which meet the relevant criteria are designated as Wildlife Sites or SSSI s 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 upland heathland 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 upland heathland, taking into account the needs of associated LBAP species and habitats. TARGET/TIMESCALE: Favourable management of 50%, Restoration of 50ha, by 2015	CCW, CLA, WAG, FUW, FWAG Cymru, GC, NFU
6	Implement the NGIP to bring about appropriate management and / or restoration and creation of upland heathland. TARGET/TIMESCALE: By 2008	GC, Relevant partners.
7	Ensure that conservation and enhancement of upland 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

<sup>f</sup> Lead partner for this action is indicated by bold typeface, see section 7.2 for explanation of abbreviations

Advisory		
8	Provide integrated advice to landowners and managers on appropriate management of upland heathland. TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	CCW, CLA, WAG, FUW, GC, NFU Cymru, NT, NWWT
9	Continue to provide advice, as required, into the development of a management plan and initiative for Comin Uwch Gwyrfai, in order to ensure long-term improvements to the quality of upland heath and associated habitats. TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	GC, CCW, RSPB
10	Provide advice, as necessary, to GC Planning and Mineral Planning officers on safeguarding, restoration and recreation of areas of upland heath. TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	GC, CCW, GAT, NWWT, NT
Survey, research and monitoring		
11	Identify extent and quality of all upland heathland sites through a programme inventory of available data (Phase One, CCW Upland Vegetation 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 2008	CCW, GC, NWWT, RSPB
12	Establish an inventory of all nationally scarce, Red Data and priority BAP species within the habitat in Gwynedd TARGET/TIMESCALE: By 2008	CCW, GC, RSPB, NWWT
Communications and publicity		
13	Raise awareness of upland 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	CCW, GC, NT, NWWT, RSPB
14	Raise public awareness of upland 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)

Country Land and Business Association (CLA)

Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group Cymru (FWAG Cymru)

Forestry Commission (FC)

Farmers Union Wales (FUW)

National Farmers Union (NFU)

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

Principal author: Elinor Gwynn (CCW)

Consultation: Jan Sherry (CCW), Karen Rawlins (CCW), Aisling Carrick (WAG)

Line drawings: English Nature

## 9. ABBREVIATIONS

BAP: Biodiversity Action Plan, SSSI : Sites of Special Scientific Interest, CRoW Act: Countryside and Right of Way Act, ESA: Environmentally Sensitive Area, HAP: Habitat Action Plan, JNCC: Joint Nature Conservation Committee, LBAP: Local Biodiversity Action Plan, SAP: Species Action Plan, SAC: Special Area of Conservation, EIA: Environmental Impact Assessment, NGIP: Natur Gwynedd Implementation Project, NWMP: Native Woodland Management Plan, WGS: Woodland Grant Scheme

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> UK Upland heathland Habitat Action Plan. Biodiversity: The UK Steering Group Report. Volume II - Action Plans. 1995. London HMSO.

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

<sup>4</sup> Bardgett et al, 1995 cited in Jones, P.S. et al, 2003.