



TREND IN THE PEAK DISTRICT:

Local experience and extrapolation from the Hay Meadows Project suggests that there has been a dramatic decline and loss.

ESTIMATED EXTENT IN THE PEAK DISTRICT:

Estimated to be less than 1500 ha.

NATIONAL BAP HABITATS:

Lowland Meadow, Lowland Acid Grassland and Lowland Calcareous Grassland (all priority habitats).

ASSOCIATED NATIONAL BAP PRIORITY SPECIES:

Brown hare, skylark, grey partridge, linnets, black grouse (extinct), great yellow bumble bee (extinct), a waxcap fungus (*Hygrocybe calyptriformis*), an earth tongue fungus (*Microglossum olivaceum*) and probably brown banded carder bee, large garden bumble bee, short haired bumble bee and hornet robberfly.

ASSOCIATED PEAK DISTRICT AUDITS:

Neutral Grassland, Calcareous Grassland, White Peak Acid Grasslands, Acid Pastures on Gritstone/Shale.

INTRODUCTION

This action plan includes enclosed fields of unimproved acid, neutral and calcareous pasture within all three Natural Areas. Their extent and composition is very variable dependent on a range of environmental and management factors. The best examples support a myriad of different plants, many of which are restricted to traditionally managed grasslands.

The plan excludes all species-poor improved grasslands except where they are relevant to restoration schemes. It also excludes all extensive areas of rough grazing, daleside grassland, wet grassland, rush pasture and the grasslands which are associated with lead rakes. Unimproved grasslands within these areas are covered in the following action plans: Limestone Dales, Rough Grazing, Rush Pasture, River Corridors and Lead Rakes.

In the White Peak there are important areas of neutral pasture within the enclosed fields of the limestone plateau. The best examples here can support strikingly rich grasslands with swathes of attractive herbs such as meadow saxifrage, betony and lady's bedstraw. Unimproved acid pastures are also found here, often characterised by swathes of the distinctive mountain pansy. Scattered across the small enclosed fields of the White Peak plateau are also a number of notable rocky outcrops and banks. These often support rich calcareous grasslands with lime-loving plants such as thyme and early purple orchid.

Within the Dark Peak and South West Peak the unimproved fields support both neutral and acidic grasslands. Such swards often exist in a mosaic and may be accompanied by areas of wet rushy grassland and flushes. The richest examples exhibit a whole suite of species including the uncommon greater butterfly orchid and melancholy thistle.

In addition to their botanical interest unimproved pastures are extremely important for birds, mammals and insects in all three Natural Areas. They provide essential habitat for a range of National BAP species including brown hares and skylarks. There is increasing recognition of the importance of unimproved pastures for fungi, particularly waxcaps.

The pastures are of importance in the landscape. Within the White Peak their flower-rich swards provide a contrast in the grass-dominated landscape. Within all three Natural Areas they are often surrounded by traditional boundaries such as dry stone walls and hedges. These help to define the character of the area and are often historically significant.

Within the White Peak concentrations of flower-rich unimproved pastures are found in the small fields of Bonsall Moor and around Middleton-by-Wirksworth. Other notable sites are scattered across the plateau, particularly in the parishes of Sheldon, Monyash, Hurdlow and Bradwell.

Within the Dark Peak and South West Peak information is more limited but there are good examples of unimproved pastures at Dungworth Reservoir and Rowarth in the Dark Peak and throughout the Leek Moors.

Nationally, unimproved pastures have undergone dramatic declines in the 20th century. It is estimated that between the 1930s and mid 1980s semi-natural grassland declined by 97 % in lowland England and Wales. In the Peak District there are no comprehensive figures for loss of this habitat but local experience suggests that they are likely to be as alarming as those for hay meadows, which have suffered 50 % loss and 26 % decline in quality between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s.

ADVERSE IMPACTS	Historic	Current
Land Management		
Agricultural intensification – ploughing, re-seeding, drainage, artificial fertilisers, herbicide, slurry application, conversion to arable and heavy grazing pressure.	✓	✓✓
Increased use of small unimproved pastures as horse and pony paddocks associated with high stocking rates and development of patchy swards.		✓✓
Application of paper pulp.		✓✓
Neglect, leading to the development of rank swards and scrub encroachment.		✓
Pollution		
Disposal of sheep dip.		✓
Use of Ivermectin and its associated effects on invertebrates.		✓
Climate change.		✓

Tipping The use of hollows for the disposal of building waste etc.		✓
Quarrying Quarrying and mineral extraction.	✓	✓
Others Tree planting schemes.	✓	✓
Fragmentation – Risk of species extinctions and negative effect on unimproved pasture restoration.	✓	✓✓
Motorbike scrambling and 4x4 trials.		✓

An impact ✓ *Significant impact* ✓✓

CURRENT ACTION

Designated Sites

- The area of unimproved pasture within designated (SSSI) sites is unknown but at least five sites - Leek Moors, Via Gellia, Wye Valley, Colshaw Pastures and Rose End Meadows - include such habitat within them.
- A number of important unimproved pastures are identified as 'Wildlife Sites'.

New Initiatives

- The PDNPA has been running a Pastures Project for the last three years. To date this has concentrated on the survey and negotiation of agreements on wet pastures and limestone heaths but it is envisaged that the next stage will focus on the unimproved pastures covered in this action plan.

Sites Owned and Managed by Conservation Organisations

- The PDNPA owns a number of unimproved pastures on the North Lees Estate, Warslow Moors, Hard Rake near Sheldon, Tideswell Dale and at Magpie Mine Field.
- The WTs own and manage important unimproved pastures including Spring Cottage, Long Clough and Weags Barn.
- The NT owns significant areas of unimproved pastures, for example on the Longshaw Estate, at Monyash, and in the Upper Derwent.

Sites Within Conservation Agreements

- 152 ha of flat pasture are being traditionally managed by landowners within the PDNPA's Farm Conservation Scheme (FCS). The majority of these are unimproved pastures of the White Peak and areas of the Dark and South West Peak which fall outside of the Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs).
- Significant areas of unimproved pasture are being positively managed by farmers, with support from MAFF, within the South West Peak and North Peak ESAs and within the Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS).

ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS

National Targets

The National BAP targets for Lowland Meadows and Lowland Dry Acid Grassland relate to the Peak District Unimproved Pastures Action Plan.

- Arrest the depletion of unimproved lowland meadows and lowland acid grasslands.
- Within SSSIs, achieve favourable status by initiating re-habilitation management.
- Outside SSSIs, secure favourable condition over 30% of lowland meadows and acid grassland by 2005 and, for lowland acid grassland, 100% by 2015.

- Attempt to re-establish 500 ha of lowland hay meadow and 500 ha of lowland acid grassland of wildlife value at carefully targeted sites by 2010.
- Develop carefully researched guidelines to restore hay meadows.

A Vision for the Peak District

The targets are ambitious since flower-rich unimproved pastures are an increasingly rare part of the Peak District countryside. As with other grasslands their conservation will be challenging. Fundamental to their existence is farming, but their future seems bleak without the right environmentally friendly economic incentives for farmers. It is hoped that these often small pastures will continue to support a profusion of wildflowers, grasses and insects and will provide feeding and nesting sites for birds and small mammals. It is only by directing co-ordinated energy and resources that this vision will be realised.

The targets below for bringing existing unimproved pasture into favourable management are in excess of national BAP targets. This reflects the potential to build upon action to date and recognises the importance and continued loss of unimproved pasture. The targets for re-creation are lower than the national targets, since unlike many lowland areas of Britain there is an enormous potential in the Peak District for restoration of unimproved pastures from semi-improved grassland rather than re-creation.

OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS

Objective 1

Bring all important unimproved pastures into favourable condition.

Targets

Review the management of all unimproved pastures within existing SSSIs and secure favourable management on all sites by 2005.

Review the management of all unimproved pastures within existing conservation agreements, outside of SSSIs, by 2005, with a view to ensuring favourable condition and management.

Secure appropriate conservation agreements on 50 % of all the resource outside of SSSIs by 2005.

Review and set a new target for 2005 - 2010.

To achieve these targets a number of sub-targets have been set:

Identify and survey all unimproved pastures of wildlife interest outside of agreements, including those within the ESA areas, by 2004.

For all unimproved pastures outside of existing agreements make all landowners/land managers aware of available conservation agreements by the end of 2005.

Secure an appropriate conservation agreement on 30 % of these newly identified pastures by 2005.

Objective 2

Restore semi-improved species-poor grasslands to species-rich swards in carefully targeted areas, to reverse the trend of loss and address the problems of habitat fragmentation and isolation.

Targets

Identify practical management prescriptions for restoring pastures, in relation to neglect, scrub and over-grazing, by 2005.

Initiate restoration of a minimum of 50 ha of species-poor pasture, targeting key areas, by 2010.

Objective 3

Create new areas of unimproved pasture, giving priority to areas adjacent to important sites or which link existing fragmented sites.

Target

Identify the opportunities for creation of species-rich pastures in appropriate locations by 2010.

Main Factors Likely to Affect Achievement of Targets

Land Management

- Implementation of the Rural Development Regulation and reform of the Common Agricultural Policy.
- High land prices - forcing intensive management following purchase of land.
- Effectiveness of agri-environment and conservation scheme prescriptions.

Resources

- Limited financial rewards from agri-environment and conservation schemes and lack of incentives for favourable management.
- Availability of funding for survey, negotiations and agreements.

Planning and Regulations

- Lack of planning controls for agricultural operations – Permitted Development Rights (PDR) allow in-filling and levelling of hollows within a farm holding.
- Planning policy.

Others

- Lack of safeguard or effective conservation mechanisms outside of SSSIs - It is often at the time of change of ownership that pastures, as with other grassland habitats, are most at risk. At present there is no systematic procedure or mechanism for conservation bodies and local authorities to have an opportunity to safeguard such land.

ACTIONS

Key to the achievement of the proposed targets are actions relating to:

- The collation of information and survey, coupled with negotiations to secure appropriate land management (Actions UP1, 4 and 19 - 22);
- Considering review of agri-environment and conservation schemes to ensure that they provide adequate financial incentive and appropriate management prescriptions to safeguard and enhance pastures (UP18), and
- Developing a strategy for safeguarding sites of particular wildlife importance where this cannot be achieved through the normal channels of negotiation, as the current systems are still inadequate to secure the future of some of our best remaining pastures (UP26).

ACTIONS	TIMESCALE	LEAD AGENCY & Partners	
DATA COLLATION AND SURVEY			
Data Collation			
UP1	Collate existing information and identify gaps in the knowledge for unimproved pastures outside of SSSIs. (Objective 1)	Spring 2001	PDNPA/WTs (joint leads)/EN/LRCs/LAs Voluntary Sector
UP2	Compile a register of unimproved pasture, including classification into types, level of importance (including 'Wildlife Site' status), Natural Area, condition, important species and conservation status and initiate a programme for regular updating. (Objective 1)	2002	PDNPA/WTs (joint leads)
Survey			
UP3	Identify priority areas for detailed habitat survey. (Objective 1)	2001 - 2002	PDNPA/WTs (joint leads)/EN
UP4	Carry out detailed survey of unimproved enclosed pasture. (Objective 1)	2001 - 2004	WTs/PDNPA (joint leads)/NT/LAs

UP5	Survey key sites for potential restoration schemes in target areas. (Objective 2)	2005 - 2010	PDNPA/WTs (joint leads)/EN/NT/FWAG
-----	---	-------------	------------------------------------

EVALUATING THE IMPORTANCE AND CONDITION OF SITES

Evaluating Importance and Identifying Key Sites

UP6	Agree methodology for the evaluation of unimproved pasture, to include definition of priorities for conservation action and identification of 'Wildlife Sites'. (Objective 1)	2001	PDNPA/GBAPG
-----	---	------	-------------

Defining Favourable Condition

UP7	Agree definitions of favourable condition for the complete range of sites in the Peak District. (Objectives 1 and 2)	Autumn 2001	EN/GBAPG
UP8	Agree guidelines for the conservation and restoration of unimproved pastures, to include the range of management needed to achieve favourable condition, techniques for restoration and definition of key areas for targeting. (Objectives 1 and 2)	Autumn 2001	EN/GBAPG

RESOURCES

UP9	Seek resources for detailed survey and subsequent negotiation of conservation agreements of unimproved pastures (including those within the ESA areas but outside of agreement) in collaboration with other grassland action plans. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001	PDNPA/WTs(joint leads)
UP10	Seek funding for an unimproved pastures restoration project. (Objective 2)	2005	PDNPA/EN(joint leads)

RESEARCH

UP11	Ensure that the results of research into the effects of Ivermectin on invertebrate communities associated with animal dung are implemented at a local level. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001 onwards	WEG
------	---	--------------	-----

MONITORING

UP12	Agree methodology for and implement effective monitoring of unimproved pastures. Ensure that the results of the process are collated and used to update the register. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001 onwards	PDNPA/MAFF/EN WTs/NT
------	--	--------------	-------------------------

AWARENESS RAISING

UP13	Develop an unimproved pasture awareness-raising strategy, to include identification of key audiences, key messages, and methods of promotion/awareness-raising. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2002	PDNPA/GBAPG
UP14	Make guidelines on unimproved pasture restoration available to landowners/managers and conservation organisation staff. (Objective 2)	2001 onwards	PDNPA/GBAPG
UP15	Share information on the wildlife importance and management needs of key conservation and restoration sites with the landowners/managers, including feedback from surveys. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001 onwards	PDNPA/NT/EN/WTs MAFF/ FWAG/LAs

CONSERVATION ACTION AND INCENTIVES

Designations

UP16	Review coverage of unimproved pastures within SSSIs and notify further sites as appropriate. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2002	EN
UP17	Review desirability and opportunities for establishment of key sites as NNRs and LNRs and establish if appropriate. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001 - 2005	EN/LAs (joint leads) WTs/ NT/PDNPA

Grant Schemes

UP18	Consider recommending a review of all agri-environment and conservation schemes to ensure that: *Targeting at a national, regional and local level continues to give adequate priority to the conservation of unimproved pastures *Management prescriptions are reviewed to include flexible, site-specific measures *Payments for unimproved pastures are increased to at least the level of profits foregone (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001 onwards	MAFF/EN/PDNPA WEG/GBAPG
------	--	--------------	----------------------------

Negotiation and Review of Agreements

UP19	Review management of all sites within SSSIs. Where necessary agree revised management regimes with owners and managers, through appropriate mechanisms, to ensure maintenance or restoration of favourable condition. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001 - 2005	EN
UP20	Negotiate appropriate agreements with landowners and managers of all key conservation and restoration sites outside of existing agreements and SSSIs, in order to achieve maintenance or restoration of favourable condition. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001 – 2005 conservation; 2005 – 2010 restoration.	PDNPA/MAFF/FWAG WTs/NT
UP21	Review management of unimproved pastures in existing agreements, outside SSSIs. Where necessary agree revised management regimes with owners/managers to ensure that favourable condition is being maintained or restored. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001 - 2005	PDNPA/MAFF/FWAG WTs/NT
UP22	Review whole holding agreements which include unprotected unimproved pastures. Consider the opportunities for upgrading the agreement to incorporate their safeguard and enhancement. (Objective 1 and 2)	2002 - 2010	MAFF/NT/WTs PDNPA/FWAG

Alternative Incomes

UP23	Identify and assist the development of other sources of income for owners and managers of unimproved pastures, to include links to conservation products. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2002	PDNPA/EN/WTs/NT
------	--	------	-----------------

Land Acquisition

UP24	Consider negotiating purchase/lease of priority unimproved pastures where this would be the most effective way of achieving conservation objectives and where a negotiated conservation solution has been unsuccessful. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001 onwards	PDNPA/EN/WTs/RSPB NT
------	--	--------------	-------------------------

Direct Action

UP25	On land owned by public or conservation bodies, ensure that:		
------	--	--	--

	*Management maintains and where possible enhances the value of unimproved pastures		
	*Options for restoration of unimproved pastures are considered		
	*Opportunities for involvement of local communities in site management are taken where possible (All Objectives)	2001 onwards	PDNPA/EN/LAs/FC NT/WTs
UP26	Agree a strategy for safeguarding sites of particular wildlife importance where this cannot be achieved through the normal channels of negotiation, in liaison with land-owning, farming and other land management interests. (Objective 1)		WEG/NFU/CLA 2001 RLMEG

REGULATION

Planning

UP27	Ensure all planning applications and General Development Orders are adequately assessed in relation to their impact on unimproved pastures, that loss or damage is avoided, and that opportunities are taken for enhancement. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001 onwards	PDNPA/EN/LAs/WTs
UP28	Consider the opportunities for the creation of unimproved pastures in relevant planning decisions, including quarry restoration schemes. (Objective 3)	2001 onwards	PDNPA/EN/LAs/WTs
UP29	Ensure that the impact of disposal of waste from new buildings is addressed in the planning process. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001 onwards	PDNPA/EN/LAs/WTs

Pollution Control and Waste Management

UP30	Review procedures and consultation processes in relation to the spreading of paper pulp. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001	EA/LAs/PDNPA/EN WTs
UP31	Ensure good practice is followed in disposing of sheep-dip, avoiding unimproved pastures. Implement by continuing with an awareness-raising strategy amongst land managers; continuing the programme of licensing; extending consultation procedures for disposal applications to the whole of the Peak District and, where necessary, by enforcement action. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001	EA/LAs/PDNPA

Other Regulatory Mechanisms

UP32	Ensure that all woodland planting proposals consider the adverse effects of planting on unimproved pastures. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001 onwards	FC/LAs/PDNPA/EN
------	---	--------------	------------------------

RESOURCES

It is envisaged that many of the actions proposed will be carried out by the relevant organisations using current resources. These include:

- continuing investment by landowners and managers in managing their land sympathetically for wildlife;
- EN's programme of reviewing SSSI management and designation and its grant and management agreement schemes;
- MAFF's Countryside Stewardship and Environmentally Sensitive Area Schemes;
- the PDNPA's advisory and grants service for landowners/managers and its rolling programme of special conservation projects;

- FWAG and the WTs' advisory services;
- continuing management of unimproved pastures in the ownership of conservation organisations and public bodies (LAs, EN, NT, WTs, PDNPA) and WCs.

Additional resources are likely to be required:

- for survey of pastures (2001 - 2003) and negotiation of agreements (2001 - 2005);
- for surveys and negotiations at priority restoration sites (2005 - 2010);
- to provide adequate financial incentives for the conservation and restoration management of pastures (2001 onwards);
- to aid in the production of the proposed registers (2001 onwards);
- to implement effective monitoring (2001 onwards).

The PDNPA and EN are currently seeking resources to continue the Pastures Project, aimed at surveying and securing high quality sites within appropriate agreements. The RSPB, PDNPA and EN are currently seeking resources for a Ground-nesting Bird Habitat Project (to run from 2001 - 2004) which would also have implications for unimproved pasture conservation.