

**Guidance for the management of Semi-natural Pasture**

**General objectives**

- Establish a level of grazing which is of benefit to breeding birds and maintains plant communities.
- Maintain open aspect of larger sites to favour breeding grassland birds.

**Important features to develop**

- Species-rich swards. This is favoured by lower nutrient status soils.
- Swards of variable height and density which favours breeding birds. The presence of rushes adds to this structural diversity of the sward although they should not be dominant.
- Wet or damp areas, which provide a habitat for a greater variety of plant species and are particularly important for wading birds.
- Ditches and drains with open standing water and rush/reedy margins.
- Large areas of flat open grassland, without trees, which are favoured by grassland breeding birds and brown hares.
- Links to other habitats (but see above on large areas). Many such areas occur around the moorland fringe and the combination of habitat types (i.e. a mosaic) is complementary and beneficial for some species.

**Priority species’ groups for which habitat is important**

Birds	Mammals
Barn Owl (lowlands only)	Brown Hare
Curlew	Bats (feeding habitat)
Grey Partridge	
Kestrel	
Lapwing	
Reed Bunting	
Ring Ouzel (around upland cloughs)	
Skylark	
Song Thrush*	
Snipe	
Starling	
Swallow	
Twite (refer to Species Action Plan)	
* at interface with shrub and tree cover	

**Other species groups for which habitat is important**

Semi-natural pasture can harbour a variety of plant species and invertebrates.

**Maintaining and improving the habitat**

To maintain the diversity of plants and habitat for the feeding and breeding of birds requires careful grazing management. Those not cropped will develop into rank grassland with fewer

plant species (although some animal groups may benefit). The following practices may be appropriate:

- Lower stocking densities during the spring and early summer to encourage colonisation by breeding birds and to reduce the risk of any nests being trampled.
- To maintain a low nutrient status in the soil and, hence, a diverse grassland structure, it is important the sward is grazed to remove nutrients and fertiliser inputs kept to a minimum.
- Hinder the flow of water from ditches, drains and hollows to maintain or restore wet areas.
- Creating water bodies - temporary or permanent - will add immensely to the value of the habitat (not in but adjacent to existing wet areas is especially appropriate). They should be sited in the open, well away from trees and shrubs if they are intended for grassland breeding birds. Ponds should not be created in existing marshy areas.

Before undertaking habitat management work on semi-natural pasture seek advice.

### **Species to plant**

- Native grassland and wildflower species; including those of wet habitats. (For information on the correct species to plant look for The Natural History Museum's Postcode Plant Database at [www.nhm.ac.uk](http://www.nhm.ac.uk) or write to The Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London, SW7 5BD, UK).
- Generally it is not appropriate to plant trees or shrubs on open pasture and in wet areas. On sites where hedgerows or other habitats occur, these can be improved or managed to complement pasture.

### **Extending the habitat**

- The value of these areas can be increased by forming links with other habitats, particularly open habitats like flowering grassland and, in some cases, low scrub. This is especially relevant to areas that already contain breeding grassland bird communities and Twite.
- Drainage can be hindered (drains blocked) to recreate wet pasture on sites previously drained, particularly in areas which contain populations of breeding grassland birds.