

Habitat Action Plan: Upland Heathland

Current status and Importance

- Upland heath lies below the 'potential woodland limit' at c. 600-750m above sea level and above the upper edge of enclosed agricultural land, usually around 300-400m elevation.
- Dwarf-shrub heaths have international conservation significance and are largely confined to the British Isles and the western seaboard of Europe.
- The existence of upland heath is dependent on the management of grazing and burning to prevent succession and development to scrub or woodland
- It is estimated that there is 1560ha of upland heath in Kirklees.
- Large areas of upland heath in the Dark Peak and South Pennines within Kirklees receive statutory protection through SSSI, SPA and SAC designations.



The Common Lizard is often found in upland heathland areas in Kirklees

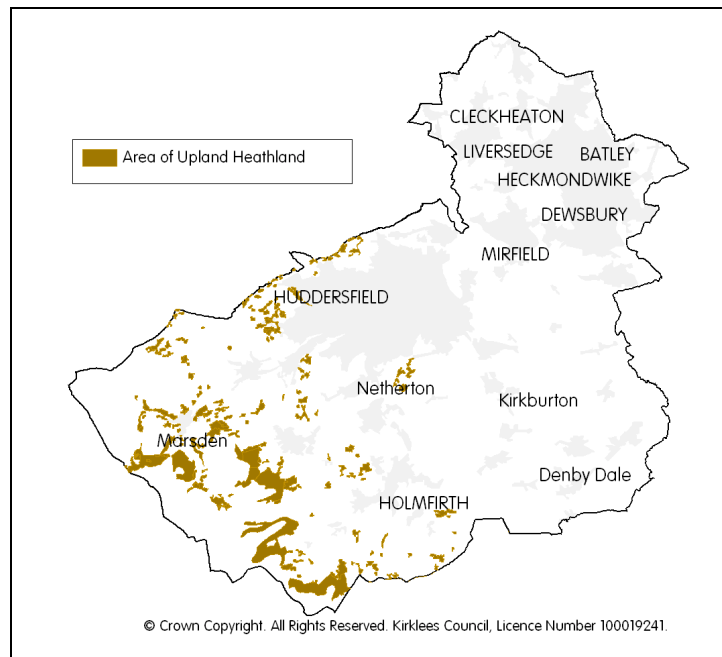
(Photograph copyright Peter Wakely/Natural England)

Species Use

- Upland heath is generally dominated by dwarf shrubs such as heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*), bell heather (*Erica cinerea*) and in the west, gorse (*Ulex gallii*). The latter does occur within Kirklees.
- The mosaic of dry heath, wet heath and blanket bog is prime habitat for a suite of bird species including red grouse (*Lagopus lagopus*), twite (*Carduelis flavirostris*), golden plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*) and wide ranging species such as merlin (*Falco columbarius*).
- Common lizard (*Lacerta vivipara*) occurs within the upland heaths of Kirklees.
- The upland heaths of Kirklees have probably been impoverished in bryophyte and lichen communities because of air borne pollution.
- Most upland heath is managed for sheep or for shooting of grouse, and is maintained by rotational burning.

Conservation Issues

- Inappropriate management of sheep. Heavy grazing is incompatible with maintaining upland heath cover and diversity and with preventing heather and shrub damage.
- Afforestation leading to direct loss of dwarf-shrub habitat along with natural woodland regeneration (although this can help retain and enhance some elements of the original dwarf-shrub habitat in the woodland ground layer).
- Conversion to more intensive forms of agriculture, such as pasture improvement, particularly at lower elevations.
- Poorly managed and excessive burning.
- Acidification from atmospheric pollution.



Extent of Upland Heathland in Kirklees

Objectives

- Protect existing upland heath from inappropriate uses or management to prevent habitat deterioration, including those issues relating to burning practices and grazing.
- Enhance the quality and restore upland dwarf-shrub heath as part of an upland mosaic of habitats, including the transition to grassland, scrub and woodland, where appropriate to soils, climate and existing species' communities.
- Manage areas of upland heath to create greater structural diversity and maximise their value for their important species' populations.

Target areas for habitat management and creation

- Much upland heath occurs within the Upland protected areas.
- There is also a significant amount of upland heath outside of the designated sites at higher altitudes within the Mid-altitudinal Grassland zone.
- The habitat is also found within the Valley Slopes zone at higher elevations.
- Sites which are within the current or historic breeding range of Twite. Note that in many cases the control (loss) of bracken has resulted in the reduction of Twite breeding habitat. This is an important and yet undervalued component of upland heath.
- For further information, please see the Biodiversity Opportunity Zones Map at www.kirklees.gov.uk/biodiversity

NB Natural England must be consulted on any proposal within nationally and internationally designated sites.

Targets

- See [Defra/Natural England SSSI Public Service Agreement Targets](#)

Key Links and Organisations

- Site protection: Natural England, Peak District National Park Authority, Kirklees Council, Forestry Commission.
- Management through Environmental Stewardship in Kirklees: Natural England, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group.
- Management of Upland heath in Kirklees: The National Trust, Moors for the Future Partnership, Peak District National Park, Yorkshire Water, Twite Recovery Project.

See Also

- [UKBAP: Upland Heathland Habitat Action Plan](#)
- [UKBAP: Blanket Bog Habitat Action Plan](#)
- Kirklees BAP Twite Species Action Plan (www.kirklees.gov.uk/biodiversity)
- Kirklees BAP Water Vole Species Action Plan (www.kirklees.gov.uk/biodiversity)