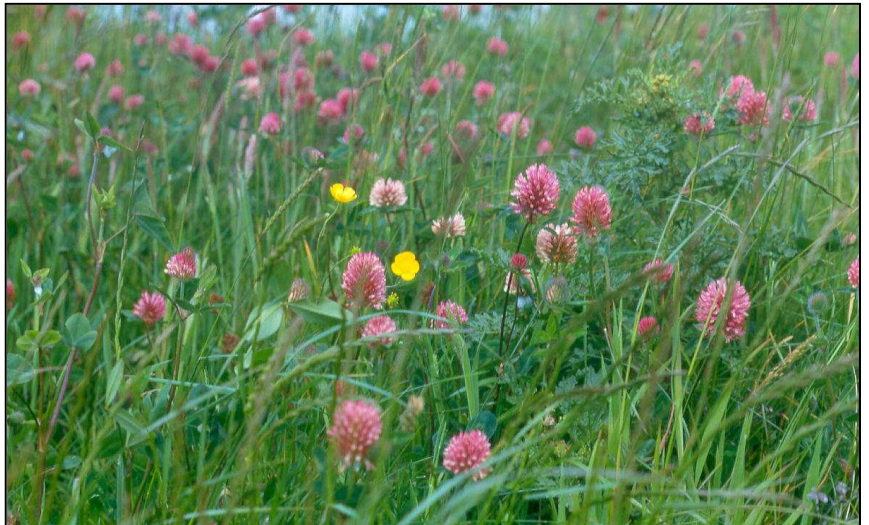


Habitat Action Plan: Meadows

Current status and Importance

- Meadows include unimproved neutral grassland within enclosed landscapes and cut for hay.
- Those at higher elevations in Kirklees tend to be less species rich and verge towards acid grassland type plant communities.
- It is estimated that by 1984 in lowland England and Wales, semi-natural



grassland had declined by 97% over the previous 50 years almost entirely due to changing agricultural practice. Losses have continued.

- In Kirklees, there is limited quantitative or qualitative data available about the extent of the habitat and to assess the changes which have occurred but they probably mirror the national picture. Losses also continue in Kirklees.
- Some sites in Kirklees have been designated as Sites of Scientific Importance (SSI's) although there are undesignated sites probably worthy of this status.
- Examples may be found also in recreational sites, church-yards, roadside verges and a variety of other localities.

Species use

- Plant communities include *Cynosurus cristatus* - *Centaurea nigra* grassland, the most relevant to the Kirklees district.
- Lowland neutral grassland is associated with a specialist group of scarce and declining plant species which includes Dyer's Greenweed (*Genista tinctoria*).
- Meadows are important habitats for skylark and a number of other farmland birds. In the uplands of Kirklees the habitat is especially critical to the twite.
- Where fertiliser input is relaxed or in swards, which have only been partially improved, *Lolium* - *Cynosurus* grassland is common. In many respects this is intermediate between improved and unimproved.

Conservation Issues

- Agricultural improvement through drainage, ploughing, re-seeding, fertiliser treatment, slurry application, conversion to arable and a shift from hay-making to silage production.
- Abandonment leading to rank over-growth, and encroachment by Common Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) and scrub.
- Changes to stocking regimes, which can cause eutrophication and localised poaching as well as changes to plant communities because of altered patterns of grazing (e.g. horses, sheep and cattle all have different grazing patterns).
- Application of herbicides and other pesticides.
- Atmospheric pollution and climate change, the influence of which is not fully assessed.

Objectives

- Arrest the depletion of species-rich hay meadows.
- Secure favourable condition at existing sites where opportunities arise.
- Bring additional areas into favourable management.
- Restore areas of grassland to hay meadow especially where core areas of interest or importance remain.
- Continue with work to establish and map the total extent of the habitat and important species' groups.

Biodiversity Opportunities Map - target areas for habitat management and creation

- Mid-altitudinal Grasslands, especially where there are existing strongholds of grassland breeding bird populations and within the feeding range of existing Twite colonies.
- Pennine Foothills, especially where restoration will benefit BAP priority species.
- For further information, please see the Biodiversity Opportunity Zones Map at www.kirklees.gov.uk/biodiversity

Targets

- To be decided

Key Links and Organisations

- Site protection: Kirklees Council, Peak District National Park Authority, Natural England.
- Management through Environmental Stewardship in Kirklees: Natural England, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group,
- Management and restoration of hay meadows in Kirklees: Twite Recovery Project (RSPB), the Kirklees BAP: Guidance for the management of Flowering Grasslands: Kirklees Council Environment Unit.
- Grassland site inventory for Kirklees: West Yorkshire Ecology, Kirklees Council Environment Unit.
- Grassland surveys: Kirklees Wildlife and Landscape Advisory Forum, West Yorkshire Ecology.

See Also

- [UK Biodiversity Action Plan: Upland Hay Meadows \(http://www.ukbap.org.uk\)](http://www.ukbap.org.uk)
- [UK Biodiversity Action Plan: Lowland Meadows \(http://www.ukbap.org.uk\)](http://www.ukbap.org.uk)
- Kirklees Species Action Plan: Twite (www.kirklees.gov.uk/biodiversity)
- Guidance for the management of Flowering Grasslands: Kirklees Council Environment Unit. (www.kirklees.gov.uk/biodiversity)