



Semi-Improved Upland Rough Grassland



This plan is in need of revision. The text below was produced in 2002 and is included for background information only.

Semi-improved rough grasslands in the uplands are areas of permanent pasture that have undergone some amount of agricultural improvement to provide grazing land for sheep or cattle. As the name suggests, they occur on the tops of the hills in Shropshire where factors of climate, altitude, aspect and soil conditions make arable or more intensive livestock rearing impossible. Typically, areas such as the Clun Forest, the Long Mynd, Clee Hills and Oswestry Hills contain areas of semi-improved and rough grassland. Upland grasslands in Shropshire provide important habitats for a number of breeding birds.

Maintaining wetness, a mosaic of sward heights and rush cover is crucial for breeding waders, which include curlew, snipe and lapwing. Unfortunately, drainage schemes in recent years have significantly reduced the extent of wet habitat available. Semi-improved upland rough grasslands are most valuable to upland wildlife when managed by extensive grazing regimes.

1 Objectives and Targets

1.1 Objectives

- A. Ensure no further loss or degradation of semi-improved upland rough grassland.
- B. Increase the extent of semi-improved upland rough grassland through restoring favourable conservation management to degraded sites.
- C. Improve the quality of existing semi-improved upland rough grassland through appropriate management.
- D. Improve knowledge of the extent and status of semi-improved upland rough grassland through survey, research and monitoring.
- E. Increase awareness of the importance of semi-improved upland rough grassland.

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1.2 Targets

- Revert 100 ha of heavily improved upland grassland to semi-improved rough grassland by 2010.
- Seek to implement appropriate management on all existing sites by 2005.

2 Current Status

2.1 Importance

This type of vegetation is considered a significant habitat in Shropshire. Despite its usual botanical impoverishment through agricultural improvement, extensive grazing of these areas can often result in an uneven sward height providing valuable cover for nesting upland birds.

Species that depend on this type of habitat include lapwing, curlew and snipe. It is a valuable landscape feature in its own right and characteristic of hilly areas in the county. Some areas of more specific vegetation types such as upland rush pasture, purple moor grass (*Molinia* communities) and acid grassland have been recognised as being important at a national level.

'Purple moor grass and rush pastures' is a priority habitat in the UK Biodiversity Programme and a habitat action plan has been prepared. The conservation direction for acid grasslands is covered by a national broad habitat statement.

2.2 Trends

Upland rough grassland is likely to be declining in nature conservation value and extent through increased pressure for more productive grazing land. Improvements such as increased drainage, increased fertilizer input, and re-seeding produce a less variable sward, and overgrazing reduces the overall sward height.

2.3 Area / Extent

Not known.

2.4 Distribution

Isolated areas of upland rough grassland exist in the Clun Hills, for example around Black Mountain, on the edge of the Stiperstones, and in the Clee Hills. Additional areas exist around the Long Mynd and elsewhere in the Shropshire Hills and Oswestry Uplands.

3 Current Factors Affecting the Habitat

- Agricultural improvement of grassland areas through re-seeding, fertilizing and drainage.
- High stocking levels leading to overgrazing of the sward and disturbance to ground nesting birds.
- Lack of grazing pressure leading to scrub encroachment. Although this in itself may produce a valuable habitat, it could cause a decline in suitable conditions for upland breeding birds.

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- Fragmentation of habitat through improvement of adjoining areas in different land ownership or protection through different tiers of agri-environment schemes.

4 Current Action

4.1 Policy and Protection

- Extensive areas of the uplands are owned and managed by conservation organisations such as Natural England (Stiperstones) and the National Trust (Long Mynd). Some of these areas are designated as SSSIs.
- Some areas of upland rough grassland are designated as county Wildlife Sites and are protected from development (though not agricultural improvement) through local plan policies.

4.2 Management, Research and Survey

- Shropshire Ornithological Society carried out a preliminary breeding wader survey of the Clun Hills in 1998.
- Areas of degraded habitat in the Clun Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) have been identified for potential restoration.

5 Benefits of Conserving Semi-Improved Upland Rough Grassland

- Contribution to UK biodiversity action plan targets for Acid Grassland, and Purple Moor Grass and Rush Pasture.
- Enhanced visual landscape qualities in the countryside with knock-on effects for local tourism initiatives.
- Provides habitat for UK BAP priority species such as skylark and brown hare.
- Provision of buffer areas to other key habitats such as upland heathland, adding to the diversity of habitats in the hilly areas of the county.

6 Key Species

Birds curlew, lapwing, snipe, skylark and reed bunting

Reptiles grass snake, adder

Mammals brown hare

Butterflies dingy skipper, green hairstreak

Plants purple moor grass, sheep's fescue, tormentil, bedstraw, common spotted orchid, bee orchid, heath spotted orchid, adders tongue fern

7 Complementary Plans

UK Acid Grasslands Broad Habitat Statement

UK Purple Moor Grass and Rough Pastures

Shropshire Brown Hare SAP

Shropshire Lapwing SAP

Shropshire Snipe SAP

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Habitat / Species	Action Code	Action text	Location of action	Start Date	End Date	Lead	Assisting
Upland Rough Grazing	SHR URG HS 01	Ensure that all semi-improved upland rough grassland within Wildlife Sites and nature reserves are appropriately managed until 2010.	Shropshire	2002	2010	SWT	FWAG NT RSPB SC
Upland Rough Grazing	SHR URG PL 01	Ensure that semi-improved upland rough grassland is safeguarded from development through the local planning process.	Shropshire	2002	-	SC T&W	
Upland Rough Grazing	SHR URG RE 01	Examine the feasibility of re-wetting appropriate areas of semi-improved upland rough grassland within ESAs	Shropshire	2002	2010	NE	FWAG NT RSPB

Key to Organisation

SWT	Shropshire Wildlife Trust
FWAG	Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group
RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
SC	Shropshire Council
T&W	Telford & Wrekin
NE	Natural England
NT	National Trust

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