

# Lowland calcareous grassland

## Current UK status and trends

Sharp decline in extent by up to 50% over past 60 years; only 65,567ha remain in England. Remnant patches are often small and isolated.

## Estimated current Northamptonshire resource

Approximately 242ha

## Progress towards BAP targets 2008–2015

Unknown, but nature reserves managed and other sites restored through Environmental Stewardship.

## Lead partner

Wildlife Trust

## Target areas



## Habitat description



Lowland calcareous grassland develops on shallow lime-rich soils, usually overlying limestone rocks. The most significant areas of calcareous grassland in Northamptonshire are found on artificial sites where removal of upper strata has exposed underlying limestone and natural re-colonisation has occurred. The less common natural sites are typically managed as components of pastoral or mixed farming systems, and a few are cut for hay. The majority of sites are found in the northeast and southwest of the county and associated with disused gulleys, quarries and railways and along road verges.

In Northamptonshire calcareous grassland includes NVC communities CG2–5. CG3 is the dominant type, and is often the result of undergrazing. CG2 is a short sward community associated with heavy grazing. CG4 and CG5 are rank, tussocky grassland, which like CG3 are associated with low grazing levels.

## Main issues and threats

- Quite a rare habitat in Northamptonshire with many important associated species. Much is isolated in small fragments, dangerously reducing species' population sizes and making it impossible for individuals to move between habitat patches.
- Additional loss of habitat to development
- Inappropriate or lack of management (e.g. undergrazing or improving soils with nutrients) leading to domination by coarse grasses and invasion by scrub

## General strategy

- Conduct survey work and habitat opportunity mapping to identify the current resources and highest priorities for linkage by sympathetic management of degraded sites and establishment of new sites

- Expand habitat through arable land and improved pasture conversion to calcareous grassland in areas with suitable soil type and underlying geology
- Sympathetically manage and restore existing sites, funded primarily through Countryside Stewardship (advice can be provided by The Wildlife Trust). Grazing management is vital to control coarse grasses and scrub.
- Focus efforts on limestone slopes, mineral extraction sites and landfill sites
- Manage calcareous grassland sites to produce a mosaic of vegetation structure and composition to benefit invertebrates. Knowledge of the species present on a site will allow management to be tailored appropriately.

## Targets

1. Maintain the current extent of lowland calcareous grassland priority habitat
2. Achieve favourable condition on 60ha of calcareous grassland by 2020
3. Restore 50ha of lowland calcareous grassland from semi-improved or neglected grassland to LWS-standard by 2020
4. Create 30ha of LWS-standard lowland calcareous grassland from arable, improved grassland, mineral extraction and landfill sites by 2020

## Actions

<b>A.</b>	Maintain existing calcareous grassland resource in nature reserves, country parks & SSSI	Wildlife Trust NCC Natural England
<b>B.</b>	Ensure all calcareous grassland road verges are in a favourable or recovering condition	Wildlife Trust NCC
<b>C.</b>	Through advice and projects ensure up to date surveys of calcareous grassland LWS and bring sites into favourable management	Wildlife Trust
<b>D.</b>	Prioritise areas for calcareous grassland creation and restoration, to maximise buffering and linkage of existing sites as well as overall patch size	Wildlife Trust
<b>E.</b>	Through Section 106 agreements/new developments ensure semi-improved or neglected grassland is restored or created to BAP quality calcareous grassland	Developers Local authorities Wildlife Trust
<b>F.</b>	Restore and achieve condition on neglected grassland to LWS standard calcareous grassland through Countryside Stewardship	Natural England
<b>G.</b>	Identify mineral extraction or landfill sites on which calcareous grassland could be created and initiate the creation process by 2020	NCC Wildlife Trust

## Flagship species



- Dingy skipper
- Grizzled skipper
- Small blue
- Man orchid
- Violet crowncup

## Further information and management advice

- ▶ [Habitat information from the Wildlife Trust](#)
- ▶ [More habitat information from the Wildlife Trust](#)
- ▶ [Further habitat information from Natural England](#)
- ▶ [Flora Locale's management, restoration and creation library](#)
- ▶ [Scrub management advice](#) (from RSPB)
- ▶ [Nature after minerals – grassland creation advice](#) (from RSPB)
- ▶ [Management advice for invertebrates](#) (from Buglife)