

# Lowland heathland

## Current UK status and trends

In England approximately 56,819ha of lowland heathland remains, only one sixth of the heathland present in 1800.

## Estimated current Northamptonshire resource

3ha (Harlestone Firs) and small patches of heather in other locations

## Progress towards BAP targets 2008–2015

No loss of key sites

## Lead partner

Wildlife Trust

## Target areas



## Habitat description



Lowland heathland occurs below 300m altitude on nutrient-poor, free-draining acidic soils where rainfall is below average. Vegetation is characterised by heather, dwarf gorses and cross-leaved heath. Heathland often occurs in a mosaic with acid grassland, wet bog and scrub. Together they form a broadly open landscape of dynamic habitats, undergoing significant changes in different successional stages. These different stages often co-occur within a site. In Northamptonshire heathland includes the NVC community H1.

Lowland heathland is currently found only at Harlestone Firs/Dallington Heath. There may be limited opportunities for some lowland heathland creation alongside acid grassland sites in the Daventry area but suitable soils in Northamptonshire are extremely limited in extent. Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) occurs on a few other Local Wildlife Sites.

Heathland patches must be at least 30ha to be sustainable. This should be the ultimate target for Northamptonshire's only remaining area of heathland at Harlestone Firs.

## Main issues and threats

- Tree and scrub encroachment and the simplification of vegetation structure due to a lack of conservation management such as light grazing or controlled burning
- Fragmentation due to development, e.g. housing and road construction
- Disturbance to and predation on ground nesting birds, reptiles and other fauna from human activity and domestic pets
- Repeated arson
- Conversion to conifer plantations

## General strategy

- Extend and link remnant patches of habitat. Remnant heathland in Northamptonshire is limited to the Harlestone/Dallington Heaths north-west of Northampton. Patches of heathland survive among other conifer plantations, both on the rides and in clear-felled blocks
- Promote heathland formation adjacent to small patches of heather on Local Wildlife Sites and nature reserves

## Targets

1. Maintain the current extent of at least LWS-standard lowland heathland
2. Increase the extent of lowland heathland by creating 10ha of LWS-standard habitat adjacent to existing heathland by 2020

## Actions

<b>A.</b> Maintain the current extent of habitat that classifies as lowland heathland	Wildlife Trust
<b>B.</b> Create areas of heathland where appropriate conditions exist by encouraging landowners to manage existing patches of land with heathland indicators to promote heathland expansion	Wildlife Trust

## Flagship species



- European nightjar
- Small heath
- Heath rustic

## Further information and management advice

- ▶ [Further habitat information from the Wildlife Trust](#)
- ▶ [Further habitat information from Natural England](#)
- ▶ [Flora Locale's management and restoration library](#)
- ▶ [Management advice for invertebrates](#) (from Buglife)