

# Lowland meadow

## Current UK status and trends

Substantial decline: 97% in the last 70 years.  
Estimated England resource is 36,129ha. Good progress in restoration and creation in recent years

## Estimated current Northamptonshire resource

Approximately 693ha

## Progress towards BAP targets 2008–2015

Good progress with 210ha of lowland meadow created and a further 210ha restored

## Lead partner

Wildlife Trust

## Target areas



## Habitat description



Lowland meadows occur on neutral soils, often in river corridors and floodplains. They include most forms of unimproved neutral grassland over the enclosed lowland landscape. This plan includes grasslands cut for hay and unimproved neutral pastures grazed by livestock. The plan focuses on meadows with low-input nutrient regimes, which have a specialist group of scarce and declining plant species. In Northamptonshire lowland meadow includes NVC communities MG4, MG5 and MG8.

**Flood meadows – MG4 grassland.** These are areas which experience periodic inundation in winter, but have good sub-surface drainage and water retentive soils. This allows the water table to fall in spring, supporting species-rich MG4 (great burnet – meadow foxtail) plant communities.

**Hay meadows – MG5 grassland.** This is the typical grassland community of grazed or hay-cut dry meadows of lowland Britain managed in the traditional fashion and supporting species-rich MG5 (common knapweed – crested dog's-tail) plant communities.

**Water meadows – MG8 grassland.** Water meadows can occur naturally but often result from careful water level management; ditch water levels are kept high in summer to prevent either drying out or water-logging of the soil. Such habitats develop species-rich marsh marigold – crested dog's-tail vegetation communities.

## Main issues and threats

- Little remaining in Northamptonshire. Much is located 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 management (e.g. improving soils with nutrients, overgrazing/over mowing, mowing without removing the cuttings)

- Lack of management (e.g. under grazing) leading to nutrient build-up and dominance of a few coarse species

## General strategy

- Undertake survey work and habitat opportunity mapping to identify the current resources and highest priorities for linkage through sympathetic management of degraded sites and establishment of new sites
- Sympathetically manage and restore existing sites, funded primarily through Countryside Stewardship (advice can be provided by The Wildlife Trust). Traditional management (hay cut and aftermath grazing) is vital to control coarse grasses and scrub.
- Direct efforts towards the Nene Valley and other river corridors

## Targets

1. Maintain the current extent of at least LWS-standard lowland meadow
2. Achieve favourable condition on 100ha of lowland meadow by 2020
3. Restore 100ha of lowland meadow from semi-improved or neglected grassland to LWS standard by 2020
4. Create 80ha of LWS-standard lowland meadow from arable or improved grassland by 2020

## Actions

<b>A.</b>	Maintain existing lowland meadow habitat in existing nature reserves, country parks and SSSI	Wildlife Trust NCC Natural England
<b>B.</b>	Ensure all neutral grassland road verges are in a favourable or recovering condition	NCC Wildlife Trust
<b>C.</b>	Through advice and projects ensure up to date surveys of lowland meadow LWS, provide management advice and bring sites into favourable management	Wildlife Trust
<b>D.</b>	Work with landowners to restore and create neutral grassland within the Nene Valley	Wildlife Trust
<b>E.</b>	Through Section 106 agreements/new developments ensure that semi-improved or neglected grassland is restored and created to BAP quality neutral grassland	Developers Local authorities Wildlife Trust
<b>F.</b>	Restore and achieve condition of neglected grassland to LWS standard neutral grassland through Countryside Stewardship	Natural England
<b>G.</b>	Offer advice to churchyard managers to ensure lowland meadow areas are managed and restored	Wildlife Trust
<b>H.</b>	Provide advice resources for meadow owners to encourage and facilitate management of lowland meadows through the Cut & Chew website	Wildlife Trust

## Flagship species



- Brown hare
- Curlew
- Marsh stitchwort
- Skylark
- Yellow wagtail

## Further information and management advice

- ▶ [Further habitat information from Natural England](#)
- ▶ [Flora Locale's management, restoration and creation library](#)
- ▶ [Lowland Grassland Management Handbook](#) (from Natural England)
- ▶ [Conservation grazing advice leaflet](#) (from the Wildlife Trust)
- ▶ [Floodplain Meadows Technical Handbook](#) (from the Floodplain Meadows Partnership)
- ▶ [Habitat management and creation advice](#) (from Emorsgate Seeds)
- ▶ [Management advice for invertebrates](#) (from Buglife)
- ▶ [Management advice for bumblebees](#) (from Bumblebee Conservation Trust)