

Moorland Edge

Our objective for this habitat is:

To retain or restore as appropriate the full diversity and extent of semi-natural habitats typically found between the moorland wall and intensively managed grasslands.



Nidderdale (HBC)

Introduction

Moorland edge habitat is not easily defined, as it describes those habitats that are an intermediate zone between the 'true' heather moorland on the highest ground and the improved grasslands typically situated immediately around a farmstead.

It is likely that this zone of semi-improved habitat has waxed and waned over the years in line with the fortunes of the rural economy. Thus, the moorland edge has probably been derived from primary habitats such as heath, mire and semi-natural woodland. During the last 40 years, the moorland edge has been increasingly squeezed between the moorland wall and the lower, improved grassland.

Moorland edge may comprise unimproved and semi-improved acid grasslands; tall herb and fen; scrub and dry or wet heath. Patches of calcareous or neutral grasslands may also be present amongst the more typical picture of poorly drained, rushy pastures. This is typical of a diverse patchwork that reflects local differences in climate, soil and hydrology as well as management by man.

The encouragement of development of open woodland in bracken areas on moorland edge would probably benefit many wildlife species and also improve the wilder, more natural, aspect of the landscape.

National status

The moorland edge is widespread across the UK uplands, although no figures on extent of this habitat are available.

Regional status

The moorland edge forms extensive tracts around the uplands of the North Pennines, although no figures are available. Much of the moorland edge lies outside the North Pennines SSSI but extensive areas occur within Nidderdale AONB.

Although not a UKBAP habitat, the moorland edge is considered of conservation importance within Harrogate district due to its importance for ground nesting birds.

Local status

The moorland edge habitat occurs in several localities such as Scargill Pasture, Scar House, Longside Moor and Lumley Moor.

Local priority species:

- Black grouse
- Twite
- Snipe
- Lapwing
- Golden plover
- Reed bunting
- Adder
- Skylark
- Curlew
- Redshank
- Linnet
- Merlin
- Grey partridge

Status of priority species

Black grouse - there are currently no permanent black grouse populations in the AONB or in adjacent parts of the national park. It was a scarce breeding bird in upper Nidderdale until 1990. The Yorkshire Dales Fringe area is the key area for Black grouse population expansion in northern England, including Colsterdale and upper Nidderdale (which contains large areas of 'white moor' - an important part of the required habitat matrix. Upper Nidderdale is a target site for recovery of the species through habitat enhancement funded by Environmental Stewardship Schemes and potentially as a translocation site.

Skylark - the UK skylark population fell by 54 per cent between 1970 and 2001.

Twite - is a high priority as good conservation measures are at least partly achievable and understood. UK status fairly stable 1970-1990 but dramatic decline in northern England since then - the population in the southern Pennines is estimated to have decreased by 80 per cent between 1990 and 2000, probably due mostly to the decline in hay meadows which provide an important seed source during chick-rearing.

Twite requirements:

- i. *an abundance of small seeds throughout the year, especially dandelion and sorrel, close to the moorland edge.*

retain or restore upland hay meadows, cut after 15 July, avoid applying fertilizers or herbicides.

maintain or re-introduce arable fodder crops near moorland edge.

retain weedy field margins, road verges etc.

supplementary feeding of small seeds.

- ii. *tall ground vegetation for nesting e.g. small bracken patches or tall heather*

maintain small patches of bracken if necessary, bracken late in season, do not burn.

rotational burning of heather to maintain young tall heather stands (*source <http://www.rspb.org.uk/countryside/farming/advice/birdsonfarms/twite>*)

Linnet - moorland edge with gorse can support substantial populations.

Wading birds (inc. Redshank, Curlew, Snipe, Lapwing). Moorland edge is an important habitat for these wading bird species, especially poorly drained land.

Lapwing - moorland edge is one of the strongholds for this species. It requires short vegetation or bare ground.

Redshank - requires wet ground and a more varied sward structure than lapwing.

Snipe - Mather (2001) states that "it is much less numerous than it was two decades ago". Now confined as a breeding bird to the uplands. It requires wet ground and tall vegetation.

Curlew - needs rough ground and tussocky vegetation.

Golden Plover - moorland edge is important to this species immediately prior to the breeding season.

Requirements

Moorland edge would benefit from the following:

- Retention/creation of a mosaic of scrub/grasslands/heath/wetlands.
- Retention of nutrient poor and poorly drained land.
- Ongoing sympathetic management including grazing at low (extensive) stocking rates and by appropriate breeds of cattle and sheep.
- Other management actions such as burning and scrub control tailored to be sympathetic to flora and fauna.
- Small scale broadleaved woodlands fitted into the landscape e.g. within gills.
- Experiments into the removal of active management and development of succession and 'wildness'.

Threats

- Agricultural and forestry intensification through activities such as drainage, re-seeding of grasslands and removal of native woods.
- Inappropriate management practices such as burning or rolling of grassland during the bird breeding season.
- Poor understanding and implementation of the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations 2006 for uncultivated land and semi natural areas.
- Retention of stock grazing - i.e. economic sustainability of extensive agriculture.
- Retention of/development of skills such as dry stone walling; husbandry of traditional stock breeds.
- Easy access to, and economic availability of, specialised machinery such as cutters/balers for rough grassland; ragwort removal.

Current local action

Yorkshire Dales Black Grouse Group comprises farmers, landowners and representatives of conservation bodies, and has been established to create the right conditions for black grouse to establish leks in areas including Nidderdale. Contact details: Phil Warren, Black Grouse Recovery Project officer, Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust, The Gillett, Forest-in-Teesdale, Barnard Castle, County Durham, DL12 0HA. Tel: 01833 622208, Email: pwarren@gct.org.uk

Nidderdale AONB Wader Surveys - a six year project (2008-13) to identify changes in breeding wader populations on farmland across the AONB, to inform Environmental Stewardship targeting and options.

Opportunities

- Apply the management prescriptions from the DEFRA Environmental Stewardship Scheme (ESS) to maintain and restore Moorland edge habitats.
- Develop a machinery ring and make greater use of the Grazing Animals Project (GAP) Scheme.
- Support and guide development of environmental stewardship conditions attached to hill farming monies.



LINKS WITH OTHER PLANS:

Blanket bog HAP
Upland heathland HAP
Woodland HAP

Upper Nidderdale (HBC)

This is not a UK BAP Priority habitat

Black grouse SAP http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/_speciespages/596.pdf

Technical Note: Lowland Dry Acid Grassland UK HAP definition <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-5706>

"Covers all acid grassland (normally below c. 300m) managed in functional enclosures. Swards in old and non-functional enclosures in the upland fringes, which are managed as free-range rough grazing in association with unenclosed tracts of upland, are excluded. However, stands remote from the upland fringe are the primary focus of conservation attention".

Dry grassland at around 250-300 m as occurs around Dallowgill Moor is sometimes classified 'Lowland Dry Acid Grassland' in national inventories but for the purposes of Harrogate District BAP would be considered as 'Moorland Edge Habitat'.