

MENDIP PURPLE MOOR GRASS & RUSH PASTURE HABITAT ACTION PLAN



Action plan name

Mendip Purple Moor Grass & Rush Pasture

Background and vision

A unique feature of the Mendip Hills is the range of grassland types and heathland that occur in close proximity. Alongside dry acid grassland and Heathland, the damper areas of the more acid soils support areas of purple moor grass. An example of this is the area of Priddy Mineries.

There are also some areas of Purple Moor Grass and Rush Pasture within the Somerset Levels and Moors in Mendip and on spring lines on the Greensand running along the base of the Penselwood Scarp in the East of the District.

Devil's-bit Scabious can be found in this habitat, and in the Mendips this plant supports populations of Marsh Fritillary, a rapidly declining butterfly as well as Narrow-bordered Bee Hawkmoth.

While the above characteristics are found across the Mendip Hills, this Biodiversity Action plan and its targets relate to the part within Mendip District only.

LBAP action in Mendip District is aimed at meeting landscape scale targets set out in the 'Rebuilding Biodiversity/Nature' methodology, concentrating efforts on 'Strategic Nature Areas' as shown in the Regional Spatial Strategy.

Rebuilding Biodiversity/Nature Map targets within Strategic Nature Areas will be met through a combination of measures:

- Increasing the average patch size of Priority Habitat Types
- Increasing the average patch size of Priority Habitat Type managed sympathetically
- Decreasing the distance between Priority Habitat Type patches
- Ensuring that Priority Habitat Type patches cover a range of altitudes and aspects to enable a wide range of conditions to be met
- Increasing the connectivity between Priority Habitat Type patches by sympathetic management of linear features as biodiversity corridors

Towards the East of the District, the Rebuilding Biodiversity process has targeted two Strategic Nature Areas for Purple Moor Grass and Rush Pasture. Although there is little existing mapped Rush Pasture in these Strategic Nature Areas, aerial photo habitat mapping has shown the habitat likely to be present.

Plan species and habitats

Species

This habitat is important for adders on hills in the Mendip District. Rush pasture in the East of the District can support Devil's Bit Scabious, the foodplant of the rapidly declining Marsh Fritillary Butterfly.

Habitats

On hills in the Mendip District this habitat is closely associated with Lowland Dry Acid Grassland and Heathland
Lowland meadow
Coastal and Floodplain grazing Marsh

Habitat status

Purple Moor grass and Rush pasture is a UK BAP Priority Habitat. Lowland Acid Grassland is also likely to benefit from this HAP. Priddy Mineries SSSIs with grassland in Mendip District and several of these form part of the North Somerset and Mendip Bats Special Area of Conservation.

Specific impacts/threats

- **Agricultural improvement** – drainage, lime applications, ploughing and re-seeding, particularly on the Mendip plateau. Fertiliser and slurry application.
- **Scrub invasion** - following lack of grazing.
- **Lack of grazing** – as well as contributing to scrub spread, lack of grazing leads to species –rich grasslands becoming denser and coarser. Small plants are out-competed leading to a loss of biodiversity.
- **Climate change** - could threaten this habitat.
- **High levels of aerial nitrogen deposition** - could lead to loss of botanical richness due to nutrient enrichment.
- **Afforestation on areas of this habitat** - both commercial forestry and to new grant-aided woodland planting. Fortunately in Somerset the Forestry Commission currently has well trained staff who can recognise semi-natural habitats and avoid grant aiding planting on them and new commercial planting is subject to Environmental Impact Regulations. However, afforestation remains a potential threat.

Proposed Partners

Mendip District Council (MDC)
Mendip Area of Natural Beauty (MAONB)
Somerset Wildlife Trust (SWT)
Natural England (NE)
Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG)
Forestry Commission (FC)
Private Landowners
Quarrying Companies
Waldegrave Estates

Current action

- Mendip Living Landscapes Project
- SWT Reserve Management
- National Trust Reserve Management
- Countryside Stewardship and Wildlife Enhancement Scheme Funding
- Management on SSSIs to achieve favourable management status by 2010
- AONB work

Target description and target goals

1. To maintain existing extent and quality of Purple Moor Grass and Rush Pasture
Goal: 44 ha by 2011 in Mendip District
2. Initiate and carry out work to restore or re-create Purple Moorgrass and Rush Pasture within SNAs.
Goal: 21 ha by 2011

Key factors

- New Project Landscape Scale project work for areas outside the Mendip Hills AONB
- Availability of HLS funding to achieve habitat restoration goals
- Successful Partnership working
- It may be necessary to revise Strategic Natural Area boundaries to ensure that these reflect the most realistic areas for achieving Rebuilding biodiversity/Nature Map boundaries
- The whole of Mendip District already has an aerial photo baseline Habitat Survey that will enable facilitate targeting and monitoring outcomes.