

LOWLAND DRY ACID GRASSLAND

An uncommon habitat, often important for reptiles, that occurs in areas that may once have been lowland heath.

UK Priority Habitats covered by this statement:

[Lowland dry acid grassland](#)

Cumbria Biodiversity Action Plan habitats covered by this statement:

None

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Wan Fell © Stephen Hewitt

Description

Lowland dry acid grassland is associated with windblown and glacial deposits of sand, and thin base-poor soils over acid rocks. These soils are almost always free-draining and summer parched. This habitat is mainly restricted to land below 300m. These grasslands on coastal dune systems are covered by the *coastal habitats above high water* habitat statement.

The vegetation of lowland dry acid grassland is characterised by species such as Sheep's Fescue, Wavy Hair-grass, Heath-grass, Tormentil, Heath Bedstraw and Sheep's Sorrel. The habitat is typically species-poor but localised patches can be more diverse and include species such as Harebell, Common Bird's-foot-trefoil, Betony, Mouse-ear Hawkweed and Sheep's-bit. This habitat commonly forms mosaics with lowland heath.

Lowland acid grassland is important for invertebrates, reptiles and fungi and supports breeding populations of ground-nesting birds such as Skylark.

Distribution and Extent

Lowland dry acid grassland is a rare habitat in Cumbria and is generally only found as small areas on thin dry soils on a variety of rock types in the lowlands. Examples are found on the rocky outcrops on the low hills of slates and shales in south Cumbria, on wind-blown sands on limestones around Morecambe Bay, on sand deposits and sandstones around Penrith, Carlisle, Brampton and Aspatria and on coastal sand-dunes along the west coast.

Conservation Issues

Agricultural intensification and inappropriate management, for example over or under grazing, or a complete absence of grazing are the main threats to this habitat, together with the problems associated with a highly fragmented habitat which tends to be present in isolated small areas.

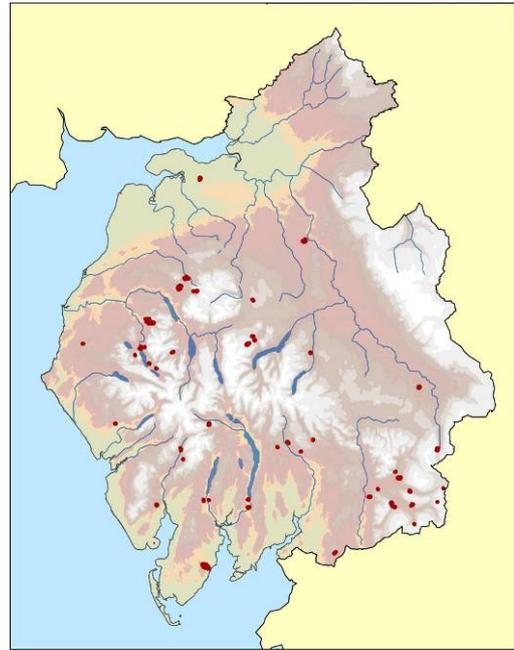
Developments can also present a significant threat to the habitat as even the loss of small fragments of this habitat can be locally or even regionally significant.

Areas of lowland dry acid grassland are easily dismissed as rough ground of little value suitable for trees planting schemes or developments.

Recreational pressure, including activities such as dirt-biking and mountain biking, can result in loss of vegetation cover and erosion on fragile sandy soils.

Planning Considerations

- PPS9 states that local authorities should conserve important natural habitat types (priority habitats and habitats of principal importance in England), and identify opportunities to enhance and add to them.
- Any development that may impact upon this grassland habitat, or its species interests, would require an assessment of the likely effects on the habitat/species and, as necessary, appropriate protection and mitigation measures.
- Developments, including sand quarries, road schemes, housing and industrial developments, can result in significant losses of lowland dry acid grassland, though in some instances they may also present opportunities for the creation of areas of this habitat.
- It is possible that areas of lowland dry acid grassland may be wrongly considered as rough ground suitable for landscape planting in conjunction with developments.
- The majority of lowland dry acid grassland lies outside the SSSI system.



*Distribution of lowland acid grassland in Cumbria
(provided for illustrative purposes only)*

Enhancement Opportunities

- If soil nutrient levels are low and there is an available seed source new areas of lowland acid grassland can be established via natural seeding as part of developments to complement existing areas of this habitat.
- Sand extraction sites are most likely to provide suitable habitat for establishment of this habitat provided areas are identified within the agreed restoration plans, and they are in locations that cannot easily be agriculturally improved.
- Biodiversity Management and Enhancement Plans can be used for longer term developments, for the lifetime of the development.

Habitat Targets

- Habitat targets for Cumbria can be found in a separate document “Habitat Targets, Planning Considerations and Enhancement Opportunities” available from www.lakelandwildlife.co.uk or by clicking [here](#)

Key Species

The following Key Species could benefit from enhancement of this habitat, or be negatively impacted upon by inappropriate developments on or near this habitat:

Pink Waxcap	Adder	Curlew
Date-coloured Waxcap	Viviparous (Common) Lizard	Lapwing
Big Blue Pinkgill (a fungus)	Slow-worm	Brown Hare
Great Crested Newt	Skylark	

Further Information

[UK BAP lowland dry acid grassland](#)

[Habitats of principal importance in England](#) Section 41 NERC Act list

[Buglife: habitat management advice: lowland dry acid grassland](#)

[Natural England lowland grassland management handbook](#)

[Environmental Stewardship](#) and [HLS handbook](#)

Contacts

- **Natural England**, Juniper House, Murley Moss, Oxenholme Rd, Kendal, Cumbria, LA9 7RL, Tel: 0300 060 2122, cumbriaplanning@naturalengland.org.uk
- **Cumbria Wildlife Trust**, Tel: 01539 816300, mail@cumbriawildlifetrust.or.uk

Current Action in Cumbria

- The Environmental Stewardship Scheme run by Natural England provides financial incentives to manage land in a way that is sympathetic to its nature conservation interest with grassland options applicable to this habitat.