

HAY MEADOWS AND PASTURES

These are flower-rich grasslands that need traditional cutting and/or grazing to maintain their species diversity and prevent scrub colonisation. Also found on some roadside verges, churchyards and other public land.

UK Priority Habitats covered by this statement:

Lowland meadows
Upland hay meadows

Cumbria Biodiversity Action Plan habitats covered by this statement:

Hay meadows and lowland pastures

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Hartside © Stephen Hewitt

Description

Hay meadows and pastures include the unimproved flower-rich neutral grasslands of enclosed lowland and upland landscapes of Cumbria. These habitats are not restricted to grasslands cut for hay, but also take into account unimproved neutral pastures where livestock grazing is the main land use.

In non-agricultural settings, such grasslands are less frequent but found in recreational sites, churchyards, roadside verges and a variety of other localities.

Unimproved or flower-rich seasonally inundated grasslands are included, but more intensively managed, grass-dominated seasonally inundated grasslands are covered by the coastal and floodplain grazing marsh habitat. Coastal grasslands and purple moor-grass and rush pastures are not included.

Unimproved grasslands can be distinguished from agriculturally improved grasslands by their abundance and variety of flowers. Characteristic species include Wood Crane's-bill, Pignut, Great Burnet, lady's-mantles, Common Knapweed, hawkbits, Ox-eye Daisy, Meadow Vetchling, Yellow Rattle and orchids. Flood pastures and flushed areas may also include species such as Marsh Marigold, Globeflower, Water Avens and Bird's-eye Primrose. Another feature of unimproved

grassland is that generally no single grass species is consistently dominant in the sward, unlike in improved grasslands. Improved grasslands are characteristically bright green, whereas unimproved grassland is generally more subdued in colour.

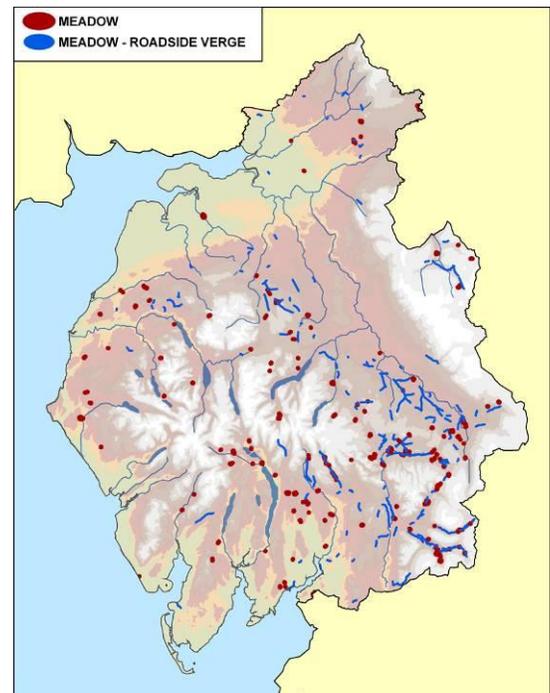
Meadows in Cumbria can support a number of uncommon and rare species, including eyebrights, Melancholy Thistle and Spignel. Upland meadows can provide nest sites for birds such as Yellow Wagtail and Curlew. Meadows provide an important food source for many insects that feed on the nectar of flowers, including bumblebees and butterflies.

Distribution and Extent

Species-rich hay meadows are extremely rare in the UK and there are less than 500ha in Cumbria.

Upland hay meadows are restricted to upland valleys generally above 200m. The most important centres are around Tebay, Orton, Ravenstonedale and Sedbergh/Dent area, but they are also found throughout the Lake District and North Pennines to the Scottish border. Lowland hay meadows and pastures include both dry and seasonally flooded grassland and these are found in the Eden Valley, Cumbria coastal plain and the lower valleys of the Lake District. Species-rich roadside verges may be found throughout Cumbria, but the greatest concentrations are in the Sedbergh/Dent area, between Penrith and Caldbeck, on the southern slopes of the Eden Valley between Morland and Kirkby Stephen, and around Alston.

Examples of meadows can be seen at Gowk Bank, Sandybeck Meadow and High Leys National Nature Reserves and Augill Pasture Cumbria Wildlife Trust Reserve.



Conservation Issues

Appropriate agricultural management is vital to the maintenance of meadows and pastures. Changes in grazing regime, including a change in stock type and increases in stocking level, timing of cutting and levels and types of fertiliser input can all result in decreases in biodiversity, as can cessation of traditional management practices, especially grazing, on agriculturally marginal land. Agricultural improvement, including application of artificial fertilisers, drainage and conversion to silage making, results in loss of species and change to commoner, species-poor, plant communities.

Tree planting schemes are inappropriate on species-rich examples of this habitat.

Development, including industrial and housing developments threaten this habitat, particularly where examples lie on the urban fringe.

Roadside verges may be damaged by the laying of pipelines and cables, road widening or improvement works, vehicles mounting verges to allow passing and parking, by the mowing regime, such as letting cuttings lie and inappropriate timing, and by lack of management which allows scrub to develop.

Planning Considerations

- 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.
- Many developments can impact upon this habitat to cause direct habitat loss and increasing isolation and fragmentation. Infrastructure schemes such as new roads, bypasses and pipelines, and other developments such as quarries and waste disposal sites may have an impact.
- Small scale developments such as barn conversions may impact upon meadows though land take for gardens and new access roads.
- Roadside verges may be impacted by any planning application which includes changes to the road network, including new access roads linking to the highway network, new junction layouts and localised road widening schemes. Also damage to roadside verges can occur during the construction phase of a development by parking and storage of materials on the verges.
- Mitigation proposals to translocate or recreate this habitat are unlikely to result in a habitat of equivalent quality, with loss of much of the ecological interest associated with the original habitat, such as the invertebrate interest.
- Most of the best meadows in Cumbria are SSSIs and many are SACs, however a large number of high quality grasslands lie outside the SSSI system, particularly roadside verges. Many of these grasslands are designated as County Wildlife Sites and Special Roadside Verges.

Enhancement Opportunities

- Whilst flower-rich grassland creation cannot replace the original habitat there are sometimes opportunities within a development for grassland habitat similar to that found on many roadside verges to be created and sympathetically managed.
- Meadows and pastures require the continuation of the agricultural management which created them (traditional grazing and cutting, no fertiliser application). Opportunities for habitat management should be taken where possible, using planning obligations where developments have had a significant impact upon such species-rich grasslands.

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	Grass Snake	Lapwing
Date-coloured Waxcap	Skylark	Barn Owl
Big Blue Pinkgill (a fungus)	Linnet	Brown Hare
Northern Hawk's-beard	Yellowhammer	Brandt's Bat
Lesser Butterfly Orchid	Yellow Wagtail	Whiskered Bat
Small White Orchid	Curlew	Noctule bat
Wall butterfly	Grey Partridge	Common Pipistrelle
Slow-Worm	Black Grouse	Soprano Pipistrelle

Further Information

[Countryside Stewardship Scheme](#)

[Buglife-managing for Invertebrates](#)

[Flora Locale grassland creation and restoration](#)

[Cumbria County Council and Cumbria Wildlife Trust roadside verge leaflet](#)

[Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust Hay Time](#)

[Planning and Development- Protected Sites and Species](#)

[Cumbria Wildlife Trust- Hay Meadow Information](#)

Contacts

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- **Cumbria Wildlife Trust**, 01539 816300 Email: mail@cumbriawildlifetrust.org.uk
- **Cumbria Meadow Network**. cumbriameadowsnetwork@outlook.com

Current Action in Cumbria

- Cumbria Wildlife Trusts Meadow life Project ran from April 2013 to October 2016. Trained volunteers identified suitable sites and then working with landowners enhanced, and restored sites and set up traditional management regimes. In April 2016 The Cumbria Meadow Network was set up to facilitate continued cooperation and sharing of knowledge.
- Cumbria County Council in partnership with English Nature, Cumbria Wildlife Trust, the Lake District National Park and Plantlife, have carried out a survey and evaluation of all roadside verges in the County and now carry out cutting regimes that reflect the importance of roadside verges for their flora and fauna.
- The Countryside Stewardship Scheme run by Natural England provides financial incentives to manage land in a way that is sympathetic to its nature conservation interest with specific hay meadow and grassland options applicable to this habitat.