

Wet Grassland Habitat Action Plan

1. Introduction

Wet grassland was included within the UK BAP habitat Coastal Floodplain and Grazing Marsh, which was subsequently listed within Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006. It supports many important species some of which are rare and/or declining. An estimated 40% of the UK's wet grassland was lost between the 1930s and the 1980s.

As a lowland county with significant river valleys Worcestershire has extensive extant and remnant wet grassland but what remains is very vulnerable to loss. The level of historic habitat loss seen at a national level is very likely to be mirrored in Worcestershire.

2. Current status

2.1 Description of habitat

UK wet grasslands provide valuable habitat for a range of native plants and animals. They develop on land which is periodically flooded or waterlogged by freshwater and where land management practices (cutting for hay, grazing) promote swards dominated by short grasses, rushes and sedges. They are not dominated by reeds. Semi-natural floodplain grassland occurs where floodplains are subject to semi-

The Water Framework Directive (2000) requires improvements to the ecological quality of water bodies, flood and drought attenuation and restoration of groundwater.

Development pressure – developers lack awareness of the value and sensitivity of potential development sites.

Weakness in information distribution between relevant bodies and individuals.

Inconsistency in availability of grant funding that can encourage better long-term management of existing sites and help financially with restoration and creation projects.

Poor economic incentive for landowners. More advice and real outcomes are required to encourage activities such as local branding.

Sand and gravel extraction within floodplains.

Leisure and recreational uses of the riverbank environs e.g. caravan parks, angling club infrastructure.

4. Current Action

4.1 Local protection

SSSI designations are used to protect some of the most valuable sites within the county. LWS are non-statutory but help identify valuable sites that receive protection within local planning policy.

4.2 Habitat management and programmes of action

Hill Court Farm is one of Worcestershire Wildlife Trust's flagship reserves consisting of 120 ha of wet grassland and hay meadow. The site is at the core of efforts to restore parts of the Longdon and Eldersfield Marshes. A reservoir and series of ditches maintains a high water table across the northern half of the site to benefit breeding and overwintering birds. Restoration work began in 2004 and the site is being monitored to track changes in botanical community and record species utilising the site.

Worcestershire Wildlife Trust has managed the Hardwick Green Meadows reserve since 2016. The 20 ha floodplain meadow is being managed with an annual regime of hay cutting and aftermath grazing.

The Vale Landscape Heritage Trust manages just over 40 ha of floodplain meadow along the River Avon. The ditches and scrapes at the Lower Moor Water Meadows provide important habitat for wetland birds whilst Haines Meadow and Gore Meadow are cut for hay.

The Catchment Based Approach is being employed in a number of river and tributary catchments across Worcestershire. This approach embeds collaborative working within a multi-sector partnership, to deliver improvements to the water environment at a river catchment scale. CaBA partnerships are operational within the Severn Vale, Warwickshire Avon, Middle Severn and the Teme.

Many of the larger extant areas of wet grassland, particularly within the Severn and Avon Vales, have been restored and are being managed with the support of agri-environment payments.

4.3 Survey, research and monitoring

