

Upland calcareous grassland

WHAT IS UPLAND CALCAREOUS GRASSLAND ?

Upland calcareous grasslands are areas of permanent grassland above 250m, which have developed on the thin soils of the carboniferous limestone. The high pH of the soil results in grasslands that are dominated by lime loving plants, and are normally floristically rich. Upland calcareous grasslands are mostly used as permanent pastures, principally for sheep.

The harsh climate of the uplands, and the short growing season, combines with the continual grazing pressure to produce a short sward which is rich in species. This includes: blue moor-grass, sheep's fescue, quaking-grass, wild thyme, common rock-rose, limestone bedstraw, eyebrights, fairy flax, tormentil, glaucous sedge and autumn gentian.

Within the range of upland calcareous grasslands is a specialised and limited form known as Sugar Limestone, which occurs where the carboniferous deposits have been baked by a volcanic intrusion of Dolerite, known as the Whin Sill. A sugar-like marble results which is very rich in lime. This, combined with the high rainfall and low annual temperatures, enables this grassland to support a unique flora including spring gentian, Teesdale violet, hoary rock-rose, horseshoe vetch, hoary whitlowgrass, false sedge, bird's-eye primrose, blue moor-grass, dark-red helleborine, alpine bistort, mountain avens, spring sandwort, hair sedge, bitter milkwort, and alpine cinquefoil.

WHERE IS IT FOUND IN THE UK?

Upland calcareous grassland is distributed across the uplands of England, Wales and Scotland but its strongholds are in Cumbria and the Yorkshire Dales.

WHY IS UPLAND CALCAREOUS GRASSLAND OF CONSERVATION IMPORTANCE?

Many of the plants found have limited distribution and specific habitat requirements. Although most of the species are found in other habitats, upland calcareous grassland provides the only conditions where they all occur in such close proximity and numbers.

UPLAND CALCAREOUS GRASSLAND IN THE DURHAM AREA

WHAT IS THE STATE OF UPLAND CALCAREOUS GRASSLAND IN THE DURHAM AREA?

There are 344 ha of upland calcareous grassland designated as SSSI, this represents 95 % of the resource. Many of these are also part of cSAC in Upper Teesdale.

WHERE DOES IT OCCUR IN THE DURHAM AREA ?

Upland calcareous grassland occurs mainly in Teesdale, with limited amounts in Weardale. Sugar limestone occurs in Upper Teesdale.

UPLAND CALCAREOUS GRASSLAND IS AT RISK FROM:

Over-grazing.

Under-grazing.

Foddering/supplementary feeding, causing localised damage and enrichment.

Agricultural intensification including fertiliser application, herbicide use, ploughing and re-seeding.

UPLAND CALCAREOUS GRASSLAND BENEFITS FROM:

Maintaining low levels of grazing, particularly by sheep.

Seasonal controlled grazing which enhances flowering and seed production.

IMPORTANT SPECIES FOR UPLAND CALCAREOUS GRASSLAND

<i>Lapwing</i>	*	<i>Spring gentian</i>	**
<i>Skylark</i>	**	<i>Alpine bartsia</i>	
<i>Fungi e.g. wax caps</i>		<i>(plus other listed species)</i>	
<i>Alpine forget-me-not</i>			
<i>Teesdale sandwort</i>			

OTHER HABITAT ACTION PLANS COVERING ISSUES RELEVANT TO UPLAND CALCAREOUS GRASS-

<i>Magnesian limestone grassland</i>	**
<i>Upland hay meadows</i>	*
<i>Upland heathland & blanket bog</i>	*

N.B. ** indicates action plan produced in 1998.

* indicates action plan produced in 2000.

TARGETS FOR THE CONSERVATION OF UPLAND CALCAREOUS GRASSLANDS IN THE DURHAM AREA:

	DATE
<i>Target 1 Maintain and enhance the current resource of species rich upland calcareous grassland.</i>	ONGOING
<i>Target 2 Restore 5 ha of degraded undesignated upland calcareous grasslands.</i>	2004
<i>Target 3 Restore 90% of county's resource of undesignated upland calcareous grasslands.</i>	2010

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UPLAND CALCAREOUS GRASSLAND ACTIONS			
ACTION	DATE	POSSIBLE PARTNERS	MEETS TARGET NO.
<u>POLICY AND LEGISLATION</u>			
1. Ensure that all prime upland calcareous sites are designated as SSSIs.	2004	EN	1
2. Ensure that the Countryside Stewardship scheme is effective for both management and enhancement of upland calcareous grassland.	2005	MAFF, EN, DBAP	1, 2
3. Work at national policy level to reduce overgrazing in the uplands.	ONGOING	MAFF, EN, RSPB	1, 2
4. Seek support for small scale upland farms.	ONGOING	MAFF, EN, RSPB	1, 2
<u>SITE SAFEGUARD AND MANAGEMENT</u>			
5. Ensure positive management for all designated sites.	2004	EN, MAFF	1
6. Identify degraded sites and look for opportunities for positive management.	2005	EN, MAFF, FWAG	2
<u>RESEARCH AND MONITORING</u>			
7. Instigate research and monitoring programme for upland calcareous grasslands.	2004	EN, DBAP, Universities.	1, 2