

HABITAT ACTION PLAN FOR LOWLAND HEATHLAND

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HABITAT DEFINITION

Lowland heathland is a broadly open landscape formed on impoverished, acidic mineral and shallow peat soil, characterised by the presence of ericaceous species and is generally found below 300m in altitude. Nottinghamshire heathlands are covered by the National Vegetation Classification communities H1, H2, H3 and H9 and are found on the acid soils of Sherwood and the East Nottinghamshire Sandlands (Coversands) areas. They are generally of a 'grass heath' type, with ling *Calluna vulgaris* and bell heather *Erica cinerea* interspersed with fine grasses such as wavy hair-grass *Deschampsia flexuosa* and sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina*. In terms of distinguishing between lowland heathland and lowland dry acid grassland, less than 25% dwarf shrub cover should be assessed as acid grassland, over 25% as heathland.

Scattered and clumped scrub and trees consisting of shrubs such as gorse *Ulex europeus* and broom *Cytisus scoparius*, and silver birch *Betula pendula* and oak *Quercus petraea* and *Q. robur* (and their hybrids) are also characteristic of the Nottinghamshire heaths, along with stands of bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and areas of bare ground, all of which contribute positively to the structural diversity of the habitat. In addition to 'dry heath', there are also small, highly fragmented areas of 'wet heath' found in the county, characterised by the presence of cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix*, and several species of *Sphagnum sp.*

Heathland in Nottinghamshire provides an important habitat for breeding and foraging as woodlark *Lullula arborea* and nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* both species of European importance, and also hosts important numbers of tree pipit *Anthus trivialis*. Heathlands support important invertebrates including green tiger beetle *Cicindela campestris* and ling pug moth *Eupithecia goossensiata* and also provide good habitat for common lizards *Lacerta vivipara*. Notable plants found on Nottinghamshire's heathlands include petty whin *Genista anglica*, dwarf gorse *Ulex minor* and glandular eyebright *Euphrasia anglica*.

CURRENT STATUS

Lowland heathland is an internationally rare and threatened habitat, identified as a priority under European law. Britain supports one fifth of the world's lowland heathland,

despite a decline of 75% of the national resource since 1800. Figures from the latest UKBAP reporting round (in 2008) indicate that the UK has some 95,000 ha of heathland. The most recent best estimate for heathland extent in England is 57,000 hectares (this figure has been taken from the Heathland Extent and Potential (HEaP) maps produced in 2008 by the RSPB).

In Nottinghamshire, around 90% of the heathland resource heathland has been lost since 1922, and in 1998 (when this HAP was first published) only about 250ha remained within the County (0.4% of the total UK area). Wet heathland has been lost disproportionately, and so the remaining fragments represent an even more substantially diminished resource.

As a result of considerable effort, some progress has been made in recent years in halting the losses of heathland, particularly to development and agriculture, and in re-creating some areas and managing others more effectively. It is therefore the case that the current resource of heathland is approximately 460ha, with the distribution shown in Annex 1.

THREATS

The main factors currently affecting Nottinghamshire's lowland heathland are:

- Encroachment of bracken, trees and scrub, and the loss of species diversity due to a lack of traditional management such as light grazing, controlled burning and cutting.
- Fragmentation and disturbance from development such as mineral extraction, housing expansion and road construction.
- Conversion to forestry or agriculture (mainly historical).
- Recreational pressure, which can lead to erosion, fires, and disturbance of both sensitive indigenous species such as nightjar, and also livestock being utilised for conservation grazing.
- Loss of ericaceous shrubs to over-grazing, on some sites.
- Air pollution, in particular soil enrichment due to nitrogen deposition.
- Lack of incentives for private landowners to manage small heathland areas to maintain their important characteristics, especially combining nature conservation with other management objectives.
- Indirect impacts of development and agriculture, such as changes to drainage regimes, which can significantly affect wet heath.

CURRENT INITIATIVES - EXAMPLES

- A national Habitat Action Plan for Lowland Heathland has been published.

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- Many private landowners manage areas of heathland, and have a vital part to play in its conservation.
- The Nottinghamshire Heathland Strategy establishes a framework for the conservation of heathland in the County and is delivered by several partners.
- The Nottinghamshire Lowland Heathland Inventory was published in 1995 by the RSPB and English Nature, followed by a more detailed Heathland Register, produced by NE and NCC and basic digital mapping of the resource in 2004. This is currently being updated by the partners in the Sherwood Habitats Strategy Group with new mapping, and the addition of detail on associated faunal groups, which will be used to develop a more detailed opportunity map for heathland re-creation and restoration.
- A Heathland Re-creation Plan for the County was published in 1997.
- The Forestry Commission will not seek further afforestation of existing heathland in the county. The Forestry Commission have restored and are managing approximately 80 ha of heathland habitat in Nottinghamshire.
- 130ha+ of heathland will be created by 2015 at Rufford, Thoresby and Clipstone Collieries by UK Coal. Over 30ha has been created so far.
- Part of the Sherwood heathland complex at Birklands and Bilhaugh is protected as an SAC.
- Work is ongoing to assess the suitability of parts of Sherwood as an archipelago SPA for nightjar and woodlark, both species that are closely associated with the Sherwood heaths.
- The majority of the best existing heathland areas are within Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), notified by Natural England, who work with landowners to try and secure appropriate management.
- Many heaths are Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC), which offers some protection from built development.
- The EIA (uncultivated land) Regulations offer some protection from agricultural “improvement” of heaths.
- The Sherwood Habitats Forum members are working together to address heathland management and re-creation issues, sharing best practice and resources where possible.
- Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust manages over 40ha of heathland in its Nature Reserves on the Sherwood sandstone and the blown sands in the East of the County.
- BTCV is involved in heathland management at a variety of sites.
- The National Trust manage approximately 21ha of lowland heathland at Clumber Park, and have undertaken heathland re-creation.

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- Sherwood Heath, managed by Newark and Sherwood District Council, is a Local Nature Reserve (LNR).
- Mansfield District Council (Oak Tree Heath), Natural England (Clipstone Heath), and Sherwood Forest Golf Club all manage heathland sites for nature conservation.
- The Sherwood Forest Trust has delivered approximately 90ha of heathland management and creation through its Sustainable Landscapes Grant Scheme.
- The Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust runs a flying flock of sheep and cattle that are used for conservation grazing of heathlands and are used by a range of partners for management of their sites. Recently the FC has trialled the use of ponies for conservation grazing in conjunction with NWT.
- The Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust, NCC, FC and other partners have a shared vision for the landscape-scale recreation and restoration of heathland habitats in the Rufford/Rainworth area.
- The Mineral Planning Authority works closely with mineral operators and consultees to ensure that mineral sites in the area are restored to heathland wherever suitable substrate is available.
- There are plans to develop a Regional Park for Sherwood Forest, which will help to provide additional incentives for habitat creation and management, bring partners together in valuing the habitats of the area and hopefully attract funding for landscape-scale habitat reconstruction.

TARGETS

The targets set for Lowland Heath are as follows (see Lowland dry acid grassland for further details):

Target Type	Target Text	Units	2005 Baseline	2010 Target	2015 Target
Maintain Extent	Maintain the extent of all existing lowland heathland.	Ha	750	750	1750
Achieve Condition	Maintain and improve by management existing lowland heathland.	Ha	338 (45%, existing habitat in favourable condition)	600 (80% of total habitat resource)	750 (100% of 2005 baseline resource)
Restoration	Improve the condition of relict habitat so that it qualifies as Lowland heathland.	Ha		500	500
Expansion	Encourage the re-establishment and increase the area of heathland.	Ha			

(N.B. these figures will be updated as new targets are set during 2011)

PROPOSED ACTION

Policy and legislation

1. Ensure the incorporation of relevant (inter-)national law, policies and guidance into all plans and policies relating to the protection, enhancement and management of lowland heathland habitat.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

2. Through planning control or other land use consultation processes, allow no further loss of areas of lowland heathland habitat and seek opportunities to enhance existing areas and create new areas through approved development.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

3. Ensure agri-environment, forestry and other funding schemes include appropriate management options and design measures to suit local nature conservation needs.

ACTION: Government Agencies, NGOs

Site safeguard and management

4. Review the extent of SSSI coverage of heathland habitat and consider notifying further sites as necessary.

ACTION: Government Agencies.

5. Designate SINCs and declare Local Nature Reserves on appropriate areas of habitat or instigate other appropriate measures for their protection.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

6. Promote the uptake of positive management with owners of SSSIs, LNRs, SINCs and any other areas of lowland heathland habitat.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

7. Carry out appropriate habitat management on sites controlled by BAP partners.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

8. Ensure sites containing lowland heathland habitat have appropriate management plans that are working towards improving site management and condition

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

9. Acquire land to ensure good habitat management or to create habitat, particularly where this will buffer existing sites and reduce fragmentation between heathland sites and other complementary habitats.

ACTION: NGO's.

Ensure that suitable mineral sites are restored to heathland through the planning system.

ACTION: NCC, Government Agencies, NGO.

Advisory

10. Provide formal or informal training in management techniques for lowland heathland habitat to land managers, site wardens, volunteers, etc.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

11. Establish demonstration sites or projects to demonstrate/publicise good habitat management techniques.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

Future research and monitoring

12. Establish and maintain a monitoring programme (a site register) to determine progress towards county HAP targets.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

13. Ensure that areas of lowland heathland habitat are periodically resurveyed to establish extent and condition. Update resulting habitat inventory every 5 years and revise targets and HAPs if necessary.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

Communications and publicity

14. Improve public awareness and appreciation of lowland heathland habitat by providing appropriate interpretation, education and access (where appropriate).

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

15. Improve awareness of the value of, and appropriate management techniques for lowland heathland habitat among site owners and occupiers.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Volunteer as a warden on a heathland site.
- If you own a heathland and are unsure how to manage it for conservation, you can seek advice from a range of sources including the Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust, the Sherwood Forest Trust, the RSPB and the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group. They may be able to help you access grants for some of the work.

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- Be vigilant for planning applications that may affect heathland sites and let NWT or NCC know of your concerns.
- When walking on a heath, make a note of the plants and animals you see, and send your records to the Nottinghamshire Biological and Geological Records Centre at Wollaton Hall. Expert knowledge is not required, but you may also be able to find out about species identification training from the NGO partners in the BAG.
- Join a wildlife conservation NGO that works to protect and conserve heathlands.

SPECIES LIST

The following are examples of Species of Conservation Concern (Appendix A) which are likely to benefit from this action plan:

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|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| ➤ Adder | <i>Vipera berus</i> |
| ➤ Common lizard | <i>Lacerta vivipara</i> |
| ➤ Nightjar | <i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i> |
| ➤ Tree pipit | <i>Anthus trivialis</i> |
| ➤ Woodlark | <i>Lullula arborea</i> |
| ➤ Common toad | <i>Bufo bufo</i> |
| ➤ Slow worm | <i>Anguis fragilis</i> |
| ➤ Common ground hopper | <i>Tetrix undulata</i> |
| ➤ Annulet moth | <i>Gnophos obscurata</i> |
| ➤ Anomalous moth | <i>Stilbia anomala</i> |
| ➤ Beautiful brocade moth | <i>Lacanobia contigua</i> |
| ➤ Clouded buff moth | <i>Diacrisia sannio</i> |
| ➤ Grass wave moth | <i>Perconia strigillaria</i> |
| ➤ Heath rustic moth | <i>Xestia agathina agathina</i> |
| ➤ Large red-belted clearwing moth | <i>Synanthedon culiciformis</i> |
| ➤ Ling pug moth | <i>Eupithecia f.goossensiata</i> |
| ➤ Small chocolate tip moth | <i>Clostera pigra</i> |
| ➤ Creeping willow | <i>Salix repens</i> |
| ➤ Cross leaved heather | <i>Erica tetralix</i> |
| ➤ Heath cudweed | <i>Gnaphalium silvaticum</i> |

The SoCC is currently under review and when this process is complete it will influence all the Habitat Action Plan species lists.

ANNEX 1 – distribution of Lowland Heathland in Nottinghamshire

[map to be inserted when available]