

This Species Action Plan sets out to maintain and enlarge populations of green-winged orchid on Caravan Club-owned sites, and has been drafted for Club Site Teams and Site Wardens. It provides background information and makes recommendations on sympathetic habitat management for this species.

## Introduction

*The green-winged orchid, so named due to the presence of green veined “wings” on the flower, has declined steadily in Britain since the 1950s as a result of the loss of undisturbed hay meadows. The loss of this habitat is the result of traditional methods of managing hay meadows and pasture falling out of favour, with areas of grassland being ploughed up or fertilised.*

***The Caravan Club audit 2006 revealed records of green-winged orchid at or in close proximity to 62 Club sites***

## How to recognise this species

- Usually between 5 and 15 cm tall, but can occasionally grow up to 40 cm
- Usually 7 - 8 blue-green, unspotted leaves in a basal rosette, and 1 - 2 further leaves clasping the stem
- 5 -10 flowers which are usually lilac to dark purple, but can also sometimes be pink, or white
- 6 - 7 green or bronze parallel veins on sepals (outer whorl of floral leaves), extending like ‘wings’. (*Note: early purple orchid is similar, but lacks wings*)



Credit: Peter Wakely/Natural England

## Current status

- Locally frequent in coastal Wales, central and southern England and East Anglia, but now scarce in south-west England. It may even be found as far north as Westmorland and north-east Yorkshire, and one small area on the west coast of Ayrshire in Scotland
- The green-winged orchid – like many other orchid species – has declined dramatically over the last 50 years throughout the British Isles. The principal causes of this decline are:

- Habitat loss due to agricultural intensification (particularly loss of traditionally managed hay meadows)
- Overgrazing by livestock and other herbivores
- Application of herbicides and fungicides
- Over-application of fertilizers, causing vigorous grass species to outcompete orchids
- Unsympathetic mowing in mid- to late summer
- Ploughing
- Neglect of low-intensity grassland management, resulting in succession to scrub
- Declines in bumblebee species which pollinate this orchid
- Collectors and gardeners picking the flowers, or whole plants. (*Note: this is illegal under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981*)

## Ecology/management requirements

Green-winged orchid can be found in grassy habitats, on base-rich, or even mildly acidic soils. The species thrives in ancient, undisturbed hay meadows that are relatively nutrient-poor. It is also capable of colonising unimproved pastures, sand dunes, road verges, churchyards and garden lawns.

Orchids have a symbiotic relationship with a fungus, which allows them germinate and obtain sufficient nutrients, and to compete with other plants. They are therefore extremely vulnerable to fungicides, lime, fertilisers and ploughing. Fertilisers also allow more vigorous plants to out-compete them.

## How to look after this species

	Site safeguard and management	Species management and protection
DO'S	<p><b>DO</b> <u>Mow suitable grassland only after the orchids have seeded and died back</u> (October – January). This allows the orchids to reproduce, and will also reduce competition with grasses</p> <p><b>DO</b> <u>Sow yellow rattle</u> <i>Rhinanthus minor</i> seeds in Autumn on grasslands where grass species are too dominant. Yellow rattle is a native parasite of grasses, and will reduce grass vigour, allowing other wildflowers – including orchids – to appear</p> <p><b>DO</b> <u>Sow new meadow habitat</u> for this orchid where conditions are suitable (see above) and space allows</p>	<p><b>DO</b> <u>Fence off suitable areas</u> with few or no remaining orchids, to prevent over-grazing (including rabbits and deer) or excessive disturbance and picking by visitors</p> <p><b>DO</b> <u>Erect notice-boards to educate, and inform the public not to pick wildflowers.</u> Many people are otherwise unaware that this is illegal and can seriously damage orchid populations</p> <p><b>DO</b> <u>Liase with neighbouring landowners to improve neighbouring land</u> for the species too, if it is present on site. This will help to secure viable long-term populations</p> <p><b>DO</b> <u>Also conserve the red-tailed bumblebee and shrill carder bee</u> which pollinate this orchid</p>
DON'TS	<p><b>DON'T</b> <u>Mow or strim suitable grassland during the orchid's growing season</u> (February – September)</p> <p><b>DON'T</b> <u>Do not develop suitable habitat</u> (i.e. avoid placing new paths or pitches in these areas)</p> <p><b>DON'T</b> <u>Allow over-grazing or too-frequent mowing</u> This will become apparent if few plants other than grass species are surviving. Where grazing/mowing is at too high a level - including from rabbits and deer - consider fencing off suitable areas</p>	<p><b>DON'T</b> <u>Use fungicides on site.</u> Orchids cannot survive without their symbiotic fungi</p> <p><b>DON'T</b> <u>Use fertilisers on or near to grasslands.</u> Orchids will be unable to compete with grass species on enriched grasslands</p> <p><b>DON'T</b> <u>Allow visitors to pick orchids</u> (This is illegal)</p> <p><b>DON'T</b> <u>Allow trampling of orchids.</u> Fence off areas where necessary</p> <p><b>DON'T</b> <u>Assume orchids are absent</u> because you can't see flowers. The plant can survive for many years under unfavourable cutting regimes without flowering, awaiting only a relaxation of intensive management</p>

For further information on this species visit:

The Caravan Club Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) for green-winged orchid: <http://www.caravanclub.co.uk>