

This Habitat Action Plan sets out to maintain and extend semi-natural grassland habitats on Caravan Club-owned sites, and has been drafted for Club Site Teams and Site Wardens. It provides background information on these habitats and makes recommendations for their effective habitat management.

Introduction

The existence of grassland is dependent on one or more processes which stop natural succession to scrub or woodland. These processes commonly involve cutting by man, or grazing; but also include conditions where woody plants cannot grow, such as infertile or thin soils, where the conditions are too harsh, high ground, very dry conditions, or cliffs.

The Caravan Club audit 2006 revealed that semi-natural grassland is present on, or in close proximity to 64 Club sites

How to recognise this habitat

Not all grassland habitats are of high ecological value. This BAP refers to semi-natural grasslands of the following categories:

- Lowland calcareous grassland
- Upland calcareous grassland
- Lowland dry acid grassland
- Lowland meadow
- Upland hay meadow
- Purple moor grass and rush pastures
- Rough grassland



Credit: David Plant

See the full Caravan Club BAP for typical species compositions

Current status

- These grassland habitats are widespread across England, Wales and Scotland, but have become increasingly rare, only persisting where agricultural improvement has not occurred
- Key factors in this decline are drainage, ploughing, re-seeding, fertiliser treatment, slurry application, conversion to arable, shifting from hay-making to silage production, abandonment of management (leading to bracken and scrub encroachment), application of herbicides and insecticides, afforestation, overgrazing and poaching of ground by livestock, or alternatively undergrazing in some areas
- From 1934 to 1984 it is estimated that semi-natural grassland declined by 97% in lowland England and Wales. Assessments indicate that this habitat has continued to decline
- All types listed above, except rough grassland, are UK BAP habitats. Some plant communities within these habitats are also protected under Annex 1 of the EC Habitats Directive (see full Caravan Club BAP for details)

Ecology/management requirements

These grassland habitats are all important for their high biodiversity. They can have a high species richness of wildflowers and grasses, which in turn supports a wide variety of invertebrates, birds, reptiles, amphibians and mammals. Communities can contain a high proportion of rare plant and animal species which will also benefit from grassland conservation

How to look after this habitat

	Site safeguard and management	Habitat management and protection
DO'S	<p>DO <u>Survey</u> promising areas to identify which habitats and plant communities are present (will need a qualified botanist)</p> <p>DO <u>Consider sowing new grassland areas</u>. Seed mixes for these habitats are readily available, but should be of local provenance and suit the soil type. <u>Alternatively, spread green clippings</u> from a nearby species-rich grassland after July. In both cases the area should be prepared beforehand</p> <p>DO <u>Maximise area and proximity to nearby grassland habitats</u> – this will boost colonisation and lower local extinction rates of dependent plants and animals</p> <p>DO <u>Use notice boards to inform and educate</u> site visitors on the importance of these habitats, and the management on site</p>	<p>DO <u>Develop a low-level grazing regime by livestock OR apply a suitable mowing regime</u>, depending upon the grassland type and whether grazing is possible/suitable</p> <p>DO After cutting, <u>allow hay to dry in situ and then remove</u> from the grassland (this allows seeds to fall, but avoids enrichment of the soil leading to domination by a few common grasses)</p> <p>DO <u>Sow yellow-rattle <i>Rhinanthus minor</i> seeds</u> in autumn, on grasslands where common grass species have become too dominant. Yellow-rattle is a native parasite of grasses; it reduces their vigour and will allow many other wildflowers to establish</p> <p>DO Ensure that wet grassland habitat <u>does not dry out</u></p>
DON'TS	<p>DON'T <u>Develop</u> in semi-natural grassland areas (i.e. no new paths or pitches in these areas)</p> <p>DON'T <u>Apply fertilizers, herbicides or insecticides</u></p> <p>DON'T <u>Expect newly-sown grasslands to become species-rich immediately</u> – they develop over time and may take several years to establish</p> <p>DON'T <u>Allow visitors to pick wildflowers</u></p>	<p>DON'T <u>Cut meadows before mid-July</u> to allow plants to flower and set seed</p> <p>DON'T <u>Cut the grass too short, or too often</u>. This would dramatically reduce species richness</p> <p>DON'T <u>Allow grasslands to become overgrazed</u></p> <p>DON'T <u>Drain grassland areas</u></p>

For further information on this habitat visit:

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

The six national BAPs for lowland and upland calcareous grasslands, lowland dry acid grassland, lowland meadow, upland hay meadow, and purple moor grass and rush pastures are located at: <http://www.ukbap.org.uk/>