



Dry lowland meadows include most forms of unimproved neutral grassland, not just grasslands cut for hay. The mainstream NVC community of this habitat, MG5 grassland (crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus* - common knapweed *Centaurea nigra*), is now highly localised and fragmented. Agricultural intensification has led to the extensive development of nutrient-demanding, productive perennial rye-grass *Lolium perenne* grasslands. These are managed for grazing and silage production which involves sites being cut earlier in the year, more frequently and has widely replaced traditional hay-making.

Unimproved neutral grassland habitat has undergone a remarkable decline in the 20th century, almost entirely due to changing agricultural practice. It is estimated that in 1984 lowland England and Wales, semi-natural grassland had declined by 97% over the previous 50 years.

This plan concentrates on meadows and pastures associated with low-input nutrient regimes. Flowering plants include, dyer's greenweed *Genista tinctoria*, green-winged orchid *Orchis morio*, greater butterfly orchid *Platanthera chlorantha*, pepper saxifrage *Silene silaus* and wood bitter vetch *Vicia orobus*. Lowland meadows and pastures are important habitats for skylark *Alauda arvensis* and a number of other farmland birds.

Threats

- Agricultural intensification such as:
 - shift from hay making to silage production
 - application of fertiliser, herbicides and pesticides; and
 - supplementary stock feeding leading to eutrophication of soil
- Destruction of grassland through arable conversion and development
- Inappropriate stock management leading to over-grazing and poaching
- Under-grazing or neglect leading to bracken/scrub encroachment
- Decline in the perceived value of species-rich pasture

Current Action

- Some sites designated as SSSIs (NE)
- Agri-Environment Schemes, Herefordshire Meadows Network and Farm Herefordshire advice to land managers (NE, CFE, HWT, WUF)
- Managed hay meadows (HWT, NE, Plantlife)
- Aspiration to undertake a review of Local Wildlife Sites (HC, HWT, WL)
- Environment Impact Assessment Regulations (DEFRA)
- Resurveying of Phase 1 habitats, including grasslands in the Woolhope Dome (HWT, WVAONB)

	Objective	Action
A	Locate and map existing habitat extent	3,5
B	Maintain the total extent and distribution of grassland	2,4
C	Assess condition of sites through biodiversity surveys	5
D	Ensure access to appropriate management advice	1,2,4,8
E	Increase markets for agricultural produce of species rich hay, green hay, wildflower seeds and pasture fed meat	1, 6
F	Increase access to grazing and machinery	7, 8

	Action	Target
1	Increase the awareness of the significance and rapid decline of this habitat	Annual
2	Maintain existing sites through encouraging uptake of Agri-Environment schemes	Annual
3	Map extent of this habitat in order to secure Local Wildlife Sites and assist in targeting Agri-environment schemes	2020
4	Produce advice, set up demonstration events and workshops with relevant land managers	2020
5	Undertake biodiversity surveys	2020
6	Develop green hay as a seed crop and promote hay making events	2020
7	Gain funding for meadow restoration and creation	2020
8	Promote rare and traditional breeds and pasture fed meat	2020

Lead Partner	NE
Key Partners	HWT, BSBI, HMN