

Purple Moor Grass and Rush Pasture



Description

Rush Pastures occur on poorly drained, usually acidic soils in areas of high rainfall. They are found typically on undulating plateaux and hillsides, as well as in stream and river valleys.

Vegetation is often a mosaic and may take the form of scattered areas in among other habitats.

Many Rush Pasture areas are within enclosed land and are grazed by cattle or sheep, but very little management exists. Environmental Stewardship Schemes provide for appropriate management in creating both a dense and open sward of rush to favour breeding wader species, as well as controlling vigorous rush growth.

Typical vegetation types are dominated by various Rush species, some Sedge species, Marsh Thistle, Meadow Buttercup, Spearwort and occasionally *Sphagnum* and other Mosses. Being wet, and with some cover, they are important for upland wader species such as Curlew, Lapwing and Snipe.

National Status

The UK has around 56,000ha of these pastures, probably more than in the rest of Europe, with the exception of Eire. England has about 5,400ha mainly in the south west of the country such as the Somerset Levels, but there are important areas within Yorkshire.

Local Status

The areas within Barnsley are possibly not classified as pure Rush Pastures, but are fragmented remnants and often a hybrid of other related habitats.

However, this may make this habitat even more important for conserving in the area, especially due to key associated species such as Brown Hare, Curlew, Snipe, Lapwing and Skylark.

Pockets of this habitat occur in Barnsley across the broad swathe of land between Ingbirchworth, Crow Edge and Langsett.

Legal Status

Types of *Molinia* vegetation in the UK are recognised as examples of *Molinia* meadows, which are listed in Annex I of the EC Habitats Directive.

Parts of this habitat may fall within the Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA). Sites included in the Unitary Development Plan (UDP) as Natural Heritage Sites (NHS) have a presumption against development but have no protection against operations which do not require planning consent.

The DEFRA Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Regulations may apply.

Links with other Action Plans

SAP9 Lapwing

SAPII Skylark

SAPI3 Twite

Current Factors Causing Loss or Decline

- The habitat is threatened by agricultural improvements such as drainage, re-seeding and nutrient enrichment.
- Inappropriate management such as over-grazing, compaction due to overstocking and heavy implement use and, through over-grazing, allowing other plant species and scrub development to take over.
- Afforestation and mineral working have destroyed some habitats.

Current Local Action

- Some local holdings may be under an agricultural scheme which includes appropriate Rush Pasture management.

Proposed Local Action

- Continue to monitor the population of Brown Hare and encourage appropriate management.
- Extract information from the *Barnsley Bird Study Group Breeding Bird Survey* to provide populations and mapping of breeding Curlew and Reed Bunting.
- Encourage participation among farmers in Environmental Stewardship and Countryside Stewardship Schemes.