



# Habitat Action Plan: Heathland

---

## Introduction

### Scope

This grouped habitat action plan (HAP) includes:

- Coastal heathland
- Lowland heathland
- Upland heathland (above the limit of the agricultural enclosure mark).

Heathlands tend to form habitat mosaics with grasslands and scrub which have evolved as a result of “traditional” management such as grazing and burning and/or in response to natural factors such as climate and soil conditions. For the purposes of this plan, the term “heathland” is used to describe a generally open landscape characterised by mosaics of ericaceous heath, grasslands and scrub, rather than the more narrow definitions used e.g. by the National Vegetation Classification (NVC). This plan excludes grasslands which do not form mosaics with heathland plant communities (covered in the Grasslands HAP) and scrub which does not form a mosaic with heathland plant communities (covered in Coastal, Urban / Brown Field, Farmland or Woodland HAPs as appropriate).

A range of species such as Chough, Kestrel and Southern Damselfly which are associated with heathland and associated habitats are covered by individual Species Action Plans (SAPs). Actions in this plan will benefit these and other species which use heathland habitats for at least part of their life cycles.

### Vision Statement

During the next five years the partners will maintain and enhance the condition and extent of heathland habitats in Pembrokeshire whilst acknowledging the constraints of land potential to support these habitats. Heathlands form open mosaics of habitats with grasslands and often bracken and coastal scrub. It is recognised that in some locations bracken and mature coastal scrub which may, or may not develop into woodland are habitats in

**Reviewed 09/05/2013**

their own right that contribute to biodiversity value. These areas may eventually be included in another plan (such as the Woodlands HAP). Management of an area should be steered (but not constrained) by the historical regimes undertaken at the site in order to maximise the biodiversity potential.

## **Description of Habitats**

Heathland in Pembrokeshire frequently forms a mosaic with other habitats, such as scrub, marshy grassland, wet flushes, swamp, fen and bare ground. Dry heathland often grades into wet heathland. On coastal slopes, coastal and/or lowland heathland tends to grade into maritime grassland.

Wet heathland, grassland and fens form a complex habitat mosaic which is commonly referred to as 'rhos' pasture in Wales. Rhos pasture is a particularly important habitat for species such as the marsh fritillary butterfly, three-lobed water crowfoot, pillwort, southern damselfly, pale butterwort, yellow centaury, and slender-green feather moss. Bird species including linnets, skylark, tree pipit and more recently the Dartford warbler are found on Pembrokeshire's Heathland.

## **Heathland Conservation**

Much of Wales' species rich heathland has been lost due to either agricultural intensification or neglect. In Pembrokeshire there are significant areas of semi-natural heathland remaining, some of which have been brought back into favourable management largely as a result of partnership initiatives such as Heritage Lottery Funded (HLF) Pembrokeshire Living Heathlands project (2000 to 2005) and the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority's (PCNPA) Conserving the Coastal Slopes project funded by the EU EAGGF fund (1999-2002). Following on from these initiatives the National Trust's Heathland Project has restored neglected and/or abandoned lowland and coastal heathland and support for private landowners managing heathland has continued through the PCNPA's Conserving the Park project.

Grazing with appropriate stock is crucial for maintaining heathland and associated habitat mosaics; heathland can be damaged by over grazing (resulting in grassland replacing heathland) or under grazing (resulting in scrub forming). Historically in some areas heathland has been burned to control the spread of scrub; this ensures that stock are able to graze the site. Some species that are closely associated with heathland such as the lichen *Cladonia peziziformis* are reliant on the heathland habitat being burnt from time to time.

10% of the total amount of lowland heathland in Wales occurs in Pembrokeshire. The national importance of the County for lowland heathland is reflected by the fact that two thirds lie within Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

In terms of distinguishing between lowland heathland and genuine acid grassland, less than 25% dwarf shrub cover should be assessed as grassland, over 25% as heathland.

## Threats

Threats to these habitats come from:

- **Enrichment** – Agricultural runoff, manuring or aerial deposition of nitrogen (more likely inland);
- **Neglect and/or inappropriate management** – stock type, density timing and duration of grazing; frequency of, inappropriate or uncontrolled burning; inappropriate cutting regimes;
- **Agricultural intensification** - resulting in habitat loss;
- **Dumping of waste** – often on common land, this presents a risk to stock and can therefore discourage beneficial grazing and can be a vector for the import of Invasive Non-native Species to an area;
- **Climate change** – warmer, wetter seasons may result in increased growth of plant species which would require a greater stock density to graze. However, higher rainfall may make grazing of some sites impractical, especially with increased stock density.

## Related Plans & Policies

Other plans / policies directly affecting the management of these habitats in Pembrokeshire are:

- A Cough Conservation Strategy for Pembrokeshire. PCNPA, 1994.
- Conserving the Coastal Slopes 1999-2002. Project report. PCNPA, 2003.
- SSSI Management Plans: <http://naturalresourceswales.gov.uk/our-work/policy-advice-guidance/designated-sites/?lang=en>
- SAC Management Plans: <http://naturalresourceswales.gov.uk/our-work/policy-advice-guidance/designated-sites/?lang=en>
- St David's Peninsular Special Protection Area: <http://naturalresourceswales.gov.uk/our-work/policy-advice-guidance/designated-sites/?lang=en>
- Coastal HAP: <http://ukbars.defra.gov.uk/project/show/36376>
- Grassland HAP: <http://ukbars.defra.gov.uk/project/show/36376>
- Woodland HAP: <http://ukbars.defra.gov.uk/project/show/36376>
- WBP Pembrokeshire Coastal Plan Grassland and heathland priority habitat map and synopsis <http://www.biodiversitywales.org.uk/en-GB/Lowland-Grassland--Heathland>
- WBP Preseli and Carn Ingli Hills priority habitat maps and synopsis <http://www.biodiversitywales.org.uk/en-GB/Lowland-Grassland--Heathland>

## Species associated with Heathland in Pembrokeshire

Priority Species Associated with this Grouped Habitat Action Plan				
Species Name	Common Name	UK Bap Spp	S42 list Welsh Spp	Locally Important Spp
<b>Birds</b>				
<i>Alauda arvensis subsp. arvensis/scotica</i>	Skylark	✓	✓	
<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	Tree Pipit	✓	✓	
<i>Asio flammeus</i>	short-eared owl			✓
<i>Carduelis cabaret</i>	Lesser Redpoll	✓	✓	
<i>Carduelis cannabina subsp. autochthona/cannabina</i>	Common Linnet	✓	✓	
<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	Hen Harrier		✓	
<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	Common Cuckoo	✓	✓	
<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	Yellowhammer	✓	✓	
<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	Reed Bunting	✓	✓	
<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Kestrel		✓	
<i>Locustella naevia</i>	Common Grasshopper Warbler	✓	✓	
<i>Milvus milvus</i>	Red Kite			✓
<i>Numenius arquata</i>	Eurasian Curlew	✓	✓	
<i>Prunella modularis subsp. occidentalis</i>	Hedge Accentor		✓	
<i>Pyrhacorax pyrrhacorax</i>	Chough		✓	
<i>Pyrhula pyrnhula subs. pileata</i>	Common Bullfinch	✓	✓	
<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	Whinchat			✓
<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	Stonechat			✓
<i>Sylvia undata</i>	Dartford Warbler			✓
<i>Turdus philomelos subs. clarkel</i>	Song Thrush	✓	✓	
<i>Tyto alba</i>	Barn Owl			✓
<b>Reptiles / Amphibians</b>				
<i>Anguis fragilis</i>	Slow-worm	✓	✓	
<i>Natrix natrix</i>	Grass Snake	✓	✓	
<i>Vipera berus</i>	Adder	✓	✓	
<i>Zootoca vivipara</i>	Common Lizard	✓	✓	
<b>Insects</b>				
<i>Coenagrion mercuriale</i>	Southern Damselfly	✓	✓	
<i>Eurodryas aurinia</i>	Marsh Fritillary	✓	✓	
<i>Hipparchia semile</i>	Grayling Butterfly		✓	
<i>Plebejus argus</i>	Silver Studded Blue		✓	
<i>Pyrgus malvae</i>	Grizzled Skipper	✓	✓	
<b>Vascular Plants</b>				
<i>Chamaemelum nobile</i>	Chamomile	✓	✓	
<i>Cicendia filiformis</i>	Yellow Centaury	✓	✓	
<i>Euphrasia anglica</i>	Glandular Eyebright	✓	✓	
<i>Genista pilosa</i>	Hairy Greenweed			✓
<i>Gentianella campestris</i>	Field Gentian		✓	
<i>Luronium natans</i>	Floating Water-plantain	✓	✓	
<i>Lycopodiella inundata</i>	Marsh Clubmoss	✓	✓	
<i>Lycopodium clavatum</i>	Stag's-horn Clubmoss		✓	
<i>Pilularia globulifera</i>	Pillwort	✓	✓	
<i>Pinguicula lusitanica</i>	Pale Butterwort			✓

**Reviewed 09/05/2013**

<i>Plantanthera bifolia</i>	Lesser Butterfly Orchid		✓	
<i>Ranunculus tripartitus</i>	Three-lobed Water-crowfoot	✓	✓	
<i>Scleranthus annuus</i>	Annual Knawel	✓	✓	
<i>Scleranthus annuus subsp. annuus</i>	Annual Knawel		✓	
<i>Veronica spicata</i>	Spiked Speedwell			✓
<i>Vicia orobus</i>	Wood Bitter-vetch		✓	
<i>Viola lactea</i>	Pale Dog-violet (heath-violet)	✓	✓	
<b>Lower Plants &amp; Fungi</b>				
<i>Cladonia peziziformis</i>	A Lichen	✓	✓	
<i>Cryptomyces maximus</i>	Willow Blister			✓
<i>Fossombronina foveolata</i>	Pitted Frillwort	✓	✓	

## Plan Aims

Ref	Aim	Deadline	Comments
HE1	Maintain ecosystem functioning by avoiding further disconnectivity in habitats included in this plan.	May 2018	
HE2	Maintain extent and condition of heathland habitats through supporting and encouraging grazing management, burning regimes, scrub clearance and infrastructure provision where land capability allows.	May 2018	Recommended by ecosystem group for Preseli & Carningli priority area and Pembrokeshire Coastal Grasslands and Heathland.
HE3	Achieve favourable condition of heathland habitats by managing invasive non-native species.	May 2018	
HE4	Achieve favourable condition of heathland habitats by identifying opportunities for addressing nutrient enrichment issues arising from management of adjacent farmland on lowland heaths	May 2018	
HE5	Restore heathland habitats where suitable opportunities arise through appropriate scrub clearance work, fencing, cutting, burning, grazing and/or creation of areas of bare ground and sparsely vegetated banks.	May 2018	
HE6	Create heathland habitat if appropriate opportunities arise to improve connectivity or ecosystem functioning.	May 2018	

## Actions

Code	Action	Lead Role	Progress / Additional Information
HE1.1			
HE2.1	Market conservation grade products from land managed for	NT	

