

Protecting Worcestershire's grasslands through the local sites system



Worcestershire
Wildlife Trust

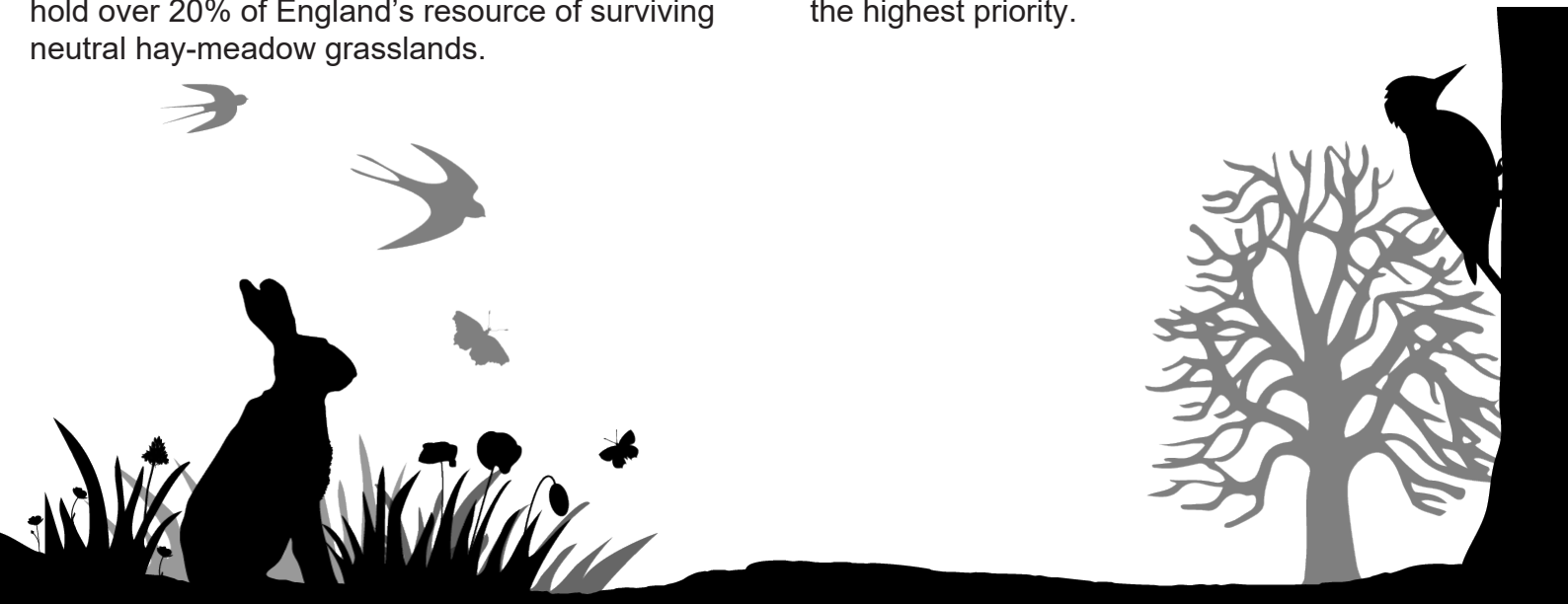


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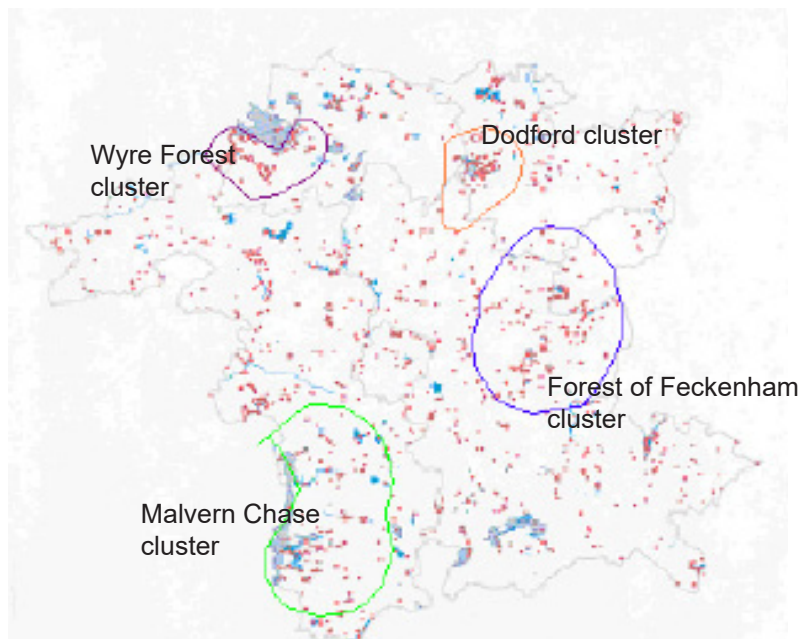
Worcestershire's national natural heritage

The above-pictured wildflower meadow is just one of over 200 Worcestershire grasslands of county importance identified as Local Wildlife Sites (LWS). With a total county area of this type of grassland of some 1500 Hectares, Worcestershire is thought to hold over 20% of England's resource of surviving neutral hay-meadow grasslands.

This makes our contribution to national grassland biodiversity extremely significant, and the protection of the county's remaining flower-rich meadows - which are still being threatened by overgrazing, agricultural improvement, or just simple neglect - of the highest priority.



Where are the Worcestershire Neutral Grasslands found?



Concentrations of unimproved neutral meadows across Worcestershire

The resource of flower-rich meadows in the county is on the clay vales of Feckenham Forest around Dodford, Malvern Chase and on the edges of Wyre Forest. These are four high priority biodiversity areas where many Local Wildlife Site-listed grasslands are concentrated and where Worcestershire Wildlife Trust has been focusing nature conservation efforts through the County Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) (habitat and vision mapping processes), the recent review of Local Wildlife Sites

completed in 2009 and Living Landscapes initiatives. Also of equal importance, though they are not classic neutral hay meadows and are smaller in number and total area, are the acidic grasslands on sandstones in the northeast (Kidderminster/Birmingham plateau), the calcareous or limestone grasslands of Bredon and the Cotswold edge and the floodplain grasslands of the Severn and Avon Vales and southwest Worcestershire.

What are Local Wildlife Sites?

Found mostly on privately owned land, Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) are considered to be of at least county-level importance for their flora and fauna or, in some cases, for specific scarce or threatened species.

Currently there are over 540 LWS scattered across the county. They are a non-statutory equivalents of the SSSIs (Sites of Special Scientific Interest), though in many cases, they support near-nationally important flora/fauna.

Though having no formal legal protection, they are recognised by the local authorities for development control purposes and appear on Local Development Framework Plans (which have replaced district council local plans). Apart from the DEFRA Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Regulations 2006, which

apply to intensification, such as ploughing, on some types of 'uncultivated land', normal agricultural practices such as grazing and haymaking are unaffected.

In nature conservation terms and in the context of the wider Worcestershire landscape, traditional grasslands, particularly the wildlife site meadows and pastures, form an integral part of the inter-linking patchwork of arable, pasture, hedgerow, stream, small woodland, scrubby corner. They function as the "miner's canary" for the health of the managed environment. Maintaining such core areas means that the countryside can be more resilient to agricultural and development pressures and that specialist species will be better buffered against other factors, such as climate change.

How Worcestershire Wildlife Trust is using the LWS system and other conservation measures to protect and manage flower-rich meadows in the wider countryside

Worcestershire Wildlife Trust has been engaged in a county-wide review of all Local Wildlife Sites. During this auditing process, we have assessed condition (whether or not they meet defined sets of scientific criteria), identified new sites, talked to owners about management, offered guidance and facilitated grant aid – where appropriate and if requested.

With and through the co-operation of landowners we and the Worcestershire Local Sites Partnership have helped conserve grasslands in the following ways:-

- Initiating contact and dialogue with farmers and horse keepers who own old grasslands and meadows.
- Raising awareness of the importance

of grasslands in Worcestershire, especially among landowners/managers who have grassland Wildlife Sites on their land.

- Offering free management advice to LWS owners.
- Putting owners in touch with grant-giving bodies such as Natural England (the Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Schemes).
- Acquiring some of the very best examples (especially within priority landscape areas) as nature reserves if land becomes available.
- Encouraging meadow awareness – such as in the Forest of Feckenham through the Worcestershire Biodiversity Partnership.

Past, current and future initiatives

Malvern Hills AONB Orchards Project
A pilot project in the North Malvern Hills in 2010 to identify traditional fruit orchards and to trial a new system of Local Wildlife Site selection criteria for this habitat; old orchards often coincide with a species-rich grassland. The survey resulted in the selection of a number of new Local Wildlife Sites and we have extended the methodology to other orchard-with-grassland sites in the county.

Bow Brook Corridor, Forest of Feckenham and Malvern Chase
We are continuing to search for new candidate meadows and pastures in these priority areas and will be approaching landowners as well as monitoring existing sites.

Grasslands Management Manual – A landowner's guide to recognition, management & restoration
This document is available to download from our website. It includes information on history, current status, types and distribution, creation, restoration and management, sites to visit, sources of advice and links to useful websites.

Targeted Environmental Stewardship (ES) in Priority Landscape Areas
Natural England have been prioritising applications from farmers and land managers within defined areas such as Forest of Feckenham and Severn-Avon Vales. Anyone interested in applying for the mid-tier and higher tier Scheme agreements and capital works covering plans for restoration, management and creation of species-rich grasslands and traditional orchards is advised to contact their West Midland Region Worcester Office on 0300 060 2923.

Restoring Worcestershire's Grasslands (RWG)
This SITA Trust funded project aimed to reverse the ecological decline of over 110ha of formerly wildlife-rich grasslands at 21 Local Wildlife Sites. At each site, RWG worked with landowners to deliver a tailored programme of capital works. We helped re-instate grassland management techniques (grazing, hay-making, green hay spreading, scrub clearance, ditching and fencing). The project had demonstrable benefits for grassland wildlife.

Protection, enhancement and creation of grasslands through the planning process

The Trust works closely with Local Planning Authorities and developers to ensure that important grasslands are protected from the adverse impacts of new development. For the most part this means directing development away from valuable sites, integrating good grasslands into the Green Infrastructure associated with larger applications and delivering new grasslands through creative landscaping schemes.

A great example of a scheme that has delivered grassland improvements is the nature reserve at Welcome Break's Hopwood Motorway Services.

If you live in Worcestershire, and know of, own or manage land with old flower-rich meadows or other interesting wildlife habitats, we are happy to advise on appropriate management.

If you think it might be a suitable candidate for recognition as a Local Wildlife Site please contact Michael Liley, Local Wildlife Sites Officer, on 01905 754919 or michael@worcestershirewildlifetrust.org.

Our nature reserves form part of our vision for a Living Landscape for Worcestershire. By working with other landowners, managers and communities we aim to restore, recreate and reconnect fragmented natural habitats to achieve a landscape where wildlife can flourish and people can lead happier and healthier lives.



A total of 24ha of new semi-natural habitat was created as part of the planning application for the services and part of this is now open to the public.

Worcestershire Facilitation Fund for Wild Pollinators

Worcestershire Wildlife Trust is preparing a series of pollinator management plans for more than 30 landowners. The plans incorporate transfer of species-rich hay to create and restore wildflower meadows and field margins to benefit pollinating insects. This project aims to link up hay suppliers, their contractors and hay receivers in order to produce bigger, better and more joined up meadow landscapes across the Forest of Feckenham and beyond.

Ways to get involved:

- Become a member
- Volunteer
- Make a donation
- Leave a gift in your will
- Adopt a species
- Buy wild bird food

Worcestershire Wildlife Trust

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