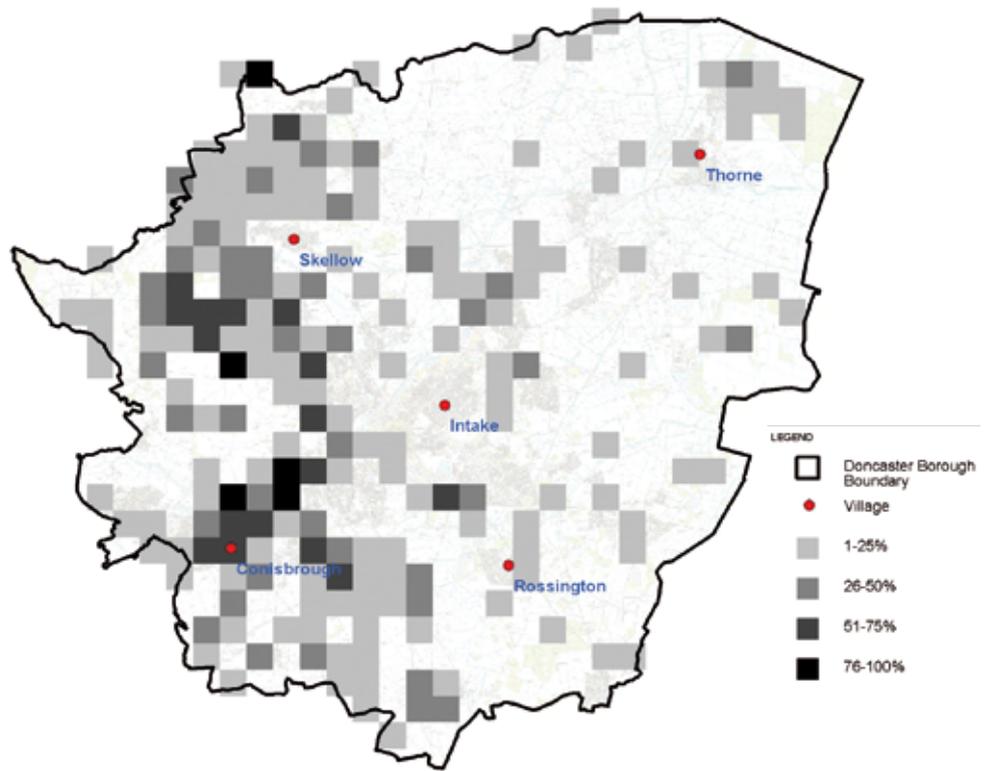


Limestone Grassland

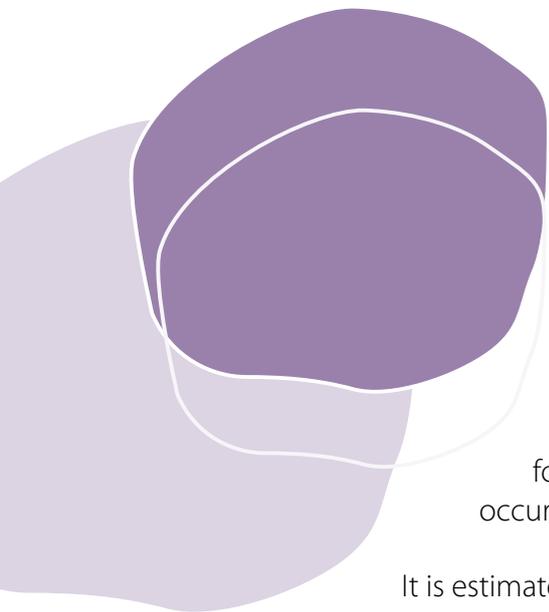
Summary Habitat Action Plan

Doncaster Local Biodiversity Action Plan
January 2007



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1 Habitat description

The Magnesian Limestone supports some of Doncaster's richest calcareous grasslands. Oat grasses often dominate the sward, together with upright brome or, in ranker areas, tor grass. The presence of fissures and cracks in the underlying limestone means that rainwater drains quickly through the thin soil, making some areas very dry and encouraging the dominance of creeping and sheep's fescues.

Limestone grasslands support a diverse invertebrate fauna. The food plants of certain butterfly species, such as the marbled white, occur only on limestone grassland sites.

It is estimated that there are between 40,000 and 50 000ha of calcareous grassland in the UK, distributed from Devon to Shetland, but local climate and subtle differences in underlying rock type means there are many different calcareous grassland types. Magnesian Limestone grassland is of very restricted extent in the British Isles, being limited to a narrow band of limestone which stretches from Ripon in the north to Nottingham in the south. The historic clearance of woodland and subsequent grazing resulted in the development of species-rich limestone grasslands. In recent times many areas of grassland have been turned over to arable cultivation; however, pockets of grassland survive on the steeper slopes of river gorges and escarpments, on railway embankments, in old quarries, churchyards and along ancient rights of way and road verges. Unimproved grasslands are also a feature of larger country estates.

2 Characteristic species

Fairy flax	Rockrose	Ploughman's spikenard
Bird's-foot trefoil	Thyme	Crested hairgrass
Lady's bedstraw	Small scabious	Bee orchid
Restharrow	Burnet saxifrage	Pale St John's-wort
Hoary plantain	Pyramidal orchid	Meadow oat
Yellow wort	Musk thistle	Horseshoe vetch
Salad burnet	Carlina thistle	Marjoram
Wild basil	Dwarf thistle	Early purple orchid
Common milkwort	Blue fleabane	Burnet rose
Autumn gentian	Dyers greenweed	Meadow saxifrage
Autumn lady's tresses	Dropwort	Greater fen sedge
Squinancywort	Fragrant orchid	

3 Current factors causing loss or decline

- There is a lack of traditional grazing management on many sites leading to reversion to rank grassland and scrub.
- Sites where rabbit grazing is the only form of 'management' can be susceptible to fluctuations in grazing pressure during Myxomatosis outbreaks.
- Unsympathetic management of roadside verges and salting of roads causes loss of species diversity and changes in habitat type.
- There are fewer mixed farms and therefore fewer grazing herds available.
- Fragmentation and loss caused by development, or by agricultural intensification.
- Uncontrolled access and inappropriate recreational use.
- Planting of inappropriate species.

4 Objectives, targets & proposed actions

Objective	Target	Ref	Action	Lead & Partners
2) To restore degraded sites and ensure appropriate management of Limestone Grassland.	2 sites by 2008 and 1 further site by 2009.	2.2	Bring DMBC owned Magnesian grassland sites into favourable management.	DMBC, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust (YWT), Don Gorge Strategic Partnership (DGSP)
	2 sites with favourable management by 2010. (Lowland Calcareous grassland is a 5-point target in the Southern Magnesian Limestone Joint Character Area, the classification, on which HLS is based.)	2.3	Identify land owners of existing SSI Magnesian Limestone Grasslands. Provide assistance to owners seeking funding and/or assistance for appropriate nature conservation and grassland management operations, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reintroduction of grazing or mowing management (where appropriate). • Removal of invasive scrub considered to be detrimental to the preservation of grassland species diversity. • Cessation or reduction of fertiliser and herbicide input. Monitor the effectiveness of the management, by regular assessment of critical habitat features and selected key or indicator species, and review the management regime.	DMBC, Natural England (NE), Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) NE is reliant upon landowners with calcareous grassland coming forward for HLS NE may be able to identify owners where land has been registered on the Rural Land Register, with Rural Payments Agency Approval
	SSI calcareous grassland sites by 2010.	2.7	Prevent disturbance to the wildlife of grasslands by the control of recreational access and prevention of inappropriate and damaging activities. Produce action plans in conjunction with SY Police where necessary.	NE, DMBC, DGSP, SY Police
3) To create 1 ha of limestone grassland linked to existing grasslands, woodland and scrub habitats within the Magnesian Limestone Natural Area.	By 2010.	3.3	Use new grassland to link existing woodland, grassland and scrub habitats.	DMBC, NE, FWAG, Private landowners NE is reliant upon landowners with habitat creation proposals coming forward for HLS
4) Raise public awareness of the importance and special characteristics of Limestone Grassland.	Leaflet for 1 site by 2008.	4.3	Provide an interpretive leaflet to explain the special value of Magnesian Limestone Grassland and include a map showing the location of more accessible sites.	DMBC, NE, DGSP

5 This habitat in Doncaster

The following describes where in the Doncaster Borough good examples of this habitat can be found, however, named sites may be privately owned and therefore are not publicly accessible. For further information about this habitat and where it can be found in Doncaster see the 'Limestone Grassland Habitat Action Plan'.

This type of habitat is represented in Doncaster as a part the Sprotbrough Gorge Site of Special Scientific Interest, and in over 10 Sites of Scientific interest. Particularly diverse limestone grassland sites include old quarries and old railway cuttings in the Cadeby and Conisbrough areas, the Don Gorge from Conisbrough to Hexthorpe, Nursery Lane Quarry and Boat Farm Quarry in Sprotbrough, Firbeck Junction near Tickhill and limestone escarpments at Clifton Beacon, Skelbrooke Rein and Harry Wood, Brodsworth, Barnburgh, High Melton, Clifton and Micklebring. The lawns and extensive grasslands of several former country estates and historic sites include fragments of unimproved calcareous grassland e.g. Cusworth Hall, Conisbrough Castle, Hickleton Park, Crookhill Park and Plantation, Wilsic Hall, Skelbrooke Park and Chapel Hole near Stainton. Exceptionally diverse short-turf calcareous grasslands are found on the lawns of Brodsworth Park and on the site of a former limestone quarry at Marr. Please enjoy the delicate and beautiful flowers of limestone grassland, taking care not to cause damage and leaving the site as you found it.



6 How to take part 'Backyard Biodiversity – Nature in your Neighbourhood'

This is a new initiative launched by Doncaster Council to enable local people to learn about, protect and enjoy nature where they live. Community Groups and Organisations can loan activity packs and equipment to enable them to take part in activities such as bird watching, pond-dipping, building bird and bat boxes and bug hunting. The service is available FREE of charge from selected Customer Service Centres in Doncaster. A pack of Wildlife Gardening fact sheets has also been produced, which provides advice and information on how you can help the wildlife in your own garden.



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