

Neutral Grassland



Current factors causing loss or decline

Large losses of permanent grassland have occurred through agricultural intensification such as ploughing, re-seeding, draining, heavy fertiliser treatment, slurry application, over-grazing, conversion to arable and a shift from hay-making to silage production.

On the urban fringe threats are from development pressures and unsympathetic amenity grassland management cutting regimes. However, neglect or abandonment can lead to rank growth and scrub encroachment.

Current action

Most of the main areas supporting higher diversity neutral grasslands receive some protection through designation as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC). However, such designations do not protect grasslands from damaging agricultural operations.

Grassland management has been implemented at local Parks with the intention of improving the grassland diversity, structure and value to wildlife. Several projects, often in conjunction with environmental educational groups, have seen the creation of wildflower meadows, or the diversification of existing grasslands through wild flower planting.

LOCAL HABITAT ACTION PLAN

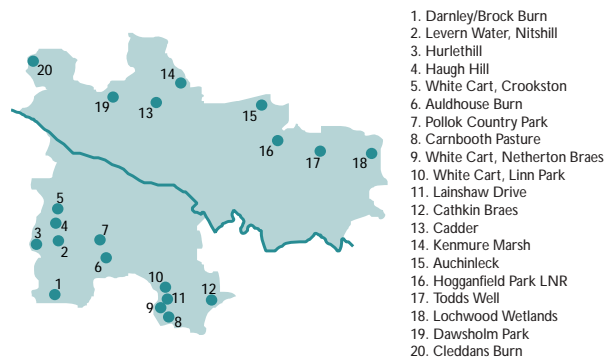
Current status

Neutral grasslands occur on circumneutral soils that are neither strongly acid nor very alkaline. They can be further defined as being improved, semi-improved or unimproved depending on the degree of agricultural intensification. Unimproved grasslands are managed through grazing and hay cutting, often in combination, and are characterised by supporting a rich diversity of grasses and herbs, and a rich associated fauna. However, with modern agricultural treatments such as ploughing, draining, seeding and the heavy use of artificial fertilisers, the diversity of the sward can be very much reduced. The focus of this plan is on the conservation of unimproved and semi-improved neutral grasslands.

In Britain, traditionally managed unimproved, neutral grasslands are now very rare. It has been estimated that between 1934 and 1984 the amount of semi-natural neutral grassland in England and Wales had declined by 97%. It is estimated that there are less than 15,000 hectares of these valuable grasslands surviving in the UK, with only 2,000 to 3,000 hectares left in Scotland, much in crofting areas of the northwest.

The habitat survey of Glasgow shows a number of areas coded as being semi-improved, rough or unqualified neutral grassland, but details are limited. However, it appears unlikely that any traditionally managed, unimproved pastures or meadows remain within the City area. Secondary grasslands that have developed in urban areas, notably former industrial sites or on mine spoil, can support species rich grasslands. There are also a number of grasslands which have affinities to, and grade into, inundation or marshy grasslands. Neutral grasslands are also commonly found on roadside verges where they have escaped agricultural intensification but are quite often influenced by winter applications of salt and unsympathetic mowing regimes.

Main Locations of Neutral Grassland in Glasgow



Objectives and targets

The national Lowland Meadows HAP identifies habitat conservation, restoration and expansion as the three main objectives and targets. Arresting the depletion of the resource is identified as a primary aim, with restoration initially focused on SSSI sites, although the plan intends to secure favourable status at all sites, where practicable, by 2015. There is also a target to re-establish 500 hectares of quality meadow at selected sites by 2010.

Objective 1: Identify and establish key sites of actual or potential high quality neutral grasslands within the City.

Target 1: Survey and assess main sites or areas by 2005.

Objective 2: Ensure no further loss or depreciation in main areas or identified key sites supporting neutral grassland.

Target 2: Prevent further loss of sites through development and land use pressures.

Objective 3: Maintain and restore favourable management regimes at key sites.

Target 3: Encourage the introduction of favourable management at identified key sites.

Objective 4: Increase the total area of high quality neutral grasslands within the City.

Target 4: Create or restore high quality, neutral grasslands at selected sites or locations.

Objective 5: Encourage awareness and appreciation of neutral grasslands.

Target 5: Involve community and education groups and land managers in grassland management and creation initiatives.

Proposed Action with Lead Authorities

Action	Lead	Delivery	Objective
Policy and Legislation			
Ensure the importance of neutral grasslands, and their management, is recognised in Local Plans and Policy Guidelines.	GCC-LS(CG)	GCC-DRS, SNH	2
Ensure agri-environment schemes encourage the protection and conservation of neutral grasslands.	GCC-LS(CG)	GCC-DRS, SNH	2, 3, 4
Site Safeguard and Management			
Oppose, or propose alternatives to, development applications for land use, which will damage or destroy areas of neutral grassland.	GCC-LS(CG)	GCC-DRS, SNH	2
Encourage landowners and farmers to implement sympathetic management of neutral grasslands.	GCC-LS(CG)	FWAG, GCC-LS, SNH, SWT	3, 4
Draw up management plans of key neutral grassland sites.	GCC-LS(CG)	GCC-LS(CG), SNH	3
Encourage the creation of neutral grasslands where practicable.	GCC-LS(CG)	FWAG, GCC-LS, GfC, SNH	4
Investigate the feasibility of introducing sympathetic management of roadside verges and develop future action plan.	GCC-LS(CG)	GCC-LS, SNH	3, 4
Encourage sympathetic management of existing areas and habitat creation at public land.	GCC-LS(CG)	GCC-LS	3, 4
Advisory			
Provide guidance on grassland management.	GCC-LS(CG)	FWAG, GCC-LS(CG), RSPB, SNH	3, 4
Future Research and Monitoring			
Survey known neutral grassland sites to assess vegetation types and quality.	GCC-LS(CG)	GCC-LS(CG)	1
Investigate areas for feasibility of habitat creation.	GCC-LS(CG)	FWAG, GCC-LS	4
Communication and Publicity			
Involve schools, and community groups in neutral grassland conservation and creation projects.	GCC-LS(CG)	GCC-LS(CRS), GfC, SNH	4, 5
Liaise with Lead Agency for national Lowland meadows Habitat Action Plan.	GCC-LS(CG)	GCC-LS(CG)	1, 2, ,3, 4, 5
Review progress of plan and actions by 2006.	GCC-LS(CG)	GCC-LS(CG)	1, 2, 3, 4, 5

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Glasgow City Council: Development and Regeneration Services (GCC-DRS), Glasgow City Council: Land Services(Conservation Group) (GCC-LS(CG).

Glasgow City Council: Culture and Leisure Services (GCC-CLS), Glasgow City Council: Education Services (GCC-ES), Glasgow City Council: Land Services Countryside Ranger Service (GCC-LS(CRS).

Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC), Greenspace for Communities(GfC), British Waterways (BW), Forestry Commission (FC), Farming Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG), The WISE Group (TWISE)

Glasgow Natural History Society (GNHS), Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT).

Clyde Amphibian and Reptile Group (CARG), Butterfly Conservation (BC), Concern for Swifts (CS)