

Culm grassland

Culm grasslands are internationally important - they are home to some of the nation's most threatened wildlife, such as the marsh fritillary butterfly and the narrow-bordered bee hawk-moth. Culm serves other important functions like reducing pollution in watercourses by acting as a buffer from more intensive agriculture upstream. The impacts of unseasonably high rainfall are reduced as the land acts like a sponge, absorbing high levels of rainfall and then slowly releasing the water during periods of drought.

One of the main threats to Culm wildlife is habitat fragmentation. Sites are often very small and widely spaced, which leaves species requiring Culm for their survival in a risky position. There have been huge losses of Culm grassland in the last hundred years. Over 50% was lost during the late 1980s and early 1990s due to the effects of poorly targeted farm subsidy which indirectly encouraged farmers to plough these grasslands to plant crops. Only 10% of the resource present in 1900 still survives.

Through the Working Wetlands project, Devon and Cornwall Wildlife Trusts are helping landowners carry out targeted habitat management, creation and restoration projects. The result will be better linked areas of Culm grasslands in the wider landscape. Delivery methods include land management advice, training events, restoration demonstration sites, establishing grazing networks, machinery rings, parish audits and a lot of practical, on the ground work. The project also takes an ecosystem scale approach that will deliver a wide range of public goods (ecosystem services). For example, the

restoration and creation of wet grassland will help to retain water during periods of high rainfall, releasing the water slowly. This will help to regulate river flows and reduce the likelihood of flooding. It will also positively impact on water quality.

Lead delivery organisations are Devon and Cornwall Wildlife Trusts. Identified partners include Natural England, South West Water, Environment Agency, Devon County Council, Butterfly Conservation.

Key BAP habitats:

- Native woodland (inc. Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland, Wet woodland, Upland Oak Woodland)
- Lowland Meadows
- Purple Moor Grass and Rush Pasture
- Hedgerows
- Rivers

Key BAP species:

- Small pearl bordered fritillary
- Marsh fritillary
- Brown hairstreak
- Wood white
- Dingy skipper
- Narrow-bordered bee hawk-moth
- Atlantic salmon
- Freshwater pearl mussel
- Curlew
- Willow tit



Mire and wet heath. Photo by Liz Cox