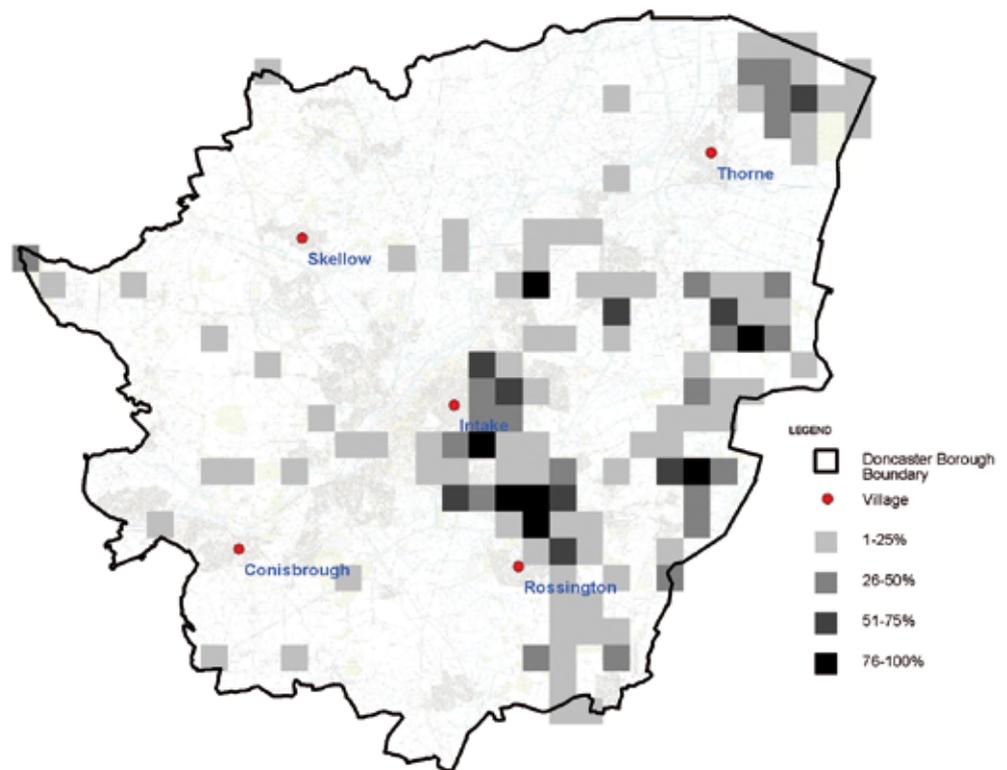


Lowland Heathland / Acid Grassland Mosaic

Summary Habitat Action Plan

Doncaster Local Biodiversity Action Plan
January 2007



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1 Habitat description

Lowland heathland is characterised by the presence of dwarf shrubs such as heather (ling), bell heather and cross leaved heath and is generally found at altitudes below 300 metres above sea level. Heathland often occurs as a mosaic with dry acidic grasslands. Dry lichen and bryophyte-dominated heath, areas of wet heath, gorse and broom scrub, and birch and oak woodland also form important components of the heathland mosaic. With the notable exception of the Humberhead Peatlands National Nature Reserve (NNR), the occurrence of dwarf-shrub heath is very restricted in the Doncaster Borough despite its historic range.

There are three distinct types of lowland heathland present in the Doncaster Borough, these being natural heathland on sandy, acid soils following historic woodland clearance, heathland that has formed following drainage and abandonment of peaty soils, and heathlands that have developed on the acid shale of colliery spoil heaps.

Doncaster's heathlands are important for a number of characteristic fauna including common lizard, adder, nightjar, woodlark and invertebrates, specifically mining bees and wasps. Heathland sites are also notable for the abundance of fungi.

2.1 Characteristic heathland species

Wavy hair grass
Bracken
European gorse
Dwarf gorse
Hard fern

Spring vetch
Shepherd's cress
Petty whin
Heath cudweed
Western gorse

Cranberry
Bog-rosemary
Bog-myrtle

2.2 Characteristic acid grassland species

Bird's-foot
Heath bedstraw
Harebell
Heath rush
Mat grass
Early hair-grass

Purple moor grass
Sheep's sorrel
Tormentil
Wood sage
Common stork's-bill
Sand spurrey

Hare's-foot clover
Parsley piert
Buck's-horn plantain
Heath milkwort

3 Current factors causing loss or decline

- Fragmentation and loss caused by development, or agricultural intensification.
- Uncontrolled access and inappropriate recreational use.
- The lowering of the water table and land drainage has caused the loss of wet heath habitats from many formerly wet sites. General lowering of water tables caused by abstraction for drinking water results in changes to drier habitat types.
- Unsympathetic management of roadside verges and salting of roads causes loss of species diversity and changes in habitat type.
- Lack of traditional grazing management can result in heathland reversion to woodland. Conversely, overgrazing results in sites becoming dominated by grassland.
- Sites where rabbit grazing is the only form of 'management' can be susceptible to fluctuations in grazing pressure during Myxomatosis outbreaks.
- There are fewer mixed farms and therefore fewer grazing herds available.

4 Objectives, targets & proposed actions

Objective	Target	Ref	Action	Lead & Partners
2) To restore degraded sites and ensure appropriate management of Lowland Heathland/Acid Grassland Mosaic.	4 sites by 2010.	2.1	Develop and implement heathland management plans for sites in public ownership. Review existing plans to ensure compatibility with HAPs and SAPs.	DMBC
	By 2010.	2.5	Extend Sandall Beat LNR to include Doncaster Common (Golf Course) and Doncaster Low Common SSIs. Develop and implement sympathetic management plan for heathland and acid grassland species. Review existing plans to ensure compatibility with HAPs and SAPs.	DMBC, Doncaster Racecourse, Town Moor Project
	1 management plan by 2009.	2.8	Draw up Water level Management Plans for sites with wet heath habitat. Promote the need for more sustainable water abstraction policies.	DMBC, Environment Agency (EA), Yorkshire Water (YW), Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs)
3) To create 2 ha Lowland Heathland/Acid Grassland linked to existing heathland grasslands, woodland and scrub habitats within the Coal Measures and Humberhead Levels Natural Areas.	2 ha by 2010.	3.3	Use new heathlands/acid grassland to link existing woodland, grassland and scrub habitats. Use local provenance seed and plant plugs to augment diversity of species-poor previously restored minerals sites.	DMBC, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG), Natural England (NE), Private landowners NE - There are options for arable reversion to acid grassland and lowland heath under ESS
4) Raise public awareness of the importance and special characteristics of Lowland Heathland/Acid Grassland Mosaics.	1 leaflet by 2008.	4.3	Provide an interpretive leaflet to explain the special value of Lowland Heathland/Acid Grassland and include a map showing the location of the more accessible sites.	DMBC, NE

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 'Lowland Heathland / Acid Grassland Mosaic Habitat Action Plan'.



The former widespread status of heathland is indicated by historic place names referring to Lings and Commons. Fragments of heathland habitat occur along the sandstone ridge that runs north from Bawtry to Doncaster, and east from Doncaster to Hatfield, with surviving areas found at Doncaster Low Pasture/Common, Warren Wood (North) and Rossington Bridge Area, all of which are Sites of Scientific Interest. Sandall Beat Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is a late 18th and 19th century plantation established on the site of old fen and heathland. This once adjoined the heath and acid grassland on Doncaster Common and linked to the heathland habitats of Pot Hill, Wheatley Golf Course, Shaw Wood, Hagg Wood, Hatfield Lings, Barnby Dun Station Wood and Hollin Bridge Farm SSI's. Bawtry Forest is an extensive area of heathland which has been affected by afforestation but which still supports a diversity of key heathland species.



Important wet heathland habitats are represented in Doncaster at two SSSIs (Hatfield Moors and Thorne Crowle and Goole Moors); these sites are also Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas. On Hatfield Moors pockets of vegetation have survived as rather dry heathland and as birch woodland. Thorne and Hatfield Moors have many areas open to the public that are managed by English Nature as a National Nature Reserve.

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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