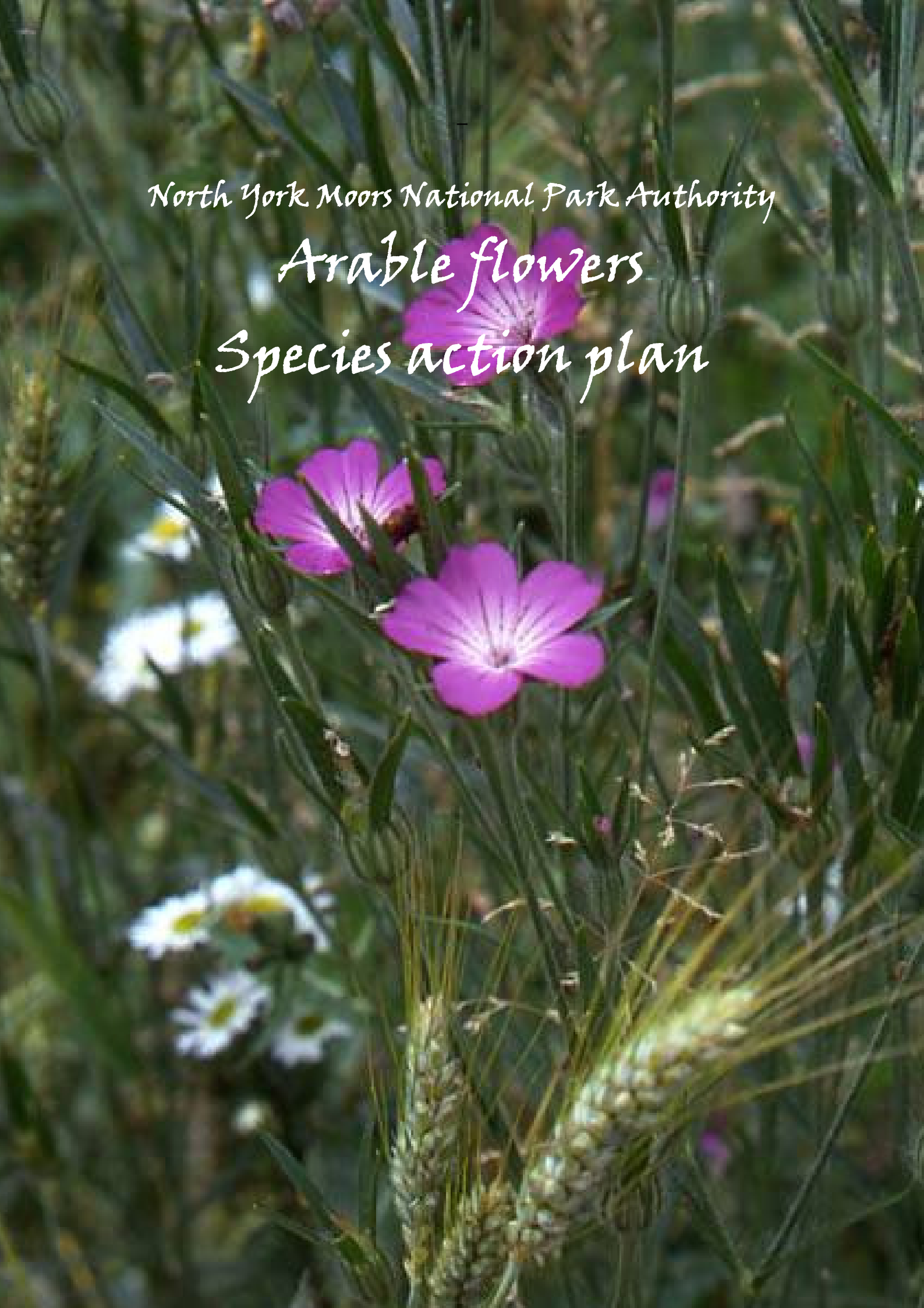


*North York Moors National Park Authority*

*Arable flowers  
Species action plan*



North York Moors National Park  
Arable Flowers Species Action Plan  
2008–2012

## Arable flowers

### Our objectives for arable flowers are:

1. To maintain existing arable plant communities within the National Park, both those supporting less common species and those with good assemblages of species that are still relatively widespread.
2. To collect, propagate and make widely available seed and plants of arable flowers still present in the National Park in order to extend known sites and restore potentially good habitat areas for arable plant communities.
3. To encourage wider appreciation of arable plants and their essential role in retaining ecological diversity.

## Introduction

Arable crops have been grown in Britain for around 8000 years. Neolithic farmers would have encountered many of the wild plants associated with arable agriculture today, although several species are rare. Several of these plants are likely to have originated in coastal shingle and other disturbed ground habitats, but others may have been introduced with grain brought from elsewhere in Europe.

The arable plant communities which have developed in any particular area have distinct relationships to soil, climate and management. Even though individual plants are annual, arable plant communities are surprisingly stable and fields with a long history of arable cultivation tend to have the richest communities of arable plants.

Species given priority in this plan include the UKBAP species, red hemp-nettle (*Galeopsis angustifolia*), corn buttercup (*Ranunculus arvensis*) and shepherd's-needle (*Scandix pecten-veneris*), as well as the locally important species night-flowering catchfly (*Silene noctiflora*) fine-leaved fumitory (*Fumaria parviflora*) and Venus'-looking-glass (*Legousia hybrida*).

## National status

Arable plants can be found wherever crops are grown, from Shetland to the Isle of Wight, but most of the sites where species-rich communities survive are on calcareous soils in the south and east of England. The majority of uncommon species have retreated from the north of the country and few can now be found north of Yorkshire.

# North York Moors National Park

## Arable Flowers Species Action Plan

2008–2012

Britain's arable plants are particularly important because they occupy the north-western end of a range of communities spreading across Europe into Asia. Most species have declined over their whole European range during the last century. The UK Biodiversity Action Plan lists 31 species of flowering plant of arable and occasionally cultivated land, of which 18 are also Red Data Book species.

### Local status

Unusually for the north of England, some arable land in the National Park supports rich arable plant communities, including two rare UKBAP species, red hemp-nettle and shepherd's-needle. Two others, night-flowering catchfly and fine-leaved fumitory, are nationally scarce and a third, Venus'-looking-glass, is at the northern edge of its range on the Tabular Hills.

The North York Moors is not a prime corn-growing area, as it tends to have relatively small fields with awkward corners, good hedges and steep banks, all of which make mechanical operations difficult and ineffective. It also has a variety of soils ranging from stony limestone through sands and loams to peats, all of which help to create conditions for rare arable plants to survive after they have been eliminated in more intensively farmed areas.

The presence of the sea at the eastern edge of the North York Moors helps to moderate the climate and allow such plants as the hairy buttercup, corn parsley and pointed or sharp-leaved fluellen to thrive at the northern edge of their range in Britain. Other uncommon species also present are narrow-fruited cornsalad and dwarf spurge.

### Legal status

There are no designated arable fields with diverse flora within the National Park. There are several within stewardship schemes.

### Links to other action plans

Habitat Action Plans:	Species Action Plans:
Farmland*#	Farmland birds*#
* = Local Species Action Plan	
# = UK Species Action Plan(s)	

### Threats

Over the last century there has been a revolution in arable farming methods which has resulted in the loss of several species and many more have become rare. The most relevant changes have been:

- Widespread herbicide use and improvements in herbicide efficacy

# North York Moors National Park

## Arable Flowers Species Action Plan

2008–2012

- The development of more competitive and nitrogen-responsive crop varieties and the increase in fertiliser applications
- The loss of marginal arable land to pasture or other land uses including development
- Mechanisation leading to more efficient seed-clearing techniques
- Changes in crop rotations

Lack of information about the distribution of arable flora is a problem because important communities and rare species can easily be lost inadvertently.

### Requirements

- The plants are annuals and need regular cultivation (every year or two).
- Herbicide and fertiliser applications need to be kept away from the field margins where the flowers are.
- A lower seed rate around the field edges can also help encourage wild flowers.

### Local action

In 1999 the Carstairs Countryside Trust (CCT) bought a 10-hectare field near Silpho with NPA assistance as a refuge for threatened local arable flowers and to demonstrate to others what can be achieved. Ryedale Folk Museum (RFM) became involved in this project and began a nursery and a small arable field at its site in Hutton-le-Hole to provide a seed source for arable flora and to give information to visitors about their significance. Following on from this work, a five-year Cornfield Flowers Project began in 2005 with a close partnership of the NPA with the CCT, RFM and local naturalists. The project employs a part-time officer who coordinates volunteers to grow on arable flower seed and has developed contacts with local farmers with suitable arable sites. The project has publicised this work through press releases, demonstration days for farmers, and the publication of a book about the project, *A Harvest of Colour*.

### Opportunities

- Cornfield Flowers Project demonstration days encouraging farmers to get involved.
- Game Conservancy Trust?
- Further environmental stewardship agreements on arable land.

### What can you do to help

- Volunteer for the Cornfield Flowers Project by growing arable flora from seed for planting out and/or identify fields with a rich arable flora or rare plants. Contact Chris Wilson on 01723 863 467 for details.

North York Moors National Park  
Arable Flowers Species Action Plan  
2008–2012

- Land managers with arable fields could provide suitable sites for restoration. Contact the National Park ecologist for more details.
- Buy a copy of *A Harvest of Colour* from the National Park visitor centre shops at Danby or Sutton Bank.
- Leave arable flowers where they are for others to appreciate.