

Lowland Wetland HAP



Objectives

1. To maintain the quality and extent of lowland wetlands in favourable conservation condition, according to Natural England criteria
2. To improve the ecological quality of degraded lowland wetlands

Introduction

Wetlands in the National Park have followed the national pattern of decline, largely because of intensification of farming. The small size and isolated nature of many of the patches of marsh and fen left within the National Park make these habitats particularly vulnerable to further degradation.

Very little detail is available on the extent of wetland habitats within the Park. This is largely because the majority of sites form part of an intricate mosaic with other grassland, heathland and woodland habitats. Many potentially important sites have not been formally surveyed.

The UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitats included in this plan are; lowland fen, reedbeds, floodplain grazing marsh and examples of purple moor grass and rush pasture. Some flush and swamp habitats may also be included, although those found at an elevation above enclosed farmland in the North York Moors are included in the Moorland Habitat Action Plan.

Progress (2008-2012)

- Out of a total of 113 wetland sites, 35 sites are either wholly or partly within Environmental Stewardship Agreements, including 20 wetland sites that are wholly or partly within Higher Level Stewardship Agreements (as of December 2012).
- An annual programme of Himalayan Balsam control was carried out along banks of the River Seph, including repeat control work. 21.7.km of riverbank has been controlled between 2008 – 2012 which is a great achievement, allowing the control work area to be extended in the future. See Rivers and Stream HAP Review – Controlling non-native invasive plants case study.
- Yorkshire Wildlife Trust surveyed Fen Bog in August 2010 including some lowland wetland habitat, to look at botanical and habitat interest.
- 171 grassland areas were surveyed during the Grassland Project (2006-2009), of which 150 can be considered as “grassland and wetland sites” N.B. Grassland Project period not entirely within the life of this LBAP (2008 - 2012).
- Discussions are underway with the Forestry Commission regarding a potential HLF bid to investigate the potential for wetland creation in Newtondale. Some timber dams were created in Pickering Beck through the Slowing the Flow Project, making a positive contribution to wetland creation, see **Improving Wetlands case study** below.

- NYMNPAs were unable to survey lowland wetlands for invertebrate interest due to resource limitations. Other organisations may be able to progress this action.
- The action to fence wetlands that are over / under-grazed to create separate management units where appropriate was abandoned because it was not possible to record a separate figure for lowland wetland. For fencing for grazing see Species Rich Grassland HAP Review.
- Scrub management figures of lowland wetlands not covered by Agri-environment schemes are included in the Species Rich Grassland HAP Review; again it was not possible to record a separate figure for lowland wetland.
- Grassland promotion and training events covered in the Species Rich Grassland HAP Review will also encompass lowland wetland.

Case Study

Improving Wetlands

As part of the Slowing the Flow Project above Pickering 18 timber dams were built by the National Park Authority's Modern Apprentices in the Hole of Horcum, in November 2011. These timber dams are known as leaky dams as they slow down the flow of water, whilst still allow some water to pass through.

The leaky dams have been very successful, improving the valley's small wetlands by retaining more water during dry periods and reducing erosion during heavy rain. In turn this has also benefitted the resident water vole population, providing them with a more robust habitat. The Apprentice Team were very lucky as they actually saw a water vole while the work was being carried out, which is a very rare and special sight.

The Slowing the Flow Project is a new approach to flood management by making changes to the way the landscape and catchment is managed. By working with nature more water can be stored in the landscape, and its passage downstream slowed, to help reduce the risk of flooding to the town of Pickering and surrounding areas. The project works in conjunction with improving habitat quality and wider environmental benefits.

In the Hole of Horcum future work is planned to make some of the dams higher and wider. This will ensure the dams will have even more of an impact, to further improve the wetland areas.