

# Strategic Priorities 2007 - 2012



January 2008

## About The Grasslands Trust

In the last sixty years over 97% of our hay meadows and other wildlife-rich grasslands have disappeared. The Grasslands Trust was set up in 2002 to address this crisis. In our first five years we have raised over £1.4 million which has enabled us to:

- Save and secure three important grassland sites in Dorset, Somerset and Wales. Each site is being linked to other wildlife sites to create much larger protected areas for 'priority' species.
- Restore degraded grasslands and provide specialist advice on grassland conservation. We work with organisations such as Natural England, the Countryside Council for Wales, the Peak District National Park Authority, local authorities, The Woodland Trust and county based Wildlife Trusts as well as landowners and private individuals.
- Lobby government to ensure that grasslands are adequately protected through statutes such as the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations. We are also an active member of the Government's Habitat Action Plan Steering Group for Grasslands.
- Start to bring together conservation organisations to co-ordinate work on grasslands, share knowledge and experience and avoid wasteful duplication.

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In autumn 2006 The Grasslands Trust began a strategic review in order to determine where we should best focus our efforts. As part of this process, we approached over ninety conservation charities and organisations asking for their input. We wanted to understand more about what grassland conservation work was taking place across the UK, what the main barriers were to work being carried out and how we could help.

57 organisations responded to our initial survey and we now hold data on over 100 grassland projects taking place across the UK which range from small community based initiatives to large landscape-scale projects. The

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feedback we received from these organisations has played a vital role in helping us to define our strategic priorities.

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## Our strategic priorities - summary

- **Building the Bigger Picture** – what grassland conservation is taking place across the UK, where are the gaps and what are the problems? How bad is the loss? This data will be used to focus our own conservation efforts and influence the work of others. It will also help us avoid duplication of effort.
- **Building national influence** – we most want to influence funders, statutory agencies and NGOs. We also need to influence government and lobby on issues affecting grasslands.
- **Directly supporting grassland conservation** – either through our own projects, through partnerships or by supporting the work of others.
- **People and Grasslands** – raising awareness about the environmental, cultural, historical and social value of grasslands: our main target audiences are the general public, local authorities and statutory bodies, landowners, businesses and private developers.

## The Bigger Picture

97 per cent of our lowland wildlife rich grasslands have been lost since 1930, and even this is felt to be an under estimate by grassland specialists. Less than 150,000 hectares of semi natural lowland grassland now remain in the UK. This compares with five million hectares of species poor agriculturally improved grassland. <sup>1</sup>

A report published in 2005 by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee stated that one in five of our native plants are threatened with extinction. Also in 2005 came a study from English Nature which showed that almost 80 per cent of lowland grasslands, outside Sites of Special Scientific Interest were in poor condition. The government agency stated that wildlife-rich grasslands were at risk and needed greater protection. It has also

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Jefferson, Dec 2006

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expressed concerns about the ability of those sites in unfavourable condition to ever recover.

The survey, funded by English Nature, Defra and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee looked at 500 unprotected sites. The findings showed that many of the wildflowers usually found in meadows had disappeared due to the use of fertilisers and herbicides. Hay meadows were found to be faring particularly badly. In contrast areas of chalk or limestone grasslands and acid grasslands had suffered from lack of grazing and were being overtaken by scrub.

There is also considerable concern about the state of local wildlife sites of which there are 40,000 across the UK. Wildlife Trusts in Worcestershire and Derbyshire for example, have seen substantial declines in the quality of such sites over the last 30 years.

Another Joint Nature Conservation Committee report published in 2005 revealed that almost half of the UK's Sites of Special Scientific Interest were in an unfavorable condition, although some are said to be recovering. Government agencies admit they have failed to arrest the loss of grasslands. The Countryside Council for Wales for example informed The Grasslands Trust last year that in Wales 25 per cent of prospective grassland SSSI's have been destroyed. Officials within Natural England also acknowledge that the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations introduced in 2002 are now "dead in the water": Although the regulations have been revised sites less than two hectares are no longer protected. There are a high proportion of priority grassland sites smaller than two hectares that are now at extreme risk.

Despite over ten years of Biodiversity Action Planning and nearly twenty years of agri-environment schemes, not to mention other rules and regulations, the threats to wildlife-rich grasslands in the UK have not abated. Important grasslands continue to be mismanaged, neglected, actively damaged, or in some cases destroyed. Furthermore, as our own research has shown – there are still some areas of the UK where we do not know enough about the extent of the grassland resource – so losses there may be unrecorded.

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In order to campaign effectively, influence decision makers and be effective on the ground The Grasslands Trust needs to know the bigger picture. Conducting our own research and disseminating these findings is essential and underpins ALL the work we do. The aims of Building the Bigger Picture therefore are:

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## Aims

1. To provide a national overview on the crisis facing wildlife-rich grasslands.
2. To promote our findings to influence decision makers, government policy and the work of practitioners.

## Targeted initiatives and work areas (potential and existing)

1. To provide a national overview on the crisis facing wildlife-rich grasslands.
  - 1.1 Long term research strategy
  - 1.2 National grassland Data Management System
  - 1.3 Crisis Research – Wales, England, Scotland & Ireland.
2. To promote our findings to influence decision makers, government policy, our own work and that of practitioners.
  - 2.1 HAP Steering Group and Funding Support Group.
  - 2.2 Crisis Campaign & Strategy.
  - 2.3 Crisis Reports and Publications.
  - 2.4 Grassland Conference

## Building National Influence

Grassland habitats are one of the most threatened habitats in the UK. Despite UK conservation legislation<sup>2</sup>, site designation, the Biodiversity Action Plan process, EU Habitats Directive, planning legislation, Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations and nearly 20 years of agri-environment schemes - wildlife-rich grasslands still remain under threat and are still disappearing.

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<sup>2</sup> The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 enshrined the philosophy of habitat conservation through site designation. This was further developed in the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

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82% of organisations consulted by The Grasslands Trust in 2006 believe that not enough is being done to protect grassland habitats. When asked what would make a difference, typical responses included:

- Better implementation of Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations.
- Existing protection must be enforced by government.
- Long term and sustainable funding needed.
- More landowner advice, better targeted, better funded and of higher standard.
- Greater awareness - of both the complexities surrounding grassland management (especially livestock management) and why this habitat is so special.

The UK Government needs to be made aware that more needs to be done. Over the next five years The Grasslands Trust intends to implement a series of campaigns aimed at lobbying and influencing local and central government as well as funders. The aims of our Building National Influence programme over the next five years are:

## Aims

1. To make existing legislation work harder to protect grasslands and where such legislation is ineffective or missing, to campaign appropriately.
2. To ensure grasslands are not threatened by new legislation.
3. To raise awareness about grasslands; their importance and management with key decision makers and landowners.
4. To influence the development, use and implementation of existing and future financial incentives and funding streams.

## Targeted initiatives and work areas

1. To make existing legislation work harder to protect grasslands
  - 1.1. Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations
  - 1.2. Sites of Special Scientific Interest

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1.3. UK BAP

2. To ensure grasslands are not threatened by new legislation
  - 2.1. Planning White Paper
  - 2.2. Homes for the Future: Housing Green Paper
  - 2.3. Green Infrastructure Projects
  
3. To raise awareness about grasslands; their importance and management with key decision makers and landowners.
  - 3.1 Launch
  - 3.2 PR Campaign
  - 3.3 UK HAP
  - 3.4 Training, advice and support
  
4. To influence the development, use and implementation of existing and future financial incentives and funding streams.
  - 4.1. The Funding Support Group
  - 4.2. Agri environment schemes
  - 4.3. Local Area Agreements

## **Directly Supporting Grassland Conservation**

Research undertaken as part of our 2006 strategic review as well as feedback from 57 conservation organisations indicates that there are now a significant number of grassland projects taking place across the UK. Our research last year identified over 100 grassland projects. 74% of the organisations who responded to our survey have made grasslands their conservation priority. When asked if they would be interested in working with us an overwhelming 81% said that they would be and a further 10% said possibly.

Not surprisingly, the vast majority of projects we now know about focus on the restoration and management of three specific types of grassland habitat: calcareous (21%), lowland meadow (26%) and acid grassland (18%) with less effort focused on re-creation. Only 40% of projects are part

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of a wider landscape scheme. Whether this balance is right, not to mention where we focus our own efforts will be addressed through our programme – Building the Bigger Picture.

With less than 14% of non-statutory priority grasslands recorded in good condition in England<sup>3</sup> and reports that BAP targets for grassland habitats are not being met, there is an urgent need to make sure that existing grassland conservation activity in the UK is coordinated, targeted, well resourced and of a high standard. The Grasslands Trust can play an important role in making this happen and believes this is a better route to success.

Recent experience at South Poorton and Carmel shows that undertaking grassland conservation work in partnership with others has enormous benefits and is likely to be the best way of making a difference on the ground. Thus our aims for Directly Supporting Grassland Conservation are:

## Aims

1. To add value to existing or new grassland work.
2. To influence the direction of new and existing grassland work.
3. To act as a catalyst for grassland conservation.
4. To promote best practice and new solutions to grassland conservation through our own projects.

## Targeted initiatives and work areas (potential and existing)

1. To add value to existing or new grassland work
  - 1.1 Wild Meadows Project (Flora Locale).
  - 1.2 Kingcombe / South Poorton – Dorset Wildlife Trust
  - 1.3 Durham Coastal Project – Durham Wildlife Trust, National Trust, Heritage Coast.
  - 1.4 Whin, Calaminarian and Neutral grassland project – Northumberland Wildlife Trust.
  - 1.5 Water Meadows recreation – Northumberland MSc Project.

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<sup>3</sup> Statistic taken from Plantlife's "Expression of Interest to host, develop and manage a Funding Support Group on behalf of the Grassland HAP Group.

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1.6 Woodland Trust sites

2. To influence the direction of new and existing grassland work.

- 2.1. Pastures New – Dorset Wildlife Trust and others.
- 2.2. National Flood Meadows Project – Open University.
- 2.3. Hay Time (North Pennines and Yorkshire Dales)
- 2.4. Lowland Grassland HAP group Funding Support Group.
- 2.5. Daventry Acid Grasslands – Northamptonshire Wildlife Trust
- 2.6. Advisory services

3. To act as a catalyst for grassland conservation.

- 3.1 Land Acquisition.
- 3.2 Large Landscape partnerships.

4. To promote best practice and new solutions to grassland conservation through our own projects.

- 4.1 Carmel Landscape Project

## People and Grasslands

*Adapted from a letter written in support of The Grasslands Trust by George Peterken, OBE, D.Sc., M.I.C.For. A former woodland specialist with the Nature Conservancy and successor bodies, a member of the Forestry Commission's South-west Regional Advisory Committee, and a member of the National Trust's Nature Conservation Panel. He is also president of the Gwent Wildlife Trust and a representative on the Wye Valley AONB's Joint Advisory Committee.*

“Compared to the prominent, year round attraction of woodlands, grasslands really are the Cinderella habitat. They do not enjoy as much public appreciation and awareness as their woodland counterpart: the Inventory of ancient and semi-natural woodlands is well-established as a

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planning tool and provides strong protection; the Government's Forestry Policies have special provision for native woodland conservation; the habitat is supported by an immensely successful voluntary body, the Woodland Trust; and the public have long been persuaded that trees and woodland are good conservation".

Semi-natural grasslands by comparison are attractive and varied through the spring and summer, but appear to be little different to improved grasslands during the autumn and winter. There is no equivalent in grasslands to the concept of 'ancient woodland'. Moreover The Grasslands Trust has been formed long after charities for woodlands, wetlands and heathlands have become established. Grasslands of conservation interest remain fragmented, largely a scatter of SSSIs, reserves established by various Wildlife Trusts, Plantlife, the Woodland Trust, and the increasingly conservation-conscious land-management practices of the National Trust.

Grassland conservation is also more difficult than woodland conservation for the following reasons:

- Grasslands are habitats that change quickly, need constant management if they are to survive and rapidly become woodland if they are neglected. Ancient woodlands, in contrast, can be left unmanaged for years; their wildlife will come to little harm if nothing is done for a decade – a period that would spell ruin to a grassland.
- Woodlands are generally larger than the grassland remnants and their ownership is concentrated, e.g. Forestry Commission, Woodland Trust, large private forestry estates. In contrast, grasslands are owned in small bits and pieces by a large number and variety of owners.
- On mixed land holdings, woods tend to be accepted as exceptional places, kept for amenity and sport, whereas remaining semi-natural grasslands tend to be regarded as an under-productive part of a farm.

Against this background the rate of loss of ancient, semi-natural woodland has been far less than the rate of loss of semi-natural grassland. Since the 1930s semi-natural woodland losses stand at about 40% and they have slowed to a trickle since the 1980s, whereas the rate of loss of semi-natural lowland grassland stands at about 98%, and it is still continuing.

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Grasslands need greater recognition and understanding. They need to capture the hearts and minds of people – just as woodlands have over the last forty years”.

## **Aims**

1. To stimulate, engage and encourage public support for grasslands.
2. To raise the status of grasslands amongst key target audiences including the general public, local authorities, developers, landowners, farmers and policy makers.
3. To enable people to become actively involved in the conservation, protection and creation of grasslands: local grasslands for local people.

## **Targeted initiatives and work areas**

1. To stimulate, engage and encourage public support for grasslands.

1.1 PR Campaign – Meadow Week by 2012

2. To raise the status of grasslands amongst key target audiences including the general public, local authorities, developers, landowners, farmers and policy makers.

2.1 Targeted communications plan (focusing on reports, advisory notes, information leaflets).

3. To enable people to become actively involved in the conservation, protection and creation of grasslands: local grasslands for local people.

3.1 Community grasslands – Hocombe Mead.

3.2 Supporter Recruitment Campaigns (individuals and businesses).

3.3 Volunteer opportunities.