

Habitat Survey 2015/2016

The Yorkshire Dales National Park has been divided into ten distinct survey areas with the intent of surveying one area each year between 2010 and 2019. The aim of the survey is to assess the condition of Priority Habitats across the entirety of the National Park. Up to date knowledge of habitat condition is vital in order for the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (YDNPA) to deliver local Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) targets, advise on agri-environment schemes and for development control functions.

2015 and 2016 targeted Priority Habitats in the Wensleydale parishes of the Yorkshire Dales National Park comprising: Askrigg, Aysgarth, Bainbridge, Bishopdale, Burton-cum-Walden, Caldbergh-with-East Scafton, Carlton Highdale, Carlton Town, Carperby-cum-Thoresby, Castle Bolton with East and West Bolton, Coverham-with Agglethorpe, East Witton, Hawes, High Abbotside, Low Abbotside, Melmerby, Middleham, Newbiggin, Thoraby, Thornton Rust, West Scafton, and West Witton.

Due to the size of the assessment area it was decided to survey half of the identified land in 2015 and the remainder in 2016. The 2015 contract assessed landholdings which already had land within existing agri-environment schemes, with 2016 assessing landholdings without land in agri-environment schemes. Results of the 2015 and 2016 survey have been combined.

The assessment was commissioned by YDNPA and completed by the consultants Haycock and Jay Associates Limited. The condition assessment targeted 9296 hectares of habitat. This area was divided between 5120 ha in 2015 and 4176 ha in 2016. The chosen sites were non-designated and were areas of Priority Habitat identified from previous surveys, removing any areas that have been recently surveyed (post 2010) by the YDNPA. Also targeted for assessment was 2787 ha hectares of land for which previously no data was held. This area was divided between 1494 ha in 2015 and 1293 ha in 2016. In addition, in 2015 147 ponds and 12km of hedgerows were identified for assessment and in 2016 51 ponds were identified for assessment. It should be noted that all assessment was subject to landowner consent.

Of the 251 landowners that were contacted 104 (41%) allowed access on to the land to survey. The assessment commenced in May 2015 and was completed by November 2016. In total over 5692 ha of land was surveyed including the condition assessment of 3920 ha of BAP habitat (including mosaics with non-BAP habitat)(see Figure 1). Habitat patches ranged in size from small areas (<0.1ha) to much larger management areas (650ha).

The condition assessment methodology [Appendix 1](#) was based upon that developed for the Environmental Stewardship scheme. The consultants were provided with a map of the area of habitat. The basic format of the survey required walking a 'W' transect and stopping 10-20 times to record a series of attributes.

Figure 1: Habitats recorded and area (hectares)

Habitat code	Habitat name	Area (hectares)
G01	Improved grassland	28
G02	Semi-improved grassland	115
G06	Lowland meadows & pastures	67
G07	Purple moor-grass and rush pastures	36
G08	Upland calcareous grassland	301
G09	Upland hay meadows	10
M04	Upland heathland	284
M06	Blanket bog	2986
M07	Inland rock outcrops, cliffs & scree	10
M08	Upland flushes, fens & swamps	178
T08	Semi-natural woodland	19
T11	Upland mixed ashwoods	10
T13	Wet woodland	14
W04	Lowland fen	3
W07	Ponds	2
F02	Hedgerows	12km
N/A	Non priority habitat	22

Results

[Appendix 2](#) shows current and historical BAP habitats and condition assessment data for the survey area.

Discussion

The survey results have substantially updated the level of knowledge of the extent and condition of habitats within the Wensleydale parishes of the National Park. This will provide a strong platform for the future monitoring and planning of biodiversity conservation work within this area of the National Park. The results will be used in-house and will also be made available to others as part of the YDNPA Habitat Map available on <https://data.gov.uk/>.

A comparison of these results with previous assessments has been difficult because previous surveys have not always assessed the habitat condition (see Appendix 2). In addition, areas that have been previously assessed have frequently used a different methodology.

The surveyors incurred several problems:

- In some instances the area mapped and the habitat listed was inaccurate and had changed substantially since the previous survey. In this instance the surveyor condition assessed the habitat as appropriate.
- Mosaics of habitats are frequent. In these cases where possible each habitat was assessed independently and an estimation of percent cover of each component was made.