

**PRIORITY HABITAT SURVEY
2017 SWALEDALE**

Summary

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Priority Habitat Survey 2017 in Swaledale

Introduction

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 Habitats¹ outside of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)² across the entirety of the National Park.

The results of these surveys is combined with the results of Natural England's surveys of Priority Habitats within SSSIs to give a much wider picture of the state of wildlife across the Yorkshire Dales National Park. Up to date knowledge of habitat condition is vital in order for the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (YDNPA) and other agencies and bodies to deliver local Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) targets, advise on agri-environment schemes and for development control functions.

In 2017 YDNPA commissioned an assessment of Priority Habitats in the following parishes in Swaledale: Arkengarthdale, Downholme, Ellerton Abbey, Fremington, Grinton, Healaugh, Hudswell, Marrick, Marske, Melbecks, Muker and Reeth. It was estimated that there is a total of 3,958 hectares of priority habitat outside of SSSIs in these parishes. The assessment was completed by the consultants Haycock and Jay Associates Limited.

The condition assessment methodology was based upon that developed for the Environmental Stewardship scheme. Assessment forms are reproduced in [Appendix 1](#). Any Priority Habitat found was mapped where necessary, condition assessed and placed in categories A, B or C depending on how many criteria it met. Any habitat in category A is considered to be in good condition. The consultants were provided by YDNPA with a map of the area of land to be surveyed. Assessment of Priority Habitat required walking a 'W' transect and stopping 10-20 times to record a set of attributes.

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1. Priority Habitats are habitats identified at a UK level as being of crucial importance for the conservation of biodiversity. More information is available at: <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-5718>
 2. SSSIs are sites afforded some legal protection because they support features of significance biologically and/or geologically in a national context. In England they are notified by Natural England. For more information see: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/protected-areas-sites-of-special-scientific-interest>

Results

Of the 116 landowners contacted, 54 (47%) allowed access on to their land to survey. In total, 1,676 hectares (ha) of land were surveyed. Habitat patches investigated ranged in size from very small areas (0.25 ha) to much larger blocks of land (up to 162 ha). 827.3 ha was found to be identifiable with Priority Habitat and, of the Priority Habitat on the land surveyed, 492.3 ha (29.4% of the land and 59.5% of Priority Habitat) was found to be in Condition A, meaning that it passed on all criteria relating to the quality of the vegetation as wildlife habitat. The results of the assessment are summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Habitats recorded during 2017 survey in Swaledale (Grey indicates Priority Habitat)

Habitat code	Habitat name	Total area (hectares)	Area in Condition A	% in Condition A
G01	Improved grassland	16.4	N/A	-
G02	Semi-improved grassland	229.0	N/A	-
G04	Lowland calcareous grassland	5.7	3.9	68.4
G05	Lowland dry acid grassland	3.6	3.6	100.0
G06	Lowland meadows & pastures	59.0	26.8	45.4
G07	Purple moor-grass and rush pastures	7.9	1.4	18.2
G08	Upland calcareous grassland	58.6	32.7	55.8
G09	Upland hay meadows	51.9	11.9	22.9
G10	Calaminarian grassland	14.1	14.1	100.0
M01	Grass moorland and rough grazing	475.4	N/A	-
M02	Fragmented heath	36.4	N/A	-
M04	Upland heathland	35.5	13.2	37.2
M06	Blanket bog	477.8	379.3	79.4
M07	Inland rock outcrops, cliffs & scree	11.3	0.8	7.1
M08	Upland flushes, fens & swamps	50.7	1.3	2.5
T04	Broad-leaved plantation	0.3	N/A	-
T05	Conifer plantation	1.2	N/A	-
T06	Mixed woodland	28.8	N/A	-
T08	Native semi-natural woodland	31.7	2.6	8.2
T11	Upland mixed ashwoods	14.7	0.0	0.0
T12	Upland oak woodland	0.2	0.0	0.0
T13	Wet woodland	4.0	0.3	7.5
V02	Bracken	57.4	N/A	-
V03	Rank vegetation	3.1	N/A	-
V04	Scrub	1.1	N/A	-
W04	Fens	0.25	0.04	16.0
W07	Ponds	0.4	0.4	100.0
	Totals (Priority Habitat)	1676.4 (827.3)	492.3	59.5

Discussion

The survey results have substantially updated the level of knowledge of the extent and condition of habitats within the Swaledale 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 (for example, during the Tees-Swale HLF Project). 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 direct comparison of these results with previous assessments in Swaledale is not possible because previous surveys have not always assessed the habitat condition. In addition, areas that have been previously assessed have frequently used a different methodology.

The surveyors encountered 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 mapped existing Priority Habitat and assessed condition 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.

Comparison can be made between the results from the 2017 survey and the 2016 'Trends and Status' Review (YDNPA 2017) that summarised results for the whole pre-extension National Park. The latter reported that "*84% of the area of priority habitats in the YDNP is in 'good' condition (just below the target of 85%)*". It should be noted that this figure includes SSSIs (which are condition assessed on a different basis) and the statistic for non-SSSI land in the whole Park was substantially lower (22.4%). In this light, Swaledale's non-SSSI habitats compare quite favourably with the Dales as a whole. However, there is room for improvement.

Taking a look at broad habitat types:-

Grassland – Just under half of the species-rich grasslands surveyed in Swaledale (47.0%) were in 'good condition', with only about one third of upland calcareous grassland and less than one quarter of upland hay meadows being in Condition 'A'. The Dales is particularly important for these Priority Habitats in a national and international context, so bringing these habitats into better condition should be viewed as an important goal.

Upland Habitats – In this category are considered upland heathland, blanket bog, inland rock outcrops, cliffs & scree and upland flushes, fens & swamps. 68.6% of these Priority Habitats were assessed as being in ‘good condition’, including nearly four-fifths of the extensive blanket bogs that occur in Swaledale. Less encouragingly, less than 2% of wet flush, fen or swamp habitats were found to be in category A and the reasons for this will need to be investigated in more depth and appropriate action taken.

Woodland – The total amount of woodland of all types was found to be 80.9 ha or 4.8% of the land surveyed. This compares with 3.6% woodland cover for the pre-extension National Park. Woodland with enhanced nature conservation value (i.e. Priority Habitats) accounted for 50.6 ha (or 62.5%) of the woodland in Swaledale, which is a fairly high proportion. However, from the nature conservation perspective, only 5.7% of Priority Habitat was judged to be in ‘good condition’.

Acknowledgements

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References

YDNPA (2017) Nature in the Dales 2020: The second Biodiversity Action Plan for the Yorkshire Dales National Park - 2016 Trends and Status Review Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority on behalf of the Yorkshire Dales Biodiversity Forum July 2017.