

Habitat Survey 2011 Report

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. 2011 was the second year of a ten year rolling survey programme with the aim of assessing the condition of BAP habitats across the entirety of the National Park. For this purpose the National Park has been divided into ten distinct survey areas with the intent of surveying one area each year over the next decade.

In 2011 a condition assessment of BAP habitats within the upper Wharfedale parishes of the Yorkshire Dales National Park was commissioned by the National Park Authority and completed by the consultants Thomson Ecology. The condition assessment targeted 5382 hectares (subject to landowner consent) in the parishes of Arncliffe, Bordley, Buckden, Conistone with Kilnsey, Halton Gill, Hawkswick, Starbotton with Kettlewell and Litton. The chosen sites were non-designated and were areas of BAP habitat identified from previous surveys.

Of the 85 landowners that were contacted 45 (53%) allowed access on to the land to survey. The assessment commenced in June 2011 and was completed in November 2011. In total 2503 ha of BAP habitat was assessed (see Figure 1) ranging in size from small areas (<0.1ha) within a management unit to large tracts of moorland >260ha.

The condition assessment methodology ([see 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)
G04	Lowland calcareous grassland	5.1
G06	Lowland meadows & pastures	32.6
G08	Upland calcareous grassland	396.4
G09	Upland hay meadows	5.3
L01	Limestone pavement	19.9
M04	Upland heathland	93.5
M06	Blanket bog	1817.1
M07	Inland rock outcrops, cliffs & scree	18.0
M08	Upland flushes, fens & swamps	49.0
T08	Semi-natural woodland	11.7
T11	Upland mixed ashwoods	46.0
W04	Lowland fen	8.6
W07	Ponds	0.1

Results

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

Discussion

The survey results have substantially updated the level of knowledge of the extent and condition of habitats within the upper Wharfedale 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 the [North and East Yorkshire Ecological Data Centre](#).

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.

Future surveys

Future surveys need to incorporate mapping of the habitat parcels. It is increasingly evident that existing mapping is inaccurate leading to possible reporting discrepancies.

It has become apparent that some landowners have had multiple inspections of land by different parties. There is therefore a need for better communication and coordination with partner organisations such as Natural England, and also with other National Park Officers. This will avoid duplication of effort and resources, and avoids adverse impressions by landowners. However, in order for this to be successful then the sharing of data between organisations and officers must not be restricted.