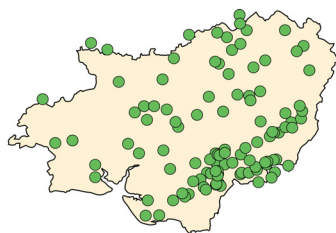


CARMARTHENSHIRE LOCAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

LOWLAND MEADOWS



Lowland meadows



Distribution of sites with lowland meadow grassland within Carmarthenshire. Data are summarised from the CCW Phase II Lowland Grassland Survey (1987-ongoing). Survey work is continuing in Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire.

Conservation objectives

- * Stop the decline of unimproved neutral grassland in Carmarthenshire.
- * Secure the favourable management of all significant areas of the habitat within SSSIs.
- * Where feasible, restore areas of the habitat.

What you can do to help:

- * If you own this habitat – seek advice on management.

Further information:

www.ccw.gov.uk
www.shared-earth-trust.org.uk

Data used with permission of Countryside Council for Wales 2004. Extracted from *Priority Habitats of Wales: a technical guide*, edited by P. S. Jones, D. P. Stevens, T. H. Blackstock, C. R. Burrows and E. A. Howe., 2003.

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What is a lowland meadow?

A once familiar sight in our countryside lowland, meadows (or unimproved neutral grasslands) are typical of traditionally managed farmland and are often rich in wildlife. They include livestock-grazed pastures as well as meadows cut for hay and can also occur in churchyards and on roadside verges. They typically occur on soils fairly poor in nutrients and which have not been heavily fertilised or reseeded and contain a range of species depending on locality, aspect, soil type and drainage.

Good examples of this grassland type have 25–30 (or more) different plant species in an area 2 x 2 m². They can also be important habitats for insects (e.g. butterflies), birds (e.g. skylark) and mammals (e.g. brown hare and bats).

Between 1930 and 1984 97% of lowland meadows were lost in England and Wales – mainly due the widespread use of artificial fertilisers. These boost agricultural productivity, but also change the grassland into one dominated by a single species, usually rye-grass. As a result, lowland meadows are now highly patchy and restricted in the UK.

The best management of lowland meadows would avoid fertiliser application with cutting or grazing (cattle are best) at appropriate times of the year.

Where are they found in Carmarthenshire?

There are still good examples of flower-rich meadows in the county. Due to its industrial past, the coalfield area in the south east has been less intensively farmed and lowland meadows can still be found there. Scattered examples also occur elsewhere in lowland areas.

Why is it in decline?

- * Agricultural intensification: ploughing and reseeded, fertiliser and slurry application, as well as a switch from hay-making to silage (this means the grass is cut much earlier in the summer).
- * Overgrazing, leading to enrichment and cutting up of the turf.
- * Lack of management, resulting in 'rank' growth and ultimately scrub and/or bracken invasion.
- * Urban and/or industrial development.

What is being done locally

- * Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) protect a number of these meadows.
- * A significant area of neutral grassland is presently covered by agri-environment management agreements.
- * Surveys have been carried out mapping the distribution and extent of the habitat in Carmarthenshire.

Where you can see this habitat

Gelli Aur Country Park has a lowland meadow.