

Species-rich grassland was reduced in extent by 97% in the 50 years before the 1980's and losses are continuing. Much of this is due to agricultural improvement as well as development and neglect. Species-rich grassland is often abundant with insects and can be very important for birds and bats.

General guidelines for the management of lowland hay meadows:

Carry out an annual hay cut once the flowering plants present have set-seed (late summer-early autumn).

Where possible graze aftermath until end-October or mid-November depending on the season; later grazing may seriously poach the field. Graze aftermath with cattle or sheep.

Remove stock from the land before poaching occurs, and allow it to rest over the winter.

In the event that thistles or nettles encroach, consider regular topping the affected area before flowering or the use of a herbicide selectively applied by a "Weedwiper". Seek further advice.



Do not apply inorganic fertiliser and slurry as they encourage vigorous grass growth, out competing flowering plants.

Apply well-rotted farmyard manure if required, perhaps a light dose every 3-4 years, this supports the soil fertility and is less likely to prevent growth of legumes present in the sward.

Avoid supplementary stock feeding, as this can lead to nutrient enrichment as well as excessive poaching. If supplementary feeding is unavoidable the feeding station should be relocated regularly (away from environmentally sensitive features such as rivers and streams and gateways and steep ground).

Some of the recommendations on this leaflet may not be permitted under ELS/HLS agreements. Contact your local Natural England Adviser for further advice if required.



Manage scrub encroachment and clear scrub if it is abundant. Some scrub along the field margins or scattered within the site is beneficial providing habitat for insects and birds.

Scrub management should be carried out in winter (October – March) to avoid disturbing nesting birds. Scrub is an important wildlife habitat.

Do not carry out further drainage activity. Light ditch management may be required where existing ditches become heavily silted or overgrown. Wet flushes improve the diversity of the area and will encourage different species to the area.

If chain harrowing or rolling, aim to do this early in the year (by early March) to avoid damage to ground nesting birds. Avoid damage to anthills. Chain harrowing can be beneficial where a meadow has been under managed and there is a build-up of dead material.

Sources of further information and funding may be available from:

Natural England: *Entry Level and Higher level Stewardship.*

Website: <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/information-for-farmers-and-land-managers/>

Email: devon@naturalengland.org.uk

Tel: 0300 0601110

Natural England Publication: *Lowland Grassland Management Handbook*

Website: <http://naturalengland.etraderstores.com/NaturalEnglandShop/Grassland>

A very useful handbook (free to download) providing information on all aspects of lowland meadow management.

Devon Wildlife Trust

Website: www.devonwildlifetrust.org

Email: contactus@devonwildlifetrust.org

Tel: 01392 279244

Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group

Website: www.fwag.org.uk/devon

Email: devon@fwag.org.uk

Tel: 01392 364392

