HABITAT ACTION PLAN FOR LOWLAND HEATHLAND

LEAD AGENCY: Nottinghamshire Heathland Strategy Steering Group
c/o Natural England
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Current Status

Lowland heathland is characterised by the presence of plants of the heather family, and is found below 300m in altitude. Nottinghamshire heathlands are generally of a 'grass heath' type, with ling and bell heather interspersed with fine grasses such as wavy hair-grass, and shrubs such as gorse. They are characteristic of the poor acid soils of the Sherwood and East Nottinghamshire Sandlands areas.

Lowland heathland is an internationally rare and threatened habitat, identified as a priority under European law. Britain supports one fifth of the world's lowland heathland, despite a decline of 75% in the national resource since 1800. In Nottinghamshire we have lost around 90% of our heathland since 1922, and today only about 250ha exists within the County, (0.4% of the total UK area). In addition to this, 120ha of forestry plantation will be restored to heathland by Forest Enterprise by 2002, and 124ha of new heathland is being created on old colliery land by RJB Mining.

Threats

The main factors currently affecting the County's heathlands are:

- Encroachment of bracken, trees and scrub, and the loss of species diversity due to a lack of traditional management such as light grazing, controlled burning and cutting.

- Fragmentation and disturbance from development such as mineral extraction, housing and roads.

- Conversion to forestry or agriculture (mainly historical).

- Recreational pressure.

Current Initiatives - Examples

- A national Habitat Action Plan for Lowland Heathland has been prepared.
- Many private landowners manage areas of heathland, and have a vital part to play in its conservation.
- The Nottinghamshire Heathland Strategy (of which this plan will form a part) establishes a framework for the conservation of heathland in the County.
- The Nottinghamshire Lowland Heathland Inventory was published in 1995 by the RSPB and English Nature, and a more detailed Heathland Register is currently in preparation.
- A Heathland Re-creation Plan for the County was published in 1997.
- Forest Enterprise will not seek further afforestation of heathland in the County. It is planned to restore and manage 120ha of heathland on Forestry Commission land in Nottinghamshire by 2002. 87ha have been restored so far.
- 124ha of heathland are being created by 2015 at Rufford, Thoresby and Clipstone Collieries by RJB Mining. 30ha has been created so far.
- The National Trust manage lowland heathland at Clumber Park, and extensive heathland re-creation is planned over the next ten years.
- The majority of the best existing heathland areas are within Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), notified by English Nature.
- Sherwood Heath, managed by Newark and Sherwood District Council, is a Local Nature Reserve (LNR). Other heaths are Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC).
- Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust manages 10ha of heathland in its Nature Reserves. BTCV is involved in heathland management at a variety of sites.
- Mansfield District Council (Oak Tree Heath), English Nature (Clipstone Heath), and Sherwood Forest Golf Club all manage heathland sites for nature conservation.

- All significant areas of heathland are given a degree of protection as SSSIs or SINCs .

- A total of 206ha of heathland is managed under the Countryside Stewardship and Reserves Enhancement Schemes, or English Nature management agreements. 4 areas on the Sherwood sandstone aquifer are covered by the Nitrate Sensitive Areas Scheme.

- Sherwood Forest is one of four trial areas in the English Nature Habitat Restoration Project. EN and the Sherwood Forest Trust are working together to tackle the problems associated with habitat fragmentation in the area.

Targets

The targets set for Lowland Heath are as follows (see Lowland dry acid grassland for further details):

Falling under the UK Broad Habitat of Dwarf Shrub Heath, this habitat includes vegetation dominated by species from the heath family or dwarf gorse species. As a UK Priority Habitat, Lowland heathland is characterised by the presence of plants such as heather and dwarf gorses, and is generally found below 300 metres in altitude. Nottinghamshire heathlands are generally of a 'grass heath' type, with ling and bell heather interspersed with fine grasses such as wavy hair-grass. They are characteristic of the poor acid soils of the Sherwood and East Notts Sandlands areas.

Target Type	Target Text	Units	2005 Baseline	2010 Target	2015 Target
Maintain Extent	Maintain the extent of all existing lowland heathland.	Ha	750	750	1750
Achieve Condition	Maintain and improve by management existing lowland heathland.	Ha	338 (45%, existing habitat in favourable condition)	600 (80% of total habitat resource)	750 (100% of 2005 baseline resource)
Restoration	Improve the condition of relict habitat so that it qualifies as Lowland heathland.	Ha		500	500
Expansion	Encourage the re-establishment and increase the area of heathland.	Ha			

PROPOSED ACTION

Policy and legislation

1. Ensure the incorporation of relevant (inter-)national law, policies and guidance into all plans and policies relating to the protection, enhancement and management of lowland heathland habitat.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

2. Through planning control or other land use consultation processes, allow no further loss of areas of lowland heathland habitat and seek opportunities to enhance existing areas and create new areas through approved development.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

3. Ensure agri-environment, forestry and other funding schemes include appropriate management options and design measures to suit local nature conservation needs.

ACTION: Government Agencies.

Site safeguard and management

4. Review the extent of SSSI coverage of heathland habitat and consider notifying further sites as necessary.

ACTION: Government Agencies.

5. Designate SINCs and declare Local Nature Reserves on appropriate areas of habitat or instigate other appropriate measures for their protection.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

6. Promote the uptake of positive management with owners of SSSIs, LNRs, SINCs and any other areas of lowland heathland habitat.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

7. Carry out appropriate habitat management on sites controlled by BAP partners.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

8. Ensure sites containing lowland heathland habitat have appropriate management plans that are working towards improving site management and condition

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

9. Acquire land to ensure good habitat management or to create habitat.

ACTION: NGO's.

Advisory

10. Provide formal or informal training in management techniques for lowland heathland habitat to land managers, site wardens, volunteers, etc.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

11. Establish demonstration sites or projects to demonstrate/publicise good habitat management techniques.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

Future research and monitoring

12. Establish and maintain a monitoring programme (a site register) to determine progress towards county HAP targets.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.
13. Ensure that areas of lowland heathland habitat are periodically resurveyed to establish extent and condition. Update resulting habitat inventory every 5 years and revise targets and HAPs if necessary.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

Communications and publicity

14. Improve public awareness and appreciation of lowland heathland habitat by providing appropriate interpretation, education and access (where appropriate).

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

15. Improve awareness of the value of, and appropriate management techniques for lowland heathland habitat among site owners and occupiers.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

What You Can Do

- Volunteer as a warden on a heathland site.

- When walking on a heath, make a note of the plants and animals you see, and send your records to the Nottinghamshire Biological and Geological Records Centre at Wollaton Hall. Expert knowledge is not required!

Species List

The following are examples of species of conservation concern (Appendix A) which are likely to benefit from this action plan:

- Adder
- Common Lizard
- Grey Partridge
- Hen Harrier
- Nightjar
- Common ground hopper
- Clouded buff moth
- Grass waver moth
- Large red bellied clearwing moth
- Ling pug moth
- Small chocolate tip moth
- Smoky wave moth
- Annulet moth
- White colon moth
- Creeping willow
- Cross leaved heather
- Greater broomrape
- Heath cudweed