

Priority Habitat Action Plans

6.1 Lowland Calcareous Grassland

Main Objectives & Key Actions:

- 1) **Bring all existing calcareous grassland sites into effective management.**
 - Maintain current resource of high quality calcareous grassland.
 - Establish restoration plans for all sites by 2009.
 - Bring all significant areas of calcareous grassland into favourable condition by 2012.
- 2) **Expand and link existing sites and establish new sites through habitat recreation projects.**
 - Recreate 10 ha of calcareous grassland habitat, for example as part of development schemes, by 2012.
- 3) **Improve designation of all sites, including fragments.**
 - Designate all appropriate calcareous grassland County Wildlife Sites by 2009.
 - Survey and establish new and existing 'Special Verges' by 2009 and seek inclusion in LDF.
- 4) **Increase the amount of research and monitoring.**
 - Resurvey the 10 key sites identified in the 2001 Calcareous Grassland Survey by 2009.
 - Monitor every calcareous grassland site on a 5 year cycle.
- 5) **Increase education & public awareness.**
 - Set up an 'Autumn Ladies Tresses' awareness campaign by 2009.
 - Continue to promote the 'Save the Small Blue' campaign.

6.1.1 Background & Current Status

Calcareous grassland typically occurs on unenclosed land with generally shallow, well-draining soil and is usually associated with chalk and limestone. With only about 41,000 hectares remaining in the UK, calcareous grassland is very localised, restricted to the chalk hills of southern England and various limestone areas in the North and West.

Within Devon it is largely confined to the chalk hills of East Devon and the limestone outcrops of Torbay and Plymouth. The South Devon Natural Area description published by English Nature in 1998 describes Torbay's calcareous grassland as being of "tremendous importance for its large number of nationally rare and scarce flowering plants". Torbay supports the most extensive stands of calcareous grassland in Devon, on its outcrops of Devonian limestone. The Torbay Wildlife Survey (1991) identified only 22.36 hectares of unimproved and 16.6ha of semi-improved calcareous grasslands in Torbay. The most extensive sites identified as having areas of calcareous grassland in the Calcareous Grassland Survey (2001) are Berry Head, Wall's Hill, Hopes Nose and Sharkham Point (Figure 2). Smaller areas have been identified in The Grove, Fishcombe

Point, Clennon Hill, Petit Tor Quarry, Daddy Hole, St Marychurch Down, Lummaton Quarry and Durl Head, many of these smaller sites are in unfavourable condition (Figure 2).

The limestone grassland communities of Torbay include a large number of nationally rare plant species. Torbay supports a concentration of rare and local plants these include small hare's ear, small restharrow, goldilocks aster, white rock-rose and little robin. Certain species of lichens and bryophytes thrive in these open, dry, sparsely-vegetated calcareous grasslands.

The main calcareous grassland sites in Torbay have been designated as SSSIs for many years and these occur at Hopes Nose, Wall's Hill, Berry Head and Sharkham Point. Berry Head is also a National Nature Reserve and a SAC. Lowland calcareous grassland is included within the *Festuco - Brometalia* grassland identified in Annex 1 of the EC Habitats Directive as of Community Interest and is of priority type if orchids present (UK BAP).

Torbay's calcareous grasslands are of regional and national importance and their conservation is of highest priority.

Species that are highlighted in the Plan are:

Small hare's-ear	
Small rest harrow	Honewort
White rock-rose	Goldilocks aster
Dwarf mouse-ear	Autumn squill
Small blue butterfly	Autumn ladies tresses
<i>Cheilothela chloropus</i> - bryophyte	
<i>Weissia levieri</i> - bryophyte	
Beautiful gothic - moth	
Chalk carpet - moth	
<i>Cladonia convulata</i> – lichen	
<i>Psora decipens</i> – lichen	
Hornet robberfly	
Waxcaps	
Dotted bee fly (<i>Bombylius discolor</i>)	

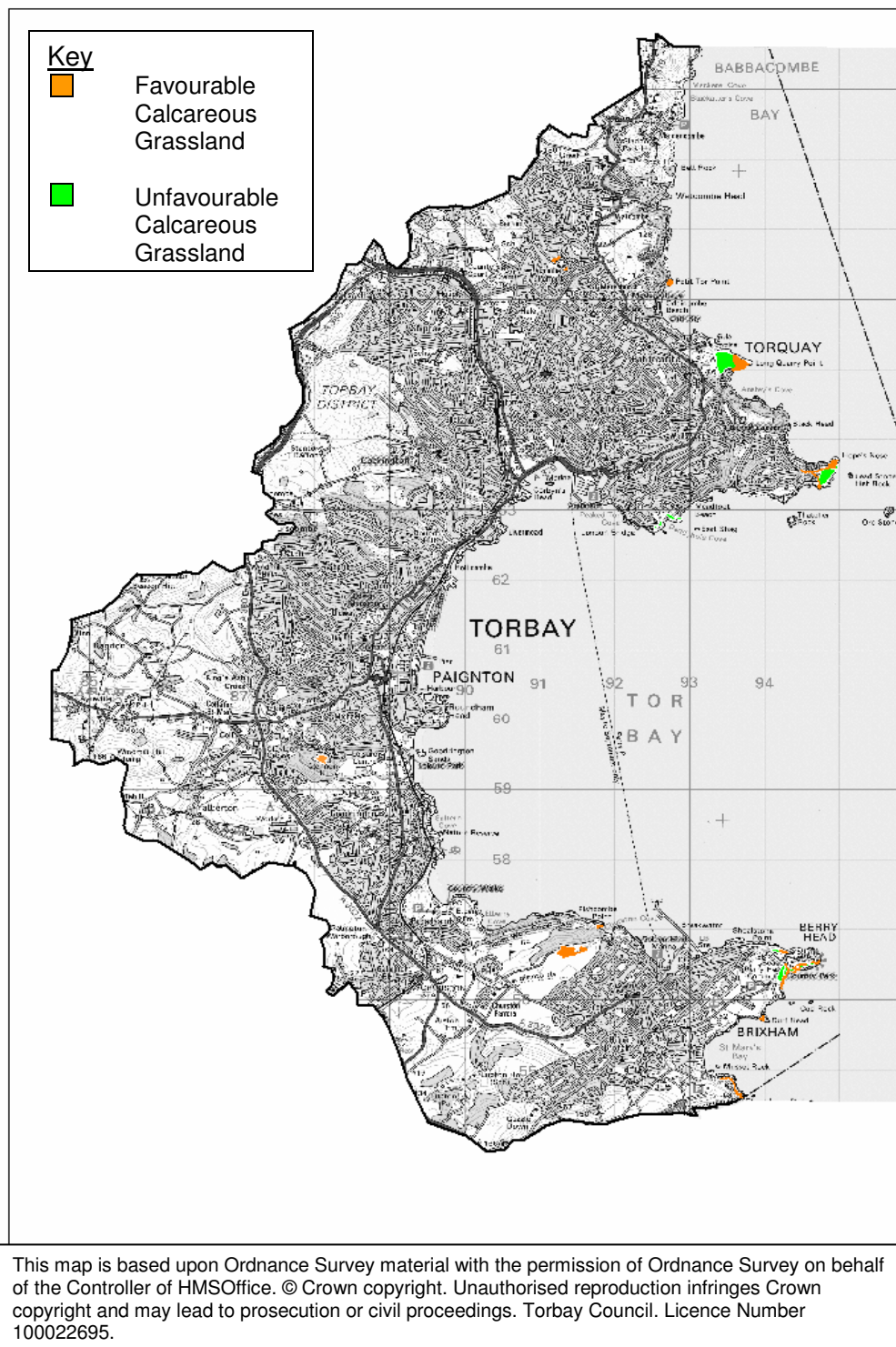


Figure 2: Map to show distribution of favourable and unfavourable calcareous grassland sites in Torbay. Location and status was obtained from the Calcareous Grassland Survey (2001) and English Nature's SSSI condition assessment. It should be noted that some of this data is 5 years old and sites may have changed in condition.

6.1.2 The Current Threats to this Habitat:

- Scrub encroachment from species such as blackthorn, cotoneaster, holm oak, gorse linked to a reduction in grazing and lack of management.
- Habitat destruction and possible development threats.
- Heavy trampling
- Dog fouling and disturbance leading to a loss in species diversity through localised nutrient enrichment.
- Fragmentation leads to a decline in species diversity and abundance and an increase probability of species extinction.
- Misuse of habitat e.g. fire, mini motorbikes and litter

Table 3: Lowland Calcareous Grassland Action Plan. Actions shaded in grey indicate further funding is required.

High priority actions are proposed for completion within the next 3 years (to end of 2009).

Medium priority actions are proposed for completion within the next 6 years (to end of 2012).

Low priority actions are proposed for completion within the next 10 years (to end 2016)

Actions for Lowland Calcareous Grassland	Priority (High, Medium and Low)	Meets Main Objective	Partners	Ongoing Action
Policy & Legislation				
LCG1 - Implement calcareous grassland recreation schemes in identified areas through the development control process.	M	2	TC, Developers	✓
LCG2 - Improve designation and protection of all calcareous grassland sites in Torbay e.g. verges, pockets and corridors as CWS, SSSI, CGS.	H	3	TC, NE	✓
Site Management				
LCG3 -Maintain management balance – grassland/scrub mosaic. Through clearance and removal of non-natives e.g. cotoneaster & holm Oak.	H	1, 2	TCCT, TC, WWCT, NE	✓
LCG4 - Maintain grassland quality by grazing and taking a hay crop where necessary.	M	1	TCCT	✓
LCG5 - Bring small pockets linked with larger areas into favourable status e.g. Churston Common, golf courses, roadside verges and	M	1, 2, 3	Land Owners	✓

railway banks and seek protection such as Protected Road Verges.				
Communication & Publicity				
LCG6 - Inform local groups, communities, schools, householders, dogwalkers and other stakeholders of the importance of calcareous grassland/maritime cliff and slope e.g. local radio and newspaper, guided walks and interpreters on sites.	H	5	TCCT, TC, AONB	✓
LCG7 - Provide information to landowners, local businesses e.g. garden centres on limestone grassland and associated flora. Raise an awareness campaign 'Have you seen this plant in your garden?' e.g. Autumn Ladies Tresses.	M	5	TCCT, TC	
LCG8 - Establish a network of local specialists to run walks and increase publicity.	L	5	TCCT	
LCG9 - Inform landowners and developers of the importance of sites and appropriate management.	H	1, 5	TCCT, TC, Landowners, Developers, NE	✓
LCG10 - Inform Highways about key areas and advise on management regimes e.g. Churston Common and Blue Water drive	H	1, 5	TCCT, TC, Landowners, NE	✓
Research & Monitoring				
LCG11 - Complete an inventory of all lowland calcareous grassland sites e.g. verges and identify networks and identify owners.	H	4	TCCT, NE, TC, DBRC	
LCG12 - Set up standard surveying protocols across key limestone grassland sites in the Bay. Complete at 5 year intervals.	H	4	TCCT, WWCT, NE, BSBI	✓ (5yearly intervals)
LCG13 - Ensure all data is collated and disseminated to DBRC and the NBN and maintain exchange agreements.	M	4	TC, WWCT, TCCT, DBRC	✓

LCG14 - Identify suitable areas for habitat restoration using soil surveys, aerial photography, ant hill relicts, former commons.	H	4	TCCT, NE, TC	
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Abbreviations: Torbay Coast & Countryside Trust (TCCT), Torbay Council (TC), Natural England (NE), Whitley Wildlife Conservation Trust (WWCT), Devon Biodiversity Records Centre (DBRC), Botanical Society of the British Isles (BSBI)

This Habitat Action Plan should be linked with the following action plans:
Earth Heritage HAP 'Coastal Exposures and Geomorphological Features'
Maritime Cliff and Slope
White Rock-rose