

1.1 Introduction

The first edition of the Lowland Grassland Management Handbook was published in 1994. The original aims and objectives included the production of a second edition which would reflect feedback received from users of the first edition. The second edition includes major revisions of key chapters such as those concerning grazing and cutting together with minor revisions of the remainder to reflect changes in knowledge since 1994. In addition, the second edition includes wholly new chapters and sections on topics such as grassland creation and monitoring.

The second edition Lowland Grassland Management Handbook is a joint initiative between four major partners, The Wildlife Trusts, English Nature, Countryside Council for Wales and Scottish Natural Heritage.

The publication of a new edition is timely given the recent publication of the costed habitat action plans for semi-natural grassland under the auspices of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (English Nature 1998a & The UK Steering Group 1995). These have objectives and targets which are geared at ensuring existing semi-natural grasslands are in favourable condition and for the creation of new grasslands of wildlife interest. In addition, the advice contained here should assist the ongoing refinement of agri-environment schemes which provide funding for grassland management.

1.2 Aims

The aims of the second edition of the Grassland Management Handbook can be summarised as follows:

- " To help land managers and advisers to achieve best practice for nature conservation in grassland management.
- " To set out the various options available to the manager and adviser.
- " To assist in the choice between these options.
- " To provide basic practical information about procedures, methods, equipment and the ways to achieve good management.
- " To list the most useful sources from which more detailed guidance can be obtained on specific matters.

1.3 Scope

The handbook covers UK lowland semi-natural grassland of the four main broad categories: neutral, calcareous, acidic and marshy grassland (but many of the techniques are applicable to other related

habitats). The definition of lowland grassland includes largely enclosed grasslands (meadows and pastures) normally occurring at altitudes of 350 metres or less in the UK. This definition thus includes the enclosed hay meadows and pastures occurring in upland valleys and dales. The Upland Management Handbook (Backshall *et al* in press) should be referred to for advice on the management of upland unenclosed grasslands. In relation to wet grasslands, the reader is advised to use this handbook in tandem with the wet grassland guide published in 1997 (Treweek, *et al* 1997).

The handbook concentrates on the management of unimproved lowland grassland of high nature conservation interest. However, grasslands which are of lesser botanical interest ie 'semi-improved' are covered; they can still be of considerable nature conservation interest and similar management principles apply.

1.4 Target audience

The handbook is directed at organisations and individuals managing unimproved semi-natural grasslands for conservation purposes and those responsible for advising managers of such grasslands including farmers. In addition, there is scope for using the information in the handbook to produce a range of material for use by a wider group of land managers. The handbook should be a useful core text for both conservation and agricultural courses at further education institutes.

1.5 Method

To help inform the content of the second edition, a feedback form was included in the first edition. Completed feedback forms were received from a number of users. In addition, a number of internal workshops designed to obtain feedback from users and specialists were held by The Wildlife Trusts and English Nature. Much informal comment has also been received by the editors since the first edition was published.

Revisions of the original chapters and new chapters and sections were drafted largely by authors from The Wildlife Trusts and English Nature although there are also a few chapters authored by ecologists from a variety of other organisations (see Contents). First drafts of fully revised and new chapters were sent out for comment to a more limited range of organisations and individuals in most cases than was the case for the first edition. These normally included staff in the Country Agencies, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries & Food and the National Trust.

1.6 Format

The handbook is divided into 16 major sections or 'topics' and a number of sub-sections. Each sub-section that relates to a management technique includes an introduction and an outline of the basic principles underlying it. These are then developed into a set of management objectives and the various options available to the manager are discussed.

Finally, the guidelines for achieving 'best practice' are explained.

Case studies are included where appropriate to highlight examples of best practice.

The handbook incorporates a bibliography and further reading list (Chapter 17). Nomenclature of vascular plants follows Stace (1997).

1.7 Use

The partner organisations involved in the production of the handbook are keen to ensure it is used widely so that lowland grasslands of nature conservation value are managed appropriately. For this reason, they are content for users to copy parts of the handbook for educational use provided the source is acknowledged.

References

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