

## UA5 Enclosed Semi-natural dry grassland – habitat description

Four main forms of dry unimproved grassland are present in Wales. The presence of three of these depends mainly upon levels of soil acidity (pH): acid grasslands, (unimproved) neutral grasslands and calcareous grasslands. A fourth, very rare type, calaminarian grasslands, occurs on soils rich in heavy metals.

### Acid grasslands

Acid grasslands occur on acid soils with pH levels generally below 5.0. They are mainly found in grazed pasture in the upland fringes, but can occur down to sea level.

In most lowland dry acid grasslands fine grasses such as Sheep's Fescue and Common Bent are abundant. Characteristic herbs include Heath Bedstraw and Tormentil. Other occasional to frequent flowers include Common Lousewort, Common Dog-violet, Harebell and Betony.



Dry acid grassland with abundant Heath Bedstraw



Heath Bedstraw



Tormentil

On soils which are thinner or more prone to droughting, Sheep's Sorrel is very characteristic, along with an abundance of mosses and lichens.



Drought-prone acid grassland with abundant Sheep's Sorrel (red flowers), mosses and lichens



Sheep's Sorrel

## Neutral grasslands

Neutral grasslands occur on soils that are neither strongly acidic nor alkaline, but low in soil nutrients such as phosphorus and nitrogen. They occur on flat or gentle slopes, in lowland grazed pastures or hay meadows.

Neutral grasslands are usually rich in colourful herbs and contain several different grass species.

Common grasses include: Crested Dog's-tail, Sweet Vernal Grass, Red Fescue and Yorkshire Fog

Flowering plants include Common Bird's-foot Trefoil, Black Knapweed, Red Clover, Yarrow, Ribwort Plantain, Ox-eye Daisy and 'Dandelion family species' such as Common Cat's-ear and Rough Hawkbit. Hay meadow examples often have frequent Hay Rattle and Eyebright.



Unimproved neutral grassland in a hay meadow, with frequent Red Clover, Ox-eye Daisy and Rough Hawkbit (yellow flowers).



Common Bird's-foot Trefoil



Black Knapweed

## Calcareous grassland

They occur on calcareous soils with pH above 6.5, mainly in the limestone areas of north and south Wales. They can be found from flat ground to steep slopes, usually with patchy outcrops of limestone rock, and are generally grazed as pasture.

Lowland calcareous grasslands are very rich in herb species, the most distinctive of which include Rockrose, Wild Thyme, Salad Burnet, Small Scabious and Lady's Bedstraw. The main grasses include Sheep's Fescue and Quaking Grass.



Calcareous grassland with frequent Wild Thyme (purple flowers) and Common Rockrose (yellow flowers), with patchy limestone rock outcrops.



Common Rockrose



Wild Thyme

## Calaminarian grasslands

Calaminarian grassland are very rare in Wales, being found on soils rich in heavy metals such as lead and zinc. The most distinctive form has frequent Spring Sandwort, while other forms are very rich in mosses and lichens.

They occur on abandoned metal mine sites and are usually grazed as pasture. They occur in both the lowlands and uplands. Most sites are in either north-east Wales or Ceredigion.



Calaminarian grassland with abundant Spring Sandwort (white flowers) and mosses