



Coastal & Floodplain Grazing Marsh

Local Biodiversity Action Plan

Associated Species Action Plans:

- Mud Snail
- Farmland Birds



Ecology

What is Coastal and Floodplain Grazing Marsh?

Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh is defined in the UK Habitat Action Plan (HAP) as periodically inundated pasture, or meadow with ditches which maintain the water levels, containing standing brackish or fresh water. The ditches are especially rich in plants and invertebrates. Almost all areas are grazed and some are cut for hay or silage. Sites may contain seasonal water-filled hollows and permanent ponds with emergent swamp communities, but not extensive areas of tall fen species like reeds; although they may abut with fen and reed swamp communities.

Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh is found on low-lying alluvial and occasionally peat soils, around estuaries and along the floodplains of rivers. It is characterised by a water table at or above ground level for part of the year. This seasonal inundation gives the area a distinctive floral composition, with species like creeping bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*), marsh foxtail (*Alopecurus geniculatus*) and strawberry clover (*Trifolium fragiferum*). In the North West, these areas often support rarer species such as: whorled caraway (*Carum verticillatum*), tubular water dropwort (*Oenanthe fistulosa*) and lesser marshwort (*Apium inundatum*).



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Why is Coastal and Floodplain Grazing Marsh important?

Areas of grazing marsh are important for breeding and wintering waterfowl and the associated pools and ditches may be rich in freshwater invertebrates and plants. Grazing marshes are particularly important for the number of breeding waders such as snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* and curlew *Numenius arquata* they support. Internationally important populations of wintering wildfowl also occur including Bewick swans *Cygnus bewickii* and whooper swans *Cygnus cygnus*. In Cheshire nationally scarce mud snails occupy the ditches at Goway Meadows. The location and management of this habitat also influences the distribution of black poplars in the region.

Current status

Grazing marsh is described as periodically inundated pasture or meadow with ditches which maintain the water levels, containing standing brackish or fresh water. The ditches are especially rich in plants and invertebrates.

The exact extent of grazing marsh in the UK is not known, but it is possible that there may be a total of 300,000 ha. The Cheshire region has large areas that were once naturally inundated by both sea and fresh water. However, the demands of industry and the perceived need for improved agricultural land has led to the drainage of non-coastal areas along rivers whilst sea defence works for land gain have caused the loss of coastal grazing marsh. The only specific grazing marsh site within the Cheshire region with legal protection is Meols Meadow SSSI on the Wirral Peninsula, which covers 7.1ha.

A costed Action Plan for Coastal and Floodplain Grazing Marshes is included in the UK Steering Group Report (1995).

Threats

- Ecologically insensitive flood defence works.
- Agricultural intensification.
- Industrialization.
- Groundwater abstraction.
- Pollution of groundwater or surface water.
- Neglect in traditional use



How are we helping to conserve grazing marsh in the Cheshire region?

- Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh is a key habitat for environmental stewardship options and is being actively targeted in Cheshire.
- A Water Level Management Plan (1997) has been prepared by the Environment Agency for the Gowy meadows and ditches SBI.
- Statutory protection of the habitat through SSSI and RAMSAR designation and ESA notification.
- Liverpool Bay Natural Area Profile (EN1998) includes a section on grazing marsh.
- The RSPB is targeting advice to landowners re: wet grassland restoration initiatives.

Objectives, targets and actions

The objectives, targets and actions to help conserve coastal and floodplain grazing marsh in the Cheshire region can be found on the [Biodiversity Action Reporting System \(BARS\)](#) along with full details of our progress so far.

How to find out more about coastal floodplain and grazing marsh

[UK BAP Definition](#)

Contact details

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References and Glossary

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References and Glossary continued

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<http://www.ukbap.org.uk/UKPlans.aspx?ID=9>

