



UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Habitat Descriptions

Lowland Heathland

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Amended from the pre-existing HAP (<http://tna.europarchive.org/20110303145238/http://www.ukbap.org.uk/UKPlans.aspx?ID=15>), lowland heathland is described as a broadly open landscape on impoverished, acidic mineral and shallow peat soil, which is characterised by the presence of plants such as heathers and dwarf gorses. It is generally found below 300m in altitude in the UK, but in more northerly latitudes the altitudinal limit is often lower. Areas of heathland in good condition should consist of an ericaceous layer of varying heights and structures, plus some or all of the following additional features, depending on environmental and/or management conditions; scattered and clumped trees and scrub; bracken; areas of bare ground; areas of acid grassland; lichens; gorse; wet heaths, bogs and open waters. Lowland heathland can develop on drift soils and weathered flint beds over calcareous soils (limestone or chalk heath). Lowland heathland is a dynamic habitat which undergoes significant changes in different successional stages, from bare ground (e.g. after burning or tree clearing) and grassy stages, to mature, dense heath. These different stages often co-occur on a site. The presence and numbers of characteristic birds, reptiles, invertebrates, vascular plants, bryophytes and lichens are important indicators of habitat quality.

In terms of distinguishing between lowland heathland and genuine acid grassland, less than 25% dwarf shrub cover should be assessed as grassland, over 25% as heathland.