



### Species-Rich Grassland (Neutral and Calcareous)

*Species-rich grasslands are one of the most threatened and rapidly disappearing habitats in Shropshire. They occur on both neutral and calcareous soils and are most valuable when they have not been improved by re-seeding, ploughing or the application of fertilisers or herbicides. They encompass traditionally managed hay meadows, old pastures and other undisturbed areas of grasslands such as churchyards and roadside verges.*

*Neutral and calcareous grasslands can be distinguished by their characteristic assemblage of species. Unimproved neutral grassland typically contains a range of grasses such as Crested Dog's Tail, Sweet Vernal Grass and Meadow Foxtail, often with a colourful array of wildflowers such as Yellow Rattle, Oxeye Daisy, Betony, Devil's-bit Scabious and Black Knapweed. Calcareous grassland occurs over limestone or other base-rich rocks and the soils are typically thin and nutrient poor. Many plants have adapted to these conditions and calcareous grasslands can be extremely rich in species. The sward is composed of a wide range of grasses, including Quaking Grass, Glaucous Sedge, orchids species, Fairy Flax, Yellow-wort, Small Scabious and Rock-rose.*

*Both types of grasslands are threatened by inappropriate management, including over-fertilization (particularly with artificial fertilizer), undergrazing or overgrazing by stock, and changes in management practices such as more frequent harvesting for silage.*

#### **1 Objectives and Targets**

##### **1.1 Objectives**

- A. Safeguard existing areas of unimproved species-rich (neutral and calcareous) grassland by ensuring no further loss or degradation.
- B. Improve knowledge of the distribution, extent and status of species-rich grassland in Shropshire through survey, research and monitoring.
- C. Increase the extent of species-rich grassland by creation and restoration projects in areas of landscape currently supporting species-rich grassland.
- D. Improve the quality of species-rich grassland through re-instating appropriate management and promoting sensitive management of adjoining land.
- E. Increase awareness of the importance of species-rich grassland and attempt to generate a market for the products and ecosystem services of species-rich grassland.

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## 1.2 Targets

- Maintain at least 43ha of Lowland Calcareous Grassland until 2011
- Maintain at least 335ha of Lowland Meadows until 2011
- Restore 15ha of Lowland Calcareous Grassland by 2015
- Restore 15ha of Lowland Meadows by 2015
- Create 4ha of Lowland Calcareous Grassland by 2015
- Create 20ha of Lowland Meadows by 2015
- Achieve condition of 4ha of Lowland Calcareous Grassland by 2015
- Achieve condition of 4ha of Lowland Meadows by 2015

## 2 Current Status

### 2.1 Habitat definition

In Shropshire Lowland Meadows comprise all areas of grasslands defined by the National Vegetation Classification<sup>1</sup> as:

MG4 – *Alopecurus pratensis* – *Sanguisorba officinalis* (rare in Shropshire)

MG5 – *Cynosurus cristatus* – *Centaurea nigra*

MG8 – *Cynosurus cristatus* – *Caltha palustris* (rare and perhaps not present in Shropshire)

In addition the following may qualify as poor condition Lowland Meadow - usually when stands have been neglected:

MG1e – *Arrhenatherum elatius* grassland, *Centaurea nigra* sub-community

Lowland Calcareous Grassland comprises all areas of grasslands defined by the National Vegetation Classification as:

CG1 – *Festuca ovina* – *Carlina vulgaris*

CG2 – *Festuca ovina* – *Avenula pratensis* [*Helictotrichon pratense*] (as *H. pratense* is not found in Shropshire this is an unusual form of this grassland)

CG3 – *Bromus erectus*

CG6 - *Avenula pubescens* [*Helictotrichon pubescens*]

CG7 - *Festuca ovina* - *Hieracium pilosella* - *Thymus polytrichus*

### 2.2 Importance

Unimproved neutral grassland and calcareous grassland are two broad habitat types identified under the UK Biodiversity Programme. Within these two broad categories priority habitats include: lowland meadows, lowland calcareous grassland, upland hay meadows, and upland calcareous grassland. Both lowland meadows and lowland calcareous grassland are found in Shropshire. Both these habitats are covered within this habitat action plan for species-rich grassland.

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## 2.3 Trends

Species-rich grassland is one of the most threatened and vulnerable habitats. It has been estimated that in lowland England and Wales semi-natural grasslands have declined by 97% during the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>2</sup>.

In Shropshire the data is not available to make a clear assessment of trends for this habitat. In 1989 a very rough assessment based on habitats lost from the 'Prime Site' series (now called Wildlife Sites) showed that species-rich meadows had declined by 20% in the previous 10 year period with a loss of 167 sites<sup>3</sup>. However, it may be that gradual loss of site quality, rather than complete loss of sites, is now having the greatest impact on grasslands in Shropshire.

## 2.4 Area / Extent

The most recent estimates of the extent of species-rich grassland in Shropshire are based on a wide range of sources none of which are comprehensive county surveys. The inventory of lowland grassland produced by English Nature in 1999 gives an approximate figure of at least 200ha of neutral grassland and more than 20ha of calcareous grassland. The most recent estimate generated by the Sustainability Group at Shropshire County Council is 335ha of Lowland Meadows and 43ha of Lowland Calcareous Grassland. Recent survey work in aggregates sites has considerably added to the known area of Lowland Calcareous Grassland in particular.

## 2.5 Distribution

Species-rich grasslands are widely distributed throughout Shropshire. Calcareous grasslands are particularly associated with the limestone areas around Oswestry and Wenlock Edge, and on former clay workings in the Telford area. Unimproved neutral grasslands are scattered throughout the county but with some concentrations in areas around the Clee Hills, the Wyre Forest and along Wenlock Edge. They tend to be fragmented and some examples persist on roadside verges, churchyards, small-holdings or in isolated and sometimes inaccessible fields where they have escaped agricultural improvement.

## 3 Current Factors Affecting the Habitat

- Agricultural improvement of grassland areas through ploughing, re-seeding, application of fertilisers and herbicides or conversion to arable.
- Reduction in grazing of grasslands, resulting in invasion by scrub or coarse grasses.
- Change in stock type leading to inappropriate grazing (eg heavy grazing by horses alone)
- Fertiliser and herbicide drift from adjacent fields.
- Recreational activities on a scale that damages the habitat (eg walking, mountain biking, horseriding)
- Infilling of old quarries that have developed a rich grassland flora.
- Loss through fragmentation of habitat.
- The loss of traditional liming in some examples of upland meadows may be reducing diversity and resulting in a slow reversion to acid grassland or heathland.

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## 4 Current Action

### 4.1 Policy and Protection

- Some areas of species-rich grassland have legal protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act if cited as one of the special features in a SSSI designation.
- According to national planning policy (Planning Policy Statement 9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation <sup>4</sup>), species-rich grasslands are a material consideration in the planning process if:
  - they have been designated as local Wildlife Sites, or
  - they fall into the category of Lowland Calcareous Grassland or Lowland Meadow in the national habitat list drawn up under section 74 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (Section 74 list).
- Under the the above Acts, central Government and all public bodies, including local authorities, utilities, the fire service, prison service etc. must have regard to the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity when carrying out their functions. This includes habitats and species on the Section 74 list.
- The EIA (Agriculture) Regulations (2006) require a landowner to seek consent from Natural England to agriculturally 'improve' or 'restructure' semi-natural grasslands if they have not been cultivated (physically or chemically) for at least 15 years and they are over 2ha in area. In practice, many if not the majority of species-rich grasslands are below this size threshold and so have no protection.

### 4.2 Management, Research and Survey

- Areas of species-rich grassland occur within the Shropshire Hills and Clun Valley ESAs. Landowners here are eligible for grants towards maintaining these grasslands.
- Old meadows and pastures and limestone grasslands are eligible for grant-aid under the Environmental Stewardship scheme administered by Natural England.
- 37 quarry sites (both active and disused sites) were surveyed in detail in 2006 and early 2007. This work provided detailed mapping of large areas of species-rich grassland habitat.
- The AONB and former Blue Remembered Hills Project have undertaken work with owners of species-rich grasslands and have also funded surveys of some sites.
- Shropshire County Council is leading work that highlights Landscape Description Units that are rich in indicators of high quality grassland (and other habitats). This work is being used to prioritise areas for project work on grasslands (see actions table). This work may also help prioritise survey work.
- Shropshire Wildlife Trust has undertaken surveys of some Wildlife Sites containing species-rich grassland.

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### 5 Benefits of Conserving Species-Rich Grassland

- Provides attractive landscapes with subsequent benefits for local tourism.
- Far fewer costly inputs are required for species-rich grasslands including less weed control, much lower fertilizer costs (ideally only low inputs of organic fertilizers), and no re-seeding costs <sup>5</sup>.
- Increased potential for organic farming through providing a chemical-free sward.
- The value of the hay crop from species-rich sites can be much greater if used as a source of green hay or wildflower seed mixes.
- Plants typically found in species rich grasslands have been shown to increase fertility, growth rates of young stock and milk production of stock in addition to reducing methane production. Excessive methane production by stock contributes to heath issues and is also a significant factor exacerbating climate change <sup>6</sup>.
- Stock grazed on species-rich grassland may also show a reduction in gut parasites <sup>7, 8</sup>.
- Supports a rich variety of flora and fauna, including rare or restricted species.
- Supports large populations of invertebrates that pollinate crops and predate on crop pests.
- Extensively managed species-rich grassland locks more carbon into the soil than intensively managed grasslands or arable farming systems <sup>9</sup>.

### 6 Key Species

#### Plants

Below is a list of axiophytes (plant habitat indicators) for both Lowland Meadows and Lowland Calcareous Grassland in Shropshire.

<i>Alchemilla filicaulis</i>	a lady's-mantle	<i>Clinopodium acinos</i>	Basil Thyme
<i>Alchemilla glabra</i>	a lady's-mantle	<i>Clinopodium ascendens</i>	Common Calamint
<i>Alchemilla xanthochlora</i>	a lady's-mantle	<i>Clinopodium vulgare</i>	Wild Basil
<i>Allium oleraceum</i>	Field Garlic	<i>Coeloglossum viride</i>	Frog Orchid
<i>Anacamptis pyramidalis</i>	Pyramidal Orchid	<i>Colchicum autumnale</i>	Meadow Saffron
<i>Anthyllis vulneraria</i>	Kidney Vetch	<i>Danthonia decumbens</i>	Heath-grass
<i>Arabis hirsuta</i>	Hairy Rock-cress	<i>Erigeron acer</i>	Blue Fleabane
<i>Astragalus glycyphyllos</i>	Wild Liquorice	<i>Euphrasia officinalis agg.</i>	Eyebright
<i>Blackstonia perfoliata</i>	Yellow-wort	<i>Filipendula vulgaris</i>	Dropwort
<i>Botrychium lunaria</i>	Moonwort		Dyer's Greenweed
<i>Briza media</i>	Quaking-grass	<i>Genista tinctoria</i>	Autumn Gentian
<i>Bromopsis erecta</i>	Upright Brome	<i>Gentianella amarella</i>	Long-stalked Crane's-bill
<i>Carex caryophyllea</i>	Spring Sedge	<i>Geranium columbinum</i>	Bloody Crane's-bill
<i>Carex muricata ssp. muricata</i>	Limestone Prickly Sedge	<i>Geranium sanguineum</i>	Fragrant Orchid
<i>Carex pallescens</i>	Pale Sedge	<i>Gymnadenia conopsea</i>	Common Rock-rose
<i>Carex panicea</i>	Carnation Sedge	<i>Helianthemum nummularium</i>	Downy Oat-grass
<i>Carex spicata</i>	Spiked Sedge	<i>Helictotrichon pubescens</i>	Stinking Hellebore
<i>Carlina vulgaris</i>	Carlina Thistle	<i>Helleborus foetidus</i>	Pale St. John's-wort
<i>Catapodium rigidum</i>	Fern-grass	<i>Hypericum montanum</i>	
	Greater Knapweed		
<i>Centaurea scabiosa</i>	Dwarf Thistle		
<i>Cirsium acaule</i>	Woolly Thistle		
<i>Cirsium eriophorum</i>			

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<i>Inula conyzae</i>	Ploughman's-spikenard		Buttercup
<i>Leontodon saxatilis</i>	Lesser Hawkbit	<i>Ranunculus sardous</i>	Hairy Buttercup
<i>Linum catharticum</i>	Fairy Flax	<i>Rhinanthus minor</i>	Yellow-rattle
<i>Listera ovata</i>	Common Twayblade	<i>Rosa micrantha</i>	Small-flowered Sweet-briar
<i>Lithospermum officinale</i>	Common Gromwell	<i>Rosa spinosissima</i>	Burnet Rose
<i>Myosotis discolor</i>	Changing Forget-me-not	<i>Sanguisorba minor ssp. minor</i>	Salad Burnet
<i>Myosotis ramosissima</i>	Early Forget-me-not	<i>Saxifraga tridactylites</i>	Rue-leaved Saxifrage
<i>Ononis repens</i>	Common Restharrow	<i>Scabiosa columbaria</i>	Small Scabious
<i>Ononis spinosa</i>	Spiny Restharrow	<i>Sedum forsterianum</i>	Rock Stonecrop
<i>Ophioglossum vulgatum</i>	Adder's-tongue	<i>Serratula tinctoria</i>	Saw-wort
<i>Ophrys apifera</i>	Bee Orchid	<i>Sherardia arvensis</i>	Field Madder
<i>Orchis morio</i>	Green-winged Orchid	<i>Silaum silaus</i>	Pepper-saxifrage
<i>Origanum vulgare</i>	Wild Marjoram	<i>Spiranthes spiralis</i>	Autumn Lady's-tresses
<i>Pimpinella saxifraga</i>	Burnet-saxifrage	<i>Stachys officinalis</i>	Betony
<i>Plantago media</i>	Hoary Plantain	<i>Succisa pratensis</i>	Devil's-bit Scabious
<i>Platanthera bifolia</i>	Lesser Butterfly-orchid	<i>Thymus pulegioides</i>	Large Thyme
<i>Platanthera chlorantha</i>	Greater Butterfly-orchid	<i>Torilis nodosa</i>	Knotted Hedge-parsley
<i>Poa compressa</i>	Flattened Meadow-grass	<i>Trifolium campestre</i>	Hop Trefoil
<i>Ranunculus parviflorus</i>	Small-flowered	<i>Trifolium micranthum</i>	Slender Trefoil
		<i>Trisetum flavescens</i>	Yellow Oat-grass
		<i>Viola tricolor</i>	Heartsease

## 7 Complementary Plans

UK Lowland Calcareous Grassland HAP  
 UK Lowland Meadows HAP  
 Shropshire Lowland Dry Acid Grassland HAP  
 Shropshire Brown Hare SAP  
 Shropshire Farmland Birds SAP  
 Shropshire Lapwing SAP

## 8. References

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### Appendix 1.

Habitat / Species	Action category code	Action text	Links & Labels	Location of action	Start date	End date	Lead	Assisting
Lowland Meadow	SHR SRG CA 01	Convene at least one local forum for managers of meadows in Shropshire by 2010		Shropshire & Telford	2008	2010	SWT	SBP
Lowland Meadow	SHR SRG CP 01	Hold one awareness raising event for horse owner clubs regarding the importance of species rich meadows and sensitive management in Shropshire by 2011		Shropshire & Telford	2008	2011	SBP	SWT (local groups)
Species rich grasslands	SHR SRG FI 01	Develop a certification scheme for green hay donor sites in Shropshire by 2015		Shropshire & Telford	2008	2015	SWT	SC, Ian Trueman
Species rich grasslands	SHR SRG HC 01	Use hay-strewing techniques on at least one Shropshire Council scheme by 2010		Shropshire & Telford	2008	2010	SC	SWT
Lowland Calcareous Grassland	SHR SRG HC 02	Restore 1.5ha of Lowland Calcareous Grassland at Crickheath, Llynclys Common by 2011	Label NI197	Crickheath, Llynclys Common Wildlife Site	2008	2011	SWT	
Lowland Calcareous Grassland	SHR SRG HC 03	Restore 1ha of Lowland Calcareous Grassland at Llanymynech Rocks Wildlife Site by 2011	Label NI197	Llanymynech Rocks	2008	2011	SWT	
Lowland Calcareous Grassland	SHR SRG HC 04	Restore 2.17ha of Lowland Calcareous Grassland at Dolgoch Quarry by 2011	Label NI197	Dolgoch Quarry	2008	2011	SWT	
Lowland Meadow	SHR SRG HC 05	Create 4.5ha of Lowland Meadow at Prees Heath by 2011	Label NI197	Prees Heath	2007	2011	BC	
Lowland Calcareous Grassland	SHR SRG HC 07	Restore 5.2ha of Lowland Calcareous Grassland at Llynclys Quarry by 2013	Label NI197	Llynclys Quarry	2009	2013	Tarmac	
Lowland Meadow	SHR SRG HC 08	Restore 4ha of Lowland Meadow at Llynclys Common by 2011	Label NI197	Llynclys Common	2008	2011	SWT	

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Lowland Calcareous Grassland	SHR SRG HC 09	Monitor the creation and maintenance of 0.3ha of Lowland Calcareous Grassland at Cornmeadow Quarry (near Harley Bank), under a planning condition, using natural regeneration (possibly followed by hay strewing) until 2013.		Cornmeadow Quarry (SJ617000)	2008	2015	SC	
Lowland Calcareous Grassland	SHR SRG HC 11	Create 0.5ha of Lowland Calcareous Grassland at Harley Bank using natural regeneration (possibly followed by hay strewing) by 2015.		Cornmeadow Quarry (SJ617000)	2008	2015	SC	
Lowland Calcareous Grassland; Lowland Meadow	SHR SRG HC 10	Create Species-rich Grassland on at least two roof tops as part of a brown / green roof scheme by 2015		Shropshire & Telford	2008	2015	SC, TC	
Lowland Calcareous Grassland	SHR SRG HS 01	Achieve condition of 1.6ha of Lowland Calcareous Grassland at Blakeway Hollow (SSSI), Wenlock Edge by 2011		Blakeway Hollow, Wenlock Edge	2005	Sept 2011	NT	
Lowland Calcareous Grassland	SHR SRG HS 17	Maintain 1.3ha of Lowland Calcareous Grassland at Hilltop (Ippikin's) meadow (SSSI) until 2015.		Hilltop (Ippikin's) meadow	2005	2015	NT	
Lowland Calcareous Grassland	SHR SRG HS 18	Restore 1.1ha of Lowland Calcareous Grassland at Pudding Bag (Wilderhope) by 2011.		Pudding Bag (Wilderhope)	2005	2011	NT	
Lowland Meadow	SHR SRG HS 02	Maintain 10.6ha of Lowland Meadow at Venus Pool (two sites) until at least 2015	Label NI197	Venus Pool	2005	2015	SOS	
Lowland Calcareous grassland	SHR SRG HS 03	Maintain 10.4ha of Lowland Calcareous Grassland at Llynclys Quarry until at least 2011	Label NI197	Llynclys Quarry	Jan 2006	Dec 2011	Tarmac	
Lowland Meadow	SHR SRG HS 04	Achieve condition of 3ha of Lowland Meadow at Llynclys Common by 2011	Label NI197	Llynclys Common	2008	2011	SWT	
Lowland Calcareous Grassland	SHR SRG HS 05	Maintain 1ha of Lowland Calcareous Grassland at Llynclys Common until at least 2015	Label NI197	Llynclys Common	2008	2015	SWT	
Lowland Calcareous Grassland	SHR SRG HS 06	Achieve condition of 1ha of Lowland Calcareous Grassland at Llynclys Common by 2011	Label NI197	Llynclys Common	2008	2011	SWT	

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Lowland Calcareous Grassland	SHR SRG HS 07	Maintain 0.5ha of Lowland Calcareous Grassland at Crickheath, Llynclys Common Wildlife Site until at least 2015	Label NI197	Crickheath, Llynclys common Wildlife Site	2008	2015	SWT	
Lowland Calcareous Grassland	SHR SRG HS 08	Maintain 1.5ha of Lowland Calcareous Grassland at Llanymynech Rocks Wildlife Site until at least 2015	Label NI197	Llanymynech Rocks	2008	2015	SWT	
Lowland Calcareous Grassland	SHR SRG HS 09	Maintain 0.5ha of Lowland Calcareous Grassland at Dolgoch Nature Reserve until at least 2015	Label NI197	Dolgoch Nature Reserve	2008	2015	SWT	
Lowland Calcareous Grassland	SHR SRG HS 10	Maintain 0.1ha of Lowland Calcareous Grassland at Craig Sychtyn SSSI until at least 2015	Label NI197	Craig Sychtyn, SSSI	2008	2015	SWT	
Lowland Meadow	SHR SRG HS 11	Maintain 3.6ha of Lowland Meadow at Chapel Fields, Tilstock until 2015	Label NI197	Chapel Fields, Tilstock	2008	2015	SWT	
Lowland Meadow	SHR SRG HS 12	Maintain 18ha of Lowland Meadow at Melverley Farm SSSI until at least 2015		Molverley Farm SSSI	2008	Dec 2015	SWT	
Lowland Meadow	SHR SRG HS 13	Maintain 6.4ha of Lowland Meadow at Colemere, near Ellesmere until at least 2015		Colemere SSSI	2008	Dec 2015	SC – ORS	
Lowland calcareous grassland	SHR SRG HS 14	Create 1.66ha of Lowland Meadow (with flushes in places) in Lagoon 1 area at Llynclys Quarry by maintenance of annual grazing regime until 2015	Label NI197	Llynclys Quarry	2005	2015	Tarmac	
Lowland calcareous grassland	SHR SRG HS 15	Extend grazing of the Lagoon 1 area of Llynclys Quarry to include the 1ha of the former tip area by 2010	Label NI197	Llynclys Quarry	2008	2010	Tarmac	
Lowland calcareous grassland	SHR SRG HS 16	Introduce grazing to at least 2.6ha of the restoration area (already fenced) at Llynclys Quarry by 2011	Label NI197	Llynclys Quarry	2008	2011	Tarmac	
Lowland Meadow	SHR SRG ID 01	Identify Landscape Description Units of high interest for Lowland Meadow using axiophyte and other data sources to help prioritise areas for survey or other grassland projects by 2009		Shropshire & Telford	2008	July 2009	SC	SBP (all)
Lowland Calcareous Grassland	SHR SRG ID 02	Identify Landscape Description Units of high interest for Lowland Calcareous Grassland using axiophyte and other data sources to help prioritise areas for survey or other grassland projects by 2009		Shropshire & Telford	2008	Sept 2009	SC	SBP (all)

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Species rich grasslands	SHR SRG ID 03	Assimilate all current data for species-rich grasslands in Shropshire to improve on the existing inventory by 2009		Shropshire & Telford	2008	2009	SC	SBP (all)
Species rich grasslands	SHR SRG ID 04	Produce a list and map of green hay donor sites for use by land managers, developers, etc by 2009		Shropshire & Telford	2008	May 2009	SWT	SC, Ian Trueman
Species rich grasslands	SHR SRG ID 05	Produce a prioritised list of potential grassland sites for survey by 2010		Shropshire & Telford	2008	Mar 2010	SC	SWT
Species rich grasslands	SHR SRG ID 06	Develop a simple form and guidance to assist current field workers collect mapped grassland data to feed into inventory data by 2010		Shropshire & Telford	2009	2010	NE	SC, SWT
Species rich grasslands	SHR SRG SU 01	Survey at least 1 non-designated site within each of the 4 LDUs of highest grassland interest by 2011		Shropshire & Telford	Apr 2009	Sept 2011	SWT	SBS

### Abbreviations

BC	Butterfly Conservation
Label NI197	Local Area Agreement – National Indicator 197 (Biodiversity)
NE	Natural England
NT	National Trust
SC	Shropshire Council
SC - ORS	Shropshire Council Outdoor Recreation Service
SOS	Shropshire Ornithological Society
SWT	Shropshire Wildlife Trust
TC	Telford Council

### Plan metadata

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Plan Lead: No lead partner identified – plan review led by Biodiversity Officer (Dan Wrench) August 2008.

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