

# COASTAL HEATHLAND

## DEFINITION

Lowland Heath is defined as being a vegetation type in which dwarf shrubs such as heather and gorse are a prominent component. They generally occur below the 300m contour but there can be a considerable overlap with communities considered more typical of the upland situation.

## DISTRIBUTION

Heathland with a genuine maritime influence is very limited within the County and the Biosphere Reserve exhibits some excellent examples of this valuable habitat. Coastal heath tends to occur in a mosaic of semi natural habitat which includes scrub and bracken. The total extent of the Biosphere Reserve resource is about 660 ha and the most exceptional areas of coastal heath can be found on Exmoor in the region to the east of Combe Martin at Foreland Point near Lynmouth and elsewhere on the Morte Point headland and from Marsland to Clovelly.

## LOCATIONS

South side of Baggy Point  
Middleborough Hill, Croyde  
Morte Point at Woolacombe  
Little Hangman  
Great Hangman;  
Holdstone and Trentishoe Downs near Combe Martin  
Milford  
Blackpool Mill  
Galantry Bower  
Welcombe Mouth  
Foreland near Lynmouth  
Countisbury

Remnant Heath:   Saunton Down near Braunton  
                          Woolacombe Down

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## CHARACTERISTIC WILDLIFE

Plants: ling, bell heather, cross-leaved heath, western gorse, European gorse, blackthorn, bracken, bilberry, bristle bent, purple moor grass, red fescue, Yorkshire fog, common bent, sheep fescue, tormentil, thrift, bluebell, primrose, sea campion, dog violet, birdsfoot trefoil, dodder, pale butterwort, ivy-leaved bellflower  
Insects: pearl bordered fritillary, high brown fritillary, green hairstreak butterflies  
Reptiles: common lizard, adder,  
Birds: wheatear, stonechat, nightjar, Dartford warbler, peregrine, gulls, cormorant, fulmar.

## THREATS

Today lowland heath is a scarce and declining habitat. In the UK it is estimated that 85% of our heathlands have been lost over the past 200 years due to changes in agricultural management and development. Some has been lost to intensification (ploughing, draining, etc.) while conversely some has been lost to a lack of management (cutting and grazing). Others may suffer due to a high level of recreational use. The remaining resource is small, isolated and often in need of management.

Within the Biosphere Reserve, many coastal heaths, which were previously grazed, have been taken out of management in order to control stock better within well fenced cliff top fields and/ or to control walkers better by keeping them fenced onto the Coast Path and separate from grazing animals.

## SITE STATUS

Sites of Special Scientific Interest:	Morte Point	99.0 Ha
	Exmoor Coastal Heaths	1758.3 Ha (predominantly Lowland Heath)(also a SAC)
	Marsland to Clovelly	360 Ha (SAC)
	Baggy Point	35.5 Ha

## CURRENT ACTION

Much of the existing coastal heathland in North Devon is owned by the National Trust and most is under active management through both Countryside Stewardship Schemes, Higher Level Scheme and the Exmoor Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) Scheme. This

management includes appropriate grazing regimes, managed through a range of farm business tenancies, selected burning, bracken mowing, limited scrub control and grassland reversion from improved pasture.

National Trust Ownership:	Watersmeet and Foreland Point	159 ha
	West Exmoor Heaths	413 ha
	Welcombe Mouth	50 ha
	Morte Heathlands	198 ha

### LINKS TO OTHER BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLANS

	UK BAP	SW BAP	Devon BAP	Exmoor BAP
Habitat Action Plans	Lowland heath Maritime Cliff and Slope	Lowland heath Sea cliff & slope	Lowland heath Sea cliff & slope	Western heath
Species Action Plans	Adder			Heath fritillary

### OBJECTIVES

- 1 To ensure that all existing coastal heathland in the Biosphere Reserve is protected from damage and loss.
- 2 To ensure that all remaining areas of coastal heathland in the Biosphere Reserve are sustainably managed to restore and enhance their biodiversity.
- 3 To recreate coastal heathland on site where it formerly occurred with particular emphasis on linking together existing fragments.
- 4 To increase public awareness, appreciation and enjoyment of coastal heathlands and their associated wildlife.

ACTION		TARGET	LEAD DELIVERER	PARTNERS	Obj. No.
<b>A</b>	<b>Policy and Legislation</b>				
1	Maintain maximum possible protection for all coastal heathland sites against inappropriate development through general or specific Local Development Framework policies, reflecting the importance of statutory sites (SAC/SPA and SSSI) and non-statutory wildlife sites.	All sites protected	NDC TDC, DCC, ENPA		1
2	Consider notification of further areas of coastal heathland where these meet SSSI criteria.	Formal response received	NE	DWT, ENPA,	1
<b>B</b>	<b>Site Safeguard and Management</b>				
1	Maintain current positive management regimes for coastal heathland sites.	All current management maintained or enhanced	NT, ENPA, Landowners	NDABS, NE	2, 3
2	Extend positive management initiatives to cover all coastal heathland within main SSSI complexes, through acquisition or agreement as appropriate.	All SSSIs in favourable or improving condition	NT, ENPA, NE		2, 3
3	Continue to support and develop coastal heathland targets under ELS & HLS Environmental Stewardship	Good take up of heathland related options	NE	ENPA, NDABS, FWAG, DWT	2,3

ACTION		TARGET	LEAD DELIVERER	PARTNERS	Obj. No.
4	Identify appropriate sites for coastal heathland re-establishment and seek agreements with landowners and funding bodies to initiate establishment works.	Sites for recreation recorded and schemes in place in at least two locations	ENPA, DWT, NE	NT, NDABS	3
<b>C Advisory</b>					
1	Maintain and seek to increase financial provision for advisory services through the voluntary and the statutory sectors, through the use of structural funds and other funding mechanisms.		DWT, RSPB, NE	DCC, NDC, NDABS, ENPA	
2	Continue to offer guidance to coastal heathland site owners.	Guidance recorded	FWAG, NDABS, DWT	NDC, DCC	
<b>D Research and Monitoring</b>					
1	Collate and appraise all existing site and species data on North Devon's coastal heathland within the Devon Biodiversity Records Centre.	Heathland resource in N Devon adequately recorded	DBRC	DCC, RSPB, NE, NDABS, ENPA, BSBI, BC, DCC, DWT	1,2,3
2	Identify gaps in existing data sets and initiate further field survey to complete coverage of all existing sites, and improve knowledge of key species populations.	All gaps identified and surveys initiated for all	DBRC	DCC, RSPB, NT, NE, ENPA, NDABS, DWT, BSBI	1,2,3

ACTION	TARGET	LEAD DELIVERER	PARTNERS	Obj. No.
<b>E</b> <b>Communication and Publicity</b>				
1 Ensure proper communication of coastal heathland related conservation initiatives, issues and progress through existing channels of communication.		DWT, NE, NT, DCC	RSPB, ENPA, NDABS, Landowners	2, 3
2 Seek to highlight, through off site and appropriate on site interpretation the importance of coastal heathland.		NT, ENPA	NE, DWT, NDABS, DCC	4
3 Seek ongoing media interest in raising awareness of heathland issues and wildlife stories.		RSPB, DWT, NE, DEFRA	ENPA, NDC, DCC, NDABS	4



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