

9 Purple moor grass and rush pastures

Found on poorly-drained, acidic soils in lowland areas of high rainfall, usually on undulating plateaux and hillsides, as well as in stream and river valleys. Vegetation is often in a mosaic with other habitats. Priority areas for conservation are species-rich areas of the NVC types M22, blunt-flowered rush *Juncus subnodulosus* – marsh thistle *Cirsium palustre* fen-meadow; M24, purple moorgrass *Molinia caerulea* – marsh plume thistle *Cirsium dissectum* fen-meadow and M26, purple moorgrass *Molinia caerulea* – marsh hawk's-beard *Crepis paludosa* mire in large or diverse community mosaics, or supporting rare species (Jefferson *pers. comm.*). The more upland types dominated by purple moor grass *Molinia caerulea* (M25, purple moorgrass *Molinia caerulea* – tormentil *Potentilla erecta* mire) and rushes *Juncus* species (M23, soft/sharp flowered rush *Juncus effusus/lacutiflorus* – marsh bedstraw *Galium palustre* rush-pasture) are specifically excluded.

Status

The UK has about 56 000 ha of these pastures, probably more than in the rest of Europe, with the possible exception of Eire¹. England has an estimated 5400 ha¹, mostly in the south-west, but there are three sites in this region, 9.4 ha at World's End/Strensall Common in the City of York² (Vale of York and Mowbray Natural area), at Skipwith Common in Selby³ (Humberhead Levels Natural Area – an area of unknown extent) and 1.6 ha in the North York Moors National Park. On the York site, acidic soils lie over base-rich, impermeable clays and the lack of nutrients and fluctuating pH allow a relatively high diversity of plants to grow. Notable spiders have been recorded, including a rare money spider (*Linyphiidae*) *Porrhomma microphthalmum* (Smith 1986, in Hammond 1996³).

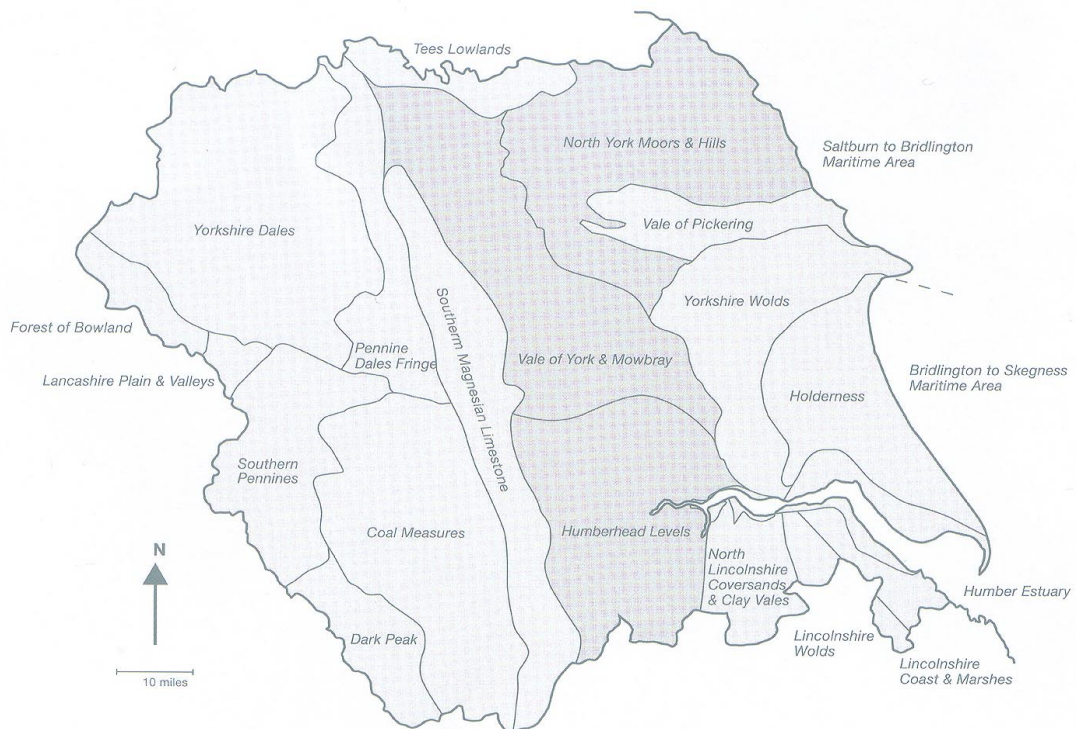
Threats

Nationally, the habitat is threatened by agricultural improvement such as drainage, cultivation and nutrient enrichment; inappropriate management such as overgrazing or burning too often; neglect of grazing leading to rankness and scrub development; habitat fragmentation; development and afforestation.

Map 13a: Presence of purple moor grass and rush pastures shown by local planning authority boundaries



Map 13b: Presence of purple moor grass and rush pastures shown by Natural Areas



Habitat present
 Habitat not known to be present