

Wales Upland Ecosystem Group Priority Action

Limestone Pavements

The thin band of exposed Carboniferous limestone across the Brecon Beacons National Park contains c. 75% of the limestone pavement habitat in Wales. Pavements occur across a number of sites including SSSIs and common land. The most significant site occurs on Ogof Ffynnon Ddu NNR, where the most extensive and intact pavement is fenced and is by far the best example of this habitat in terms of geological formation and vegetation composition. Pavement occurs from Mynydd Du in the west to the uplands above Rhymni in the east.

The most significant area lies between the upper Nedd and Tawe valleys, including Ogof Ffynnon Ddu NNR.

Issues

Historically, much of the limestone pavement has been subject to extensive quarrying and removal of stone for building and agricultural lime production. This disturbance, combined with the shattered nature of the pavements (due to faulting from the Neath Disturbance) has resulted in numerous small pavement areas which have an ill-defined structure of clints and grikes and significant areas of broken material. In many instances, the limestone exposures occur on extensive common land units, surrounded by coarse grasslands and heather, resulting in livestock preferring to graze on and around the pavements. This has resulted in significant over grazing and nutrient enrichment from dunging/urination. The entire limestone pavement area within the Brecon Beacons National Park has been mapped and catalogued from 2006-2010 and can be used to select areas for restoration.

Likely Effects of Inaction

- Habitat will remain in unfavourable condition and status, though it is unlikely that the pavements can decline further from their current condition.
- Possible loss of some species from the local area and a contraction of range for species as the Beacons pavements are the only significant area of this habitat in southern Britain.

Actions Required

- Determine the most effective method of stock exclusion on common land for nature conservation. Fencing areas of pavement can be used as a pilot for future fencing works on common land. This requires the proper and timely use of provisions made in the Commons Act 2006.
- Provisions for effective management of limestone pavement in Glastir, in particular on common land – Carn y Goetre and Mynydd Du
- Improved management of pavement on SSSI sites; Ogof Ffynnon Ddu – Pant Mawr SSSI and Blaen Nedd SSSI.
- Effective grazing management of pavement areas on and off common land can only be realistically achieved by exclusion of stock for part of the growing season. Shepherding would not be cost effective or sustainable in the medium-long term. Annual erection and removal of electric fencing is an option and would have the benefit of being able to adjust

both the area and length of exclusion, but may require annual payments. Permanent fencing with gates or easily removable sections offers the best long term method of stock exclusion.

- In addition to stock exclusion, spot treatment of weeds, in particular nettles and thistles will be required.
- It is also important that pavements can receive grazing during late summer, to remove vegetation growth and create a short sward for fungi. Any exclusion should be lifted in time for stock to deliver the correct sward height before animals are removed from the common.
- Pavements outside of common are still often on large grazing units and will need similar stock exclusion to achieve an improvement in condition.

Species Interest

Section 42 Species