



Results Based Agri-environment Payment Scheme (RBAPS)

Grassland Pilot: Wensleydale, Yorkshire Dales



The objective of the grassland element of the RBAPS project is to test the effectiveness of results based payments to improve the environmental performance of two existing agri-environment scheme options for the maintenance and restoration of species rich grassland and breeding wader habitat.

Wensleydale has been chosen to pilot the RBAPS approach within the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority because it contains a large proportion of the national upland hay meadow habitat and also breeding populations of all four target bird species (lapwing, curlew, redshank and snipe). Many farmers in this area are already undertaking management for these habitats under the Environmental Stewardship scheme however a high proportion of these schemes have already or are due to end within the next year so it was seen as a good opportunity to trial the new RBAPS approach in this area.

RBAPS Options

- **Species Rich Hay Meadow:**
Aim - Maintain and/or restore plant diversity of semi natural pastures and meadows



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Optimally managed habitat:

- High diversity and quantity of flowering plants and grasses
- Ratio of flowering plants to grasses in excess of 50:50
- Plants are able to flower and set seed annually
- Sward structure is varied
- Site is grazed by sheep and cattle
- Grass crop is removed each year via mowing (for hay meadows)
- Weeds and dominant grasses absent or very low cover
- Occurrence of bare soil is minimal

■ Habitat for Breeding Waders:

Aim - To provide suitable feeding, nesting and chick rearing habitat for breeding waders (lapwing, curlew, snipe and redshank)



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Optimally managed habitat:

- Damp grassland containing wet features like flushes, open drains, scrapes.
- Rush cover (particularly soft rush) approx. 30% of field – scattered
- Varied sward height and changes to vegetation structure
- Site is grazed by cattle and sheep (lightly during April – June)
- A range of plants and invertebrates
- No negative soil or water impacts
- Open site within a mosaic of grassland and moorland habitats

There are no set management prescriptions for farmers participating in the pilot however a large part of the project will focus on advice and training on how to practically manage land to achieve the optimum habitat conditions for the two options such as weed control and rush management. Many of the project farmers are already undertaking good management but some will be able to enhance this through a series of capital works such as adding native seed to meadows and constructing scrapes and other wetland features to wader sites. The sites will be assessed annually by the farmer and project staff and payment rates will depend on the achieved score. Monitor farms under current Higher Level Environmental Stewardship agreements have been established in the pilot area in order to compare the two approaches.

This three year project is delivered in partnership by Natural England and the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (on behalf of the Northern Upland Chain Local Nature Partnership), and is co-financed by the European Union. It is one of three EU funded projects testing the RBAPS approach and the results will be used to inform future agri-environment scheme design.

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