

LANCASHIRE BAP SPECIES ACTION PLAN

NARROW SMALL-REED (*Calamagrostis stricta*)

Summary

Narrow Small-reed is a Nationally Rare grass of wet places that has been recorded from a few widely scattered localities in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Several of its known sites have been lost through land drainage. In Lancashire it is known from a single site, where it was discovered in 1987, one of only 2 sites in north-west England. The colony was inadvertently almost destroyed in 2000 but survives precariously.

The purpose of the Action Plan is to reduce the likelihood of the species' extinction in Lancashire by increasing the size of the existing colony and by establishing another colony nearby.

Action Plan Aim –

To prevent the extinction of Narrow Small-reed in Lancashire

Species Description

Narrow Small-reed (*Calamagrostis stricta*) is a compact tufted perennial grass with slender creeping rhizomes growing up to 1 metre in height. The flowering panicles are erect, narrow yellowish-brown, purple or green.

Main Habitats

Nationally, this species is a plant of near-neutral marshes, fens and lake margins. In Lancashire it is known only from the site of a former pond in an urban setting.

National Status

Narrow Small-reed (*Calamagrostis stricta*) is a Nationally Rare species, now known from only twelve 10-km squares in Britain and Ireland, four in England, one in Northern Ireland, and seven in Scotland (Preston, Pearman and Dines, 2002). Other localities are known to have been lost through drainage. It is included on Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and is listed as a priority species in 'Biodiversity – The UK Steering Group Report' and in the Report on the Species and Habitat Review 2007. Whilst it is listed in the British Red Data Books 1 Vascular Plants (Wigginton, M.J. 1999) as "Low Risk", the The Vascular Plant Red Data List for Great Britain (Cheffings, C. and Farrell, L. 2005) lists the species as 'vulnerable'.

This species belongs to the Circumpolar Boreo-arctic Montane element of the British flora.

Regional Status

In north-west England the species has been recorded from only two localities, one around the margins of a Cheshire mere, where it has been known for over 150 years, and the other more recently discovered in Lancashire. Generally these populations are regarded as stable (but see below).

Local Status

In Lancashire the population of Narrow Small-reed occurs in an unlikely urban location alongside a culverted section of the River Darwen, on the site of a former pond and close to the centre of the town of Darwen. Previously unrecorded in Lancashire, its occurrence here is difficult to explain, as the habitat is now far from typical. It is considered that the species survives here as a relict population, from a former wetland habitat, associated with a post-glacial lake that once covered much of the Darwen Valley from Earcroft to Pleasington and including much of Blackburn. The species is assumed to have survived in the river terrace wetland habitat, which was later converted into an industrial pond as this part of Darwen became developed. The pond existed until about thirty years ago when it was in-filled.

The population was discovered in 1987 by P.Jepson but was not positively identified beyond that of a species of small-reed. Attention was drawn to the locality during preparations for the Blackburn Wildlife Survey in 1991. During fieldwork as part of that survey, the plant was identified as Narrow Small-reed: the identification was confirmed by Humphrey Bowen, then Botanical Society of the British Isles (BSBI) referee for the genus *Calamagrostis*.

The only known site in Lancashire is Brookside Biological Heritage Site.

Current factors affecting the Species

The population was formerly dominant over an area of 25 square metres comprising one large and two smaller patches. However, in 2000 the population was inadvertently covered by 0.5 metres of debris removed from the bed of the nearby River Darwen as a result of works by the Environment Agency. The damage to the locality was not observed for at least two months. The tipped material was removed but most of the buried vegetation had been killed. Subsequent careful monitoring did not reveal any Narrow Small-reed recovery where it had been formerly most abundant. However, in the autumn of 2002 a small crown (c 25mm diameter) of an unidentifiable grass was observed on the edge of the tipped area and in amongst brambles. In 2003 the plant flowered and proved to be a surviving Narrow Small-reed.

The population in Lancashire is considered to be critically endangered and in need of conservation management and regular monitoring if the population is to recover to anywhere near its previous state.

Current Action / Mechanisms

- *Policy and Legislation*

Narrow Small-reed is afforded special protection by virtue of its inclusion on schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. It is a Nationally Rare species included in the British 'Red Data Book' on vascular plants, and is listed as a 'priority species' in the UK Biodiversity Steering Group's report. Its site is also given protection from development under the provisions of relevant policies relating to Biological Heritage Sites and related matters in the Blackburn-with-Darwen Unitary Plan.

- *Land Management*

The site has been cleared of material dumped in 2000; otherwise none at present.

- *Advisory*

Environment Agency have been advised of the presence of this species.

- *Research and Monitoring*

The population is visited occasionally by P.Jepson but no systematic monitoring takes place.

- *Communication and Publicity*

None

Species Targets

Target	Area	Measure	Timescale
<i>To return the population to its pre-2001 level</i>	Blackburn-with-Darwen	No. of clumps/ extent of colony	2020
<i>To establish a second viable colony in this area</i>	Blackburn-with-Darwen	No. of clumps/ extent of 2 nd colony	2010

Proposed Actions

Action	Area	Milestone/ Measure	Partners	Timescale
Research and monitoring				
Monitor existing colony	Blackburn-with-Darwen	No. of clumps/ area of colony	EA,	Ongoing
Identify suitable second site for re-introduction	Blackburn-with-Darwen	location of site/ agreement of owner	EA, LWT	2008
Monitor 2 nd site after re-introduction	Blackburn-with-Darwen	No. of clumps/ area of colony	EA, LWT	2010 onwards
Site safeguard				
Undertake habitat management	Blackburn-with-Darwen	% site(s) in favourable condition	EA, LWT, site owners	2006 onwards
Seek to protect site through acquisition or lease by conservation body	Blackburn-with-Darwen	Acquisition/lease agreed	EA, LWT	2010
Species management and protection				
Introduce to second site, if species is found to be extinct look into possibilities of reintroduction	Blackburn-with-Darwen	Species established	EA, LWT	2010
Publicity				
Publicise the importance and threat to the species in Lancashire	Blackburn-with-Darwen	No. of appearances in publications/ media	EA, WT	Ongoing

Related Action Plans

Rivers and Streams
Urban

References

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