



# UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Habitat Descriptions

## Coastal and Floodplain Grazing Marsh

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The definition of this habitat remains unchanged from the pre-existing Habitat Action Plan (<http://tna.europarchive.org/20110303145238/http://www.ukbap.org.uk/UKPlans.aspx?ID=9>), a summary of which appears below.

Grazing marsh is defined as periodically inundated pasture, or meadow with ditches which maintain the water levels, containing standing brackish or fresh water. The ditches are especially rich in plants and invertebrates. Almost all areas are grazed and some are cut for hay or silage. Sites may contain seasonal water-filled hollows and permanent ponds with emergent swamp communities, but not extensive areas of tall fen species like reeds; although they may abut with [fen](#) and [reed swamp](#) communities.

The exact extent of grazing marsh in the UK is not known but it is possible that there may be a total of 300,000ha. England holds the largest proportion with an estimate in 1994 of 200,000ha. However, only a small proportion of this grassland is semi-natural supporting a high diversity of native plant species (5,000ha in England, an estimated 10,000ha in the UK).

Grazing marshes are particularly important for the number of breeding waders such as snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* and curlew *Numenius arquata* they support. Internationally important populations of wintering wildfowl also occur including Bewick swans *Cygnus bewickii* and whooper swans *Cygnus cygnus*.