

## 2.3 Species Rich Wet Grassland

**Definition:** *Species rich wet grassland* occurs on poorly drained soils. If more than 5 wildflower species, indicative of wet conditions, are located in an area of one square metre at 6 out of 10 random points in the field area then it is “species rich” wet grassland. Indicator species include meadowsweet, marsh bedstraw, marsh marigold, yellow flag iris and several species of sedges and/or rushes. (A full list of species rich indicator plants is found in Appendix III). There must be less than 25% ryegrass, timothy and white clover in the sward.

**Aim:** to maintain and enhance the conservation value of wet species rich grassland through appropriate agricultural practices such as positive grazing management, implementing a no grazing period and restrictions on fertiliser and pesticide use.

**Biodiversity objectives:** the species rich wet grassland contributes to the NI Biodiversity Action Plan targets for the Irish hare and cough. The proposed Biodiversity Action Plans for Meadow cranesbill, Yellowhammer, Redshank, the marsh fritillary, lowland meadows, lowland dry acid grassland, maritime cliffs and slopes and coastal sand dunes and some NI Priority species, such as the dingy skipper, wall brown, narrow small-reed, melancholy thistle, great burnet and fen violet will also benefit.

### Management requirements

- No grazing is permitted between 1 January and 15 May
- Grazing is permitted between 16<sup>th</sup> May and 31 December at a maximum stocking density of 1.0 LU/ha
- Excess grass may be saved for hay or silage but must not be cut until after the 15 July
- Rush control must be carried out where rushes cover more than one third of the area. Rushes must be controlled by cutting between 15 July and 15 March retaining 10% uncut. Herbicide control is not permitted. If ground conditions do not permit rush cutting contact Countryside Management Branch for further advice\*.
- No cultivation, reclamation, infilling, dumping, drainage or application of lime, herbicide, pesticide, sheep dip, slurry, poultry litter or any other material, is permitted
- Where fertiliser has traditionally been applied, applications of **farmyard manure only** must not exceed 15kg N per hectare per year

- Supplementary feeding sites, temporary silage clamps and storage areas for big bale silage or hay are not permitted
- Trees must not be planted on species rich sites
- The spread of scrub/trees must be controlled
- No poaching
- No rolling between 1 April – 1 June

### **Further advice**

Scrub should be prevented from spreading on species rich grassland – see appendix IV for further information. The annual payment includes an element for routine positive management such as scrub control and rush cutting.

Noxious weeds such as thistles and ragwort may be controlled by cutting between 15 July and 15 March or with herbicides, applied using a spot sprayer only.

Cutting dense rushes twice in one year, within a four to eight week period, will help reduce rush cover in the following year. Ideally cut rushes should be removed by baling, raking or burning. Where this is not possible graze with cattle immediately after cutting to help break up the mat of cut rush.

Existing drainage systems can be maintained but not widened, deepened or extended.

***\*Prior written approval must be obtained from Countryside Management Branch if you wish to use any method of rush control other than cutting.***

