



Northumberland
Wildlife Trust

High Ridge Meadow Survey Report 2024



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Summary

Northumberland Wildlife Trust was commissioned to undertake an assessment of the Meadow at High Ridge, Hazlerigg. A site visit on 4 July 2024 recorded species observed within the meadow boundary and some of the surrounding grassland.

Site Description – High Ridge, Hazlerigg

Site Survey 4th July 2024 Weather: Cloudy, 13c, 23mph wind

Northumberland Wildlife Trust (henceforth referred to as NWT) was commissioned to undertake a Habitat Survey at High Ridge Meadow, Hazlerigg (central grid reference NZ237717). This is an area of grassland to the south end of the High Ridge playing field, with football pitch, adjacent to High Ridge Court.

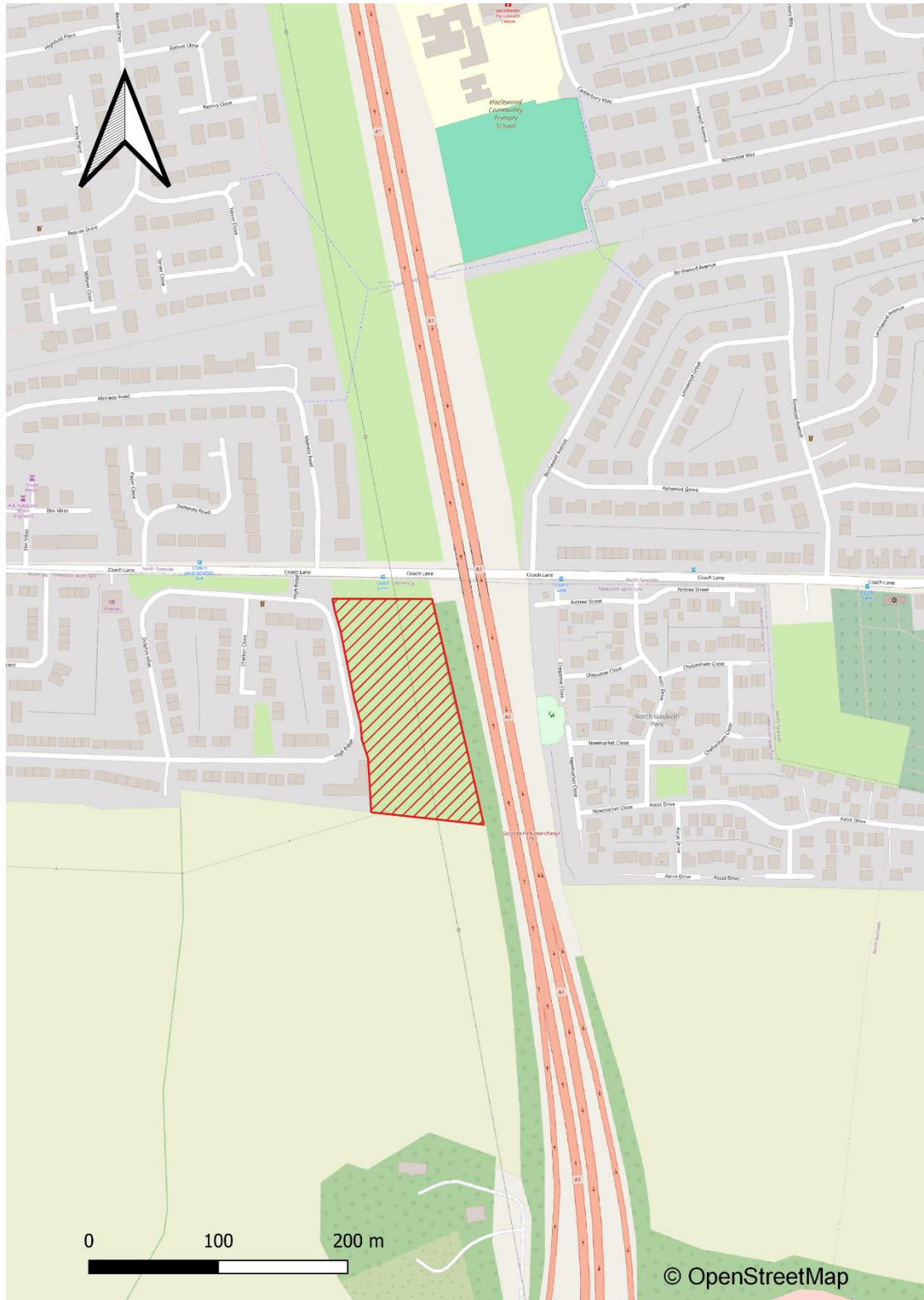


Figure 1: Indicative site boundary (red hatched area) and location. ©OpenStreetMaps

Habitat Description and Phase 1 Map

Notes were made regarding the nature of the habitats present on site, with areas classified following the Phase 1 survey methodology outlined in the 2016 edition of the 'Handbook for Phase 1 habitat survey' by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), to highlight features/areas of potential interest. Target notes were used to provide a brief description of any areas of potential value. Plant species were identified in accordance with Rose (2006).

A search was also conducted for the presence of Schedule 9 invasive non-native plant species such as Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*) and Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*).

The Phase 1 survey was completed on the 4/7/2024, by Sara Frisby PGDip BSc Hons.

Habitats

Habitat within the site was dominated by semi-improved neutral grassland. The main meadow habitat is described in the following section. The football pitch and grassland north of this were also walked over and included in the description.

The results of the survey are shown below, with target notes, species lists, and site photographs provided in **Appendix 1 & 2**.

No schedule 9 species were noted in the grassland. The boundary scrub was not included in the search.

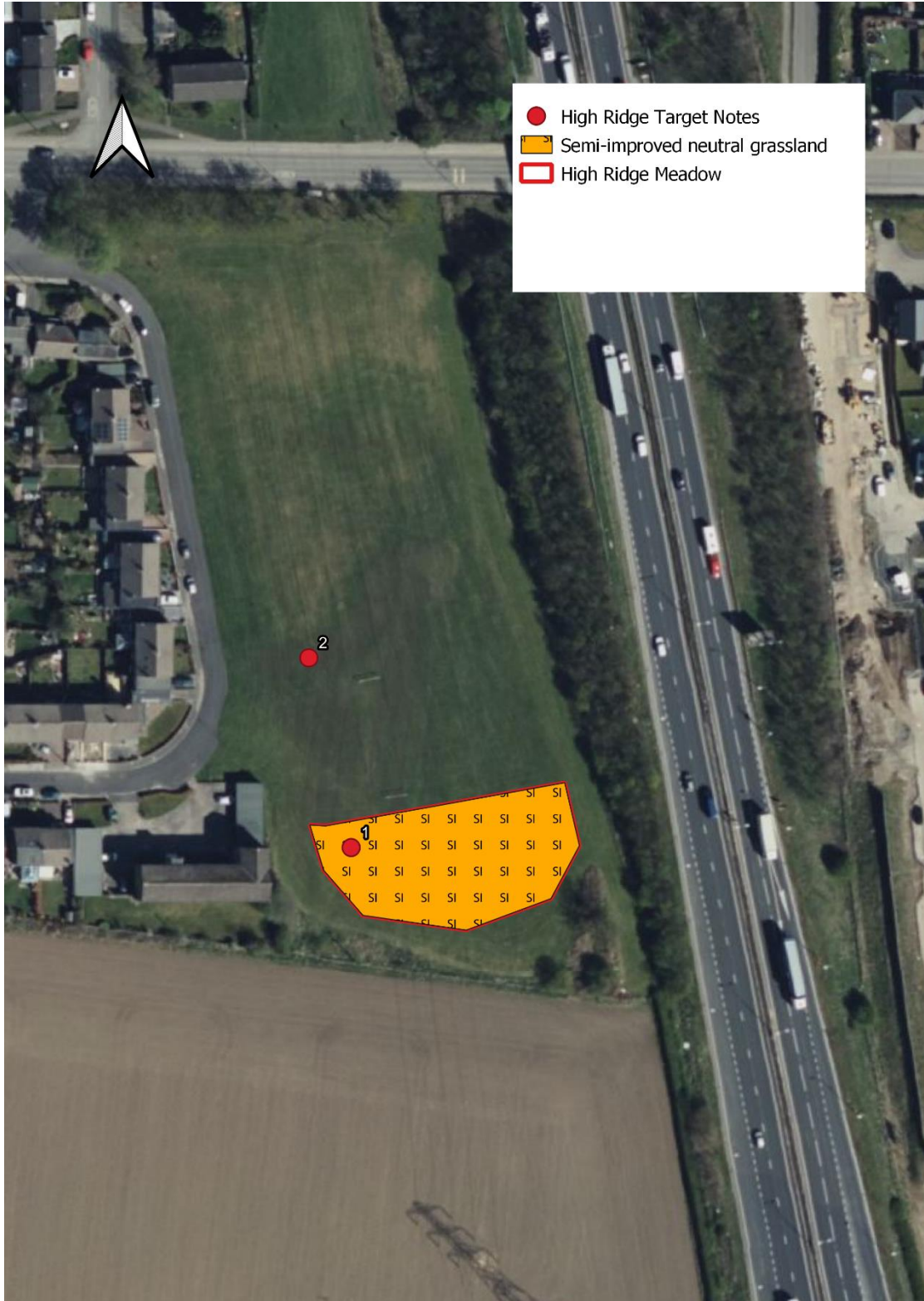


Figure 2: Habitat Map with habitat key.

Semi-improved Neutral Grassland

The meadow area is semi-improved neutral grassland. It is a small area of uncut grass that is dominated by Yorkshire fog (*Holcus lanatus*), with creeping bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*) and scattered creeping buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*). There are a few other grasses and forbs scattered throughout the meadow area, however, the composition would suggest that the area is not managed and therefore dominated by a ranker grass species. There is a heavy thatch of dead grass, and the soil is barely visible. There are patches of meadow foxtail (*Alopecurus pratensis*) and sweet vernal grass (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*), with some meadow buttercup (*Ranunculus acris*). Only a few docks and no species such as creeping thistle (*Cirsium arvense*) or hogweed (*Heracleum sphondylium*) were noted within the meadow, which can be dominant in unmanaged grassland or disturbed ground.

A damper area in the meadow, which included tufted hair-grass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*), compact rush (*Juncus conglomeratus*) and some black knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*) had open areas, with lower sward height and a few more species.

Further north, alongside the football pitch and to the north of the football pitch, the species diversity is greater. There is a mixture of sedges, grasses and forbs including patches of bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), spikes of common spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*) and marsh foxtail (*Alopecurus geniculatus*). It is understood that this area is usually cut, but had been delayed this year. A full list of species noted across the grassland can be found in **Appendix 1**, with those found outside the 'meadow' area marked.

Table – Incidental records taken during survey visits, by no means comprehensive.

Species	Latin name
7-spot ladybird	<i>Coccinella septempunctata</i>
Ringlet butterfly x2	<i>Aphantopus hyperantus</i>
Meadow Brown butterfly	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>

Management Suggestions

The Meadow

The ideal management for the meadow area would be a hay cut (cut, turn, removal of arisings after they have dried and seed has dropped). This would remove nutrient build up and the thatch from dead vegetation. It would allow seeds to reach the soil and reduce the more dominant species such as Yorkshire fog. The meadow may increase in species richness over time, with flowering plants increasing and some of the more dominant species being reduced or maintained at a low density. Desirable species such as orchids, red clover (*Trifolium pratense*) and bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*) were noted just to the north where the grass is cut regularly, and would most probably appear in the meadow, with positive management.

After positive management, species diversity could be monitored to record any increase. Monitoring could include a count of the number of different species present in the meadow area. Quadrat (1m square) surveys could also be done, in random spots or fixed points, to monitor the number of species, on average, per quadrat. The target number is 15 species or more, on average, per quadrat for a species-rich neutral grassland.

Once the nutrients and thatch are reduced the meadow should not suffer if the cut is missed on occasional years. However, if the meadow is not cut (and arisings removed) over several years there will be an increase in dominant/more rank species such as Yorkshire fog and cock's-foot (*Dactylis glomerata*) and diversity of species will be lost again. Grass species such as Yorkshire fog and cock's-foot are locally native and useful grasses for many invertebrate species, as shelter, larval food plants etc., the aim is to reduce their dominance rather than eradicate.

If the hay cut is not possible, it is advised that small areas of the meadow are cut or strimmed and raked, each year, to try to increase species richness. Arisings can be composted in a small, sacrificial area away from the meadow. Seed heads of dominant species such as hogweed, creeping thistle, if they appear, can be removed before the seed is dispersed. Hogweed and thistles are acceptable in small numbers, as they provide nectar for invertebrates and seed for birds. As the meadow is small, any invading scrub should be removed. Scrub within a meadow can be desirable, as it creates shelter for invertebrates and structural diversity, but with the small size and the existing surrounding scrub habitat, the maintenance of a species-rich grassland is more important.

It is important that the grassland is not cut and the arisings left on the meadow. The cuttings will smother more delicate species, create a thatch of dead grass, which prevents seeds from reaching the soil and increases nutrient input. It is better not to cut than it is to cut and leave!

After a couple of years of positive management, if the species diversity is not improving greatly and the Yorkshire fog remains dominant, yellow rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*) could be seeded into the meadow to further reduce the

dominance of the grass and try to increase the diversity. The meadow as it is still has value to small mammals and invertebrates, particularly for shelter and hibernation.

Appendix 1

Phase 1 Habitat Target Notes

Target	Note
1	Damper area with tufted hair-grass, compact rush, brown sedge
2	More species rich and damper, bird's-foot trefoil, common sedge, common spotted orchid

Species Lists

Buttercup – creeping (*Ranunculus repens*)

Buttercup – meadow (*Ranunculus acris*)

Clover – red (*Trifolium pratense*)

Clover – white (*Trifolium repens*)

Common/black knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*)

Common mouse-ear (*Cerastium fontanum*)

Common ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*)

Common sorrel (*Rumex acetosa*)

Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale* agg.)

Grass – cock's-foot (*Dactylis glomerata*)

Grass – creeping bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*)

Grass – marsh foxtail (*Alopecurus geniculatus*)

Grass – meadow foxtail (*Alopecurus pratensis*)

Grass – perennial rye-grass (*Lolium perenne*)

Grass – sheep's-fescue (*Festuca ovina*)

Grass – sweet vernal grass (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*)

Grass – tufted hair-grass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*)

Grass – Yorkshire fog (*Holcus lanatus*)

Orchid – common-spotted (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*)

Selfheal (*Prunella vulgaris*)

Speedwell – Germander (*Veronica chamaedrys*)

Stitchwort – lesser (*Stellaria graminea*)

Trefoil – common bird's-foot (*Lotus corniculatus*)

Dock – broadleaved (*Rumex obtusifolia*)

Dock – curled (*Rumex crispus*)

Rush – compact (*Juncus conglomeratus*)

Rush – jointed (*Juncus articulatus*)

Sedge – brown (*Carex disticha*)

Sedge – common (*Carex nigra*)

Species in **bold** were not in the meadow area, but in grassland surrounding the football pitch.

Appendix 2

Site Photographs

Photo 1 – High Ridge Grassland looking south, including football pitch



Photo 2 – Meadow area



Photo 3 – Dense Yorkshire fog, with creeping bent



Photo 4 – Grassland to north west of pitch, common spotted orchid



Photo 5 – Lower sward, less dominant grass, patches of bird's-foot-trefoil

