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Clarifying the MG8 & MG4 plant communities within the NVC **A short questionnaire**

The Floodplain Meadows Partnership (FMP), hosted by the Open University, represents a number of organisations with an interest in species-rich floodplain meadows (Natural England, Environment Agency, The Grasslands Trust, the Wildlife Trusts, The Field Studies Council, the RSPB, Centre for Ecology and Hydrology and the Open University). The remit of the partnership is to maintain long term botanical monitoring plots on key floodplain meadow sites, encourage monitoring of restoration projects and run a series of outreach activities to share the findings. This research will increase our understanding of the dynamics of the communities of these floodplain sites and inform site management. For more information see our website www.floodplainmeadows.org.uk

The principal vegetation communities of these meadows are MG4 (*Alopecurus pratensis-Sanguisorba officinalis*) and MG8 (*Cynosurus cristatus-Caltha palustris*) of the National Vegetation Classification, although other communities are also found. The need for a review of both of these communities was highlighted in Rodwell *et al.* 2007, following the work of Gowing *et al.* 2002. Rodwell (2007) recommended a thorough review of wetter meadows and pastures to include MG4, MG8 and MG7C, citing his earlier comment that "The description of the *Cynosurus-Caltha* flood pasture is one of the least satisfactory parts of the mesotrophic grassland section of the NVC (Rodwell *et al.* 2000)." Following discussions with John Rodwell it was agreed that a thorough review of floodplain meadow communities should be carried out by the FMP.

The FMP already have a substantial data set for the MG4 community and are engaged in a review of this community, defining four new subcommunities, which are to be published shortly.

The Partnership's Steering Group recently prioritised the development of a better understanding of the MG8 floodplain meadow community and the associated *Agrostis stolonifera-Carex spp-Senecio aquaticus* unit, revising their definition within the NVC and describing their current distribution.

This requires the collation of all available data and analysis of a sufficient sub-set to allow the definition of new communities and subcommunities. Once the review is complete, a more exact distribution map of the types and their relative areas will be

possible and the establishment of the position of each unit along gradients of fertility and soil moisture will allow for recommendations to be made regarding appropriate management strategies.

We are contacting you to ask for help in completing this review.

What do we need in order to do this?

We are seeking assistance from you to identify sites supporting the MG8 and allied *Agrostis-Carex-Senecio* community (Rodwell *et al.* 2000, Cox and Leach 1995) in your area together with information on any MG8 or MG4 sites that you are aware of which might not be on current listings. Details of NVC maps and quadrat records would be particularly useful.

We would hope to use this information to help us select sites from as wide a geographical range as possible to survey in 2012; this should enable us to redefine the MG8 and closely related community of floodplain meadows. In addition, we hope to identify new MG4 sites and their restoration potential.

The MG8 Map – data collected so far

The accompanying map (Figure 1) shows the distribution of sites thought to support MG8 vegetation in England **although the extent and quality of the community at many of the sites is unknown**. Data are sourced from:

- The Natural England Grassland Inventory (searched for MG8 as an attribute)
- Phase II surveys of selected areas
- Additional sites identified by Clare Pinches, Natural England.
- A few additional sites identified by the Floodplain Meadows Partnership

The data have also been used to produce a series of regional maps (Figure 2). We have names for many sites, especially those that are notified as SSSI's, but there are many for which we have no name. In addition to the map, we also attach a Mapinfo tab file, which you may be able to overlay onto your own site inventory to help with site identification.

What you can do to help

We would be grateful if you could consider the following questions, and use the accompanying Excel file to supply your answers.

1. Of the sites listed on the regional map, can you identify those which you believe to contain a reasonable extent (>1.0ha) of vegetation referable, if loosely, to the MG8 community? (see definitions in Appendix) If possible, can you rank these in terms of quality – based on floristic diversity, extent and also evident gradients between different types (see excel spreadsheet for quality definitions)?
2. Can you provide names and any other information for those sites appearing only as dots on the regional map?
3. We would like to use the information gained through this process to select sites for survey in summer 2012. Therefore any suggestions for good sites to

visit and any information regarding permission to survey would be appreciated.

4. Are there any additional sites, not on the list, that you know to support MG8 or the *Agrostis-Carex-Senecio* community? We are aware that the inventory is more complete for some areas than others.
5. Whilst looking at the list, there is an additional column that you could tick if you know the site to also support MG4 or vegetation transitional to MG4.
6. We have also attached a map (and excel file) of our known MG4 sites, so if you know of any additional MG4 sites in your area, we would like to know.
7. Any information on active water-level management or the potential for such management at any of the sites you know about would be appreciated.
8. Other details on management, especially whether the parcels identified are managed for hay (at least occasionally) or are continuous pasture.
9. Any information on on-going or proposed habitat restoration on any of the sites, or on adjacent land would be appreciated.
10. Are you aware if any of these sites are entered into, or considered for, stewardship agreements (HLS)?

Outcomes of this work

Through this work we aim to:

- define more accurately the MG8 community within the NVC and its relationship to other damp floodplain meadow associations, especially the *Agrostis-Carex-Senecio* unit. This information will be published in due course.
- Produce an up to date distribution map of these communities
- Raise awareness of their biodiversity value and rarity in the UK

- **Appendix. Attributes to look for in identifying MG8 and *Agrostis-Carex* vegetation.**

We could suggest that if 4 or more of the following list are present in a homogeneous stand, then we would be interested.

Agrostis canina
Agrostis stolonifera
Caltha palustris
Carex demissa
Carex disticha
Carex nigra
Carex panicea
Cirsium dissectum
Cynosurus cristatus
Eleocharis species
Filipendula ulmaria
Galium palustre
Hydrocotyle vulgaris
Lychnis flos-cuculi
Myosotis laxa
Ranunculus flammula
Senecio aquaticus
Thalictrum flavum

The site may have high cover of rush species (*J. effusus*, *J. articulatus*, *J. acutiflorus*, *J. inflexus*), this does not matter so long as 4 of the above are present in reasonable quantity. The site may be managed as either pasture or hay meadow.

Figure 1. MG8 England Distribution map.

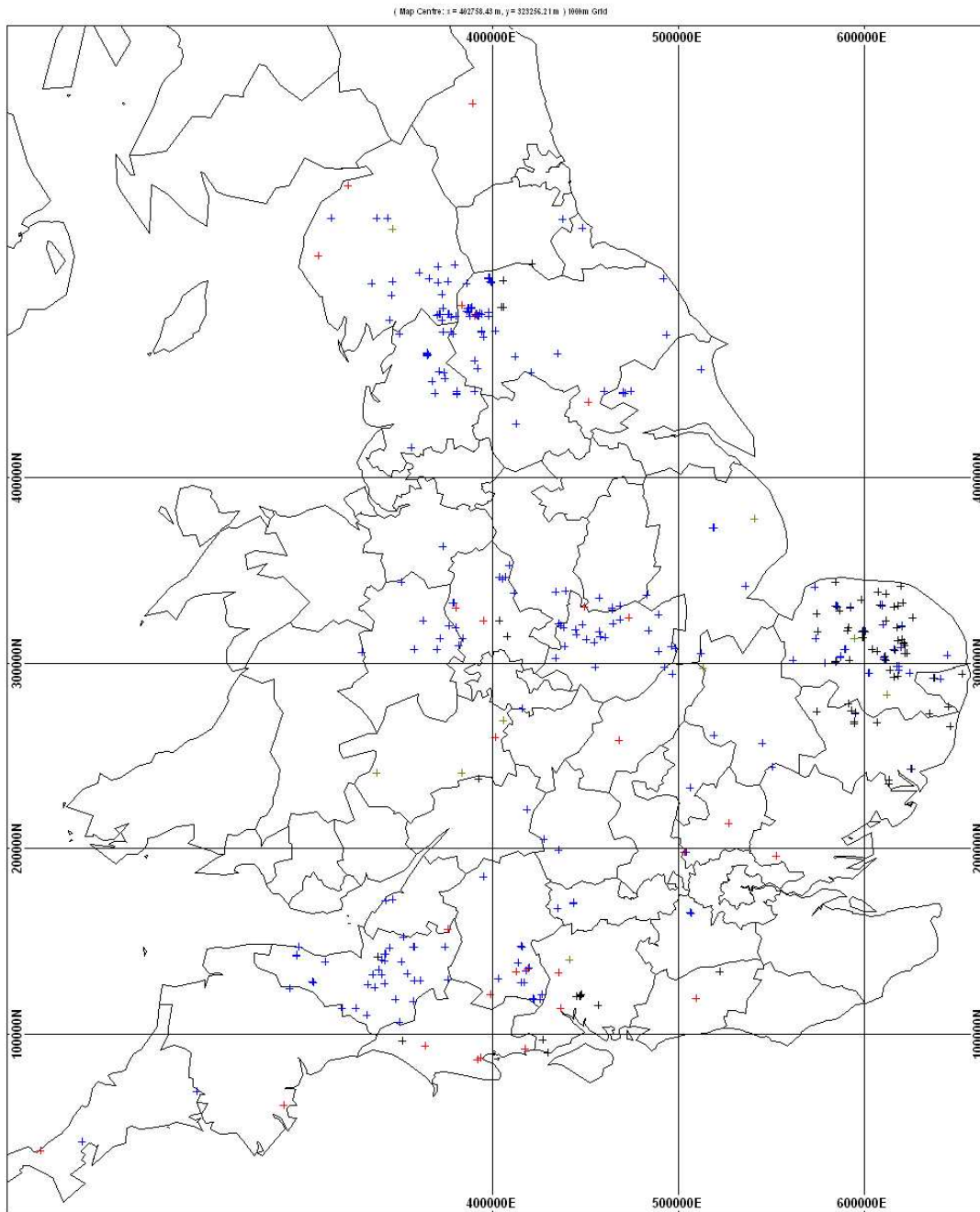
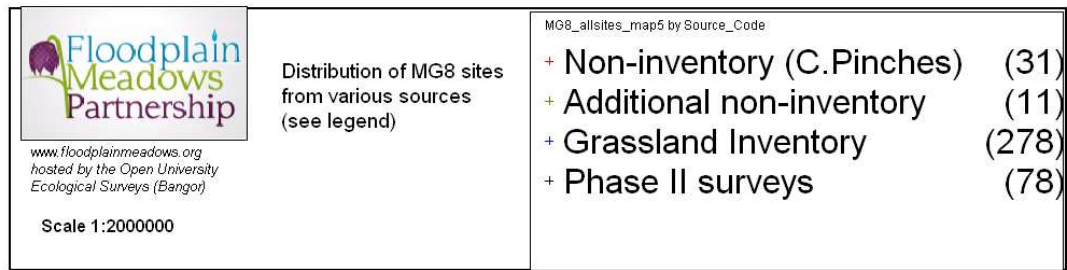


Figure 2. Distribution of MG8 in East Anglia.

