



# UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Habitat Descriptions

## Inland Rock Outcrop and Scree Habitats

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# Inland Rock Outcrop and Scree Habitats

## Correspondence with existing habitats

- UK BAP broad habitat: Inland rock
- Phase 1: Upland species-rich ledges; inland cliff; scree
- NVC: U16–U18, U21, OV38–OV40
- Annex I: H8110 Siliceous scree of the montane to snow levels (*Androsacetalia alpinae* and *Galeopsietalia ladani*); H8120 Calcareous and calcshist screes of the montane to alpine levels (*Thalaspiaetea rotundifolii*); H8210 Calcareous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation; H8220 Siliceous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation; H6430 Hydrophilous tall herb fringe communities of plains and of the montane to alpine levels

## Description

This habitat covers a wide range of rock types, varying from acidic to highly calcareous and includes five Habitats Directive Annex I habitat types. The habitat occurs throughout the uplands, and is particularly characteristic of high altitudes, but is also found at low altitudes notably in northern Scotland. Representation of the two Habitats Directive Annex I chasmophytic vegetation types in the lowlands is also included. Coastal cliff and ledge habitats are excluded as they form part of the maritime cliffs and slopes priority habitat.

Natural rock exposures support a wide range of communities. Screes are typically dominated by *Cryptogramma crispera* and other ferns, lichens and bryophytes. On cliff ledges, tall herbs such as *Sedum rosea* and *Angelica sylvestris* are generally abundant. Chasmophytic vegetation (in rock crevices) is usually dominated by ferns such as *Asplenium viride* and small herbs such as *Thymus polytrichus* and *Saxifraga* spp. Bryophytes and lichens also occur in crevices but are able to flourish on the open rock surfaces where there is a lack of competition from vascular plants.

Many rock habitats, especially cliff faces, rock ledges, gorges and boulder fields are inaccessible to grazing animals and are unmanaged. Others are more accessible, such as fine screes and gently sloping rock outcrops, where accessible grazing may keep the vegetation in check. Burning can affect the more heather-rich rock faces with fires spreading up on to rocky slopes from muirburn below.

The inaccessibility of rock habitats to grazing animals, especially of rock ledges, provides a refuge for many vascular plants that are sensitive to grazing, including numerous local and rare species. Notable species of upland rock and scree habitats include *Athyrium distentifolium*, *Woodsia ilvensis*, *Carex rupestris*, *Cicerbita alpina*, *Artemisia norvegica*, *Hieracium sect. Alpestris*, *Salix lanata*, *Saxifraga cespitosa* and *S. cernua*.

The botanically rich rock habitats support a number of notable invertebrate species. Key groups include beetles such as *Leistus montanus* and *Nebria nivalis*, Diptera such as species of *Tipula* spp, *Thricops* spp and *Helina vicina*, and spiders such as *Pardosa trailli*. Several key species of birds use inland cliffs for nesting, notably the raptors peregrine and golden eagle, and raven.

Inland rock outcrop and scree habitats are widespread in upland areas of the UK, with more limited occurrence in the lowlands. Acidic rock and scree are especially widespread, whereas calcareous communities are restricted by the underlying geology, and good stands of tall-herb vegetation also tend to be restricted by heavy grazing. Reliable extent data are not available but the UK Second Report on the Implementation of the Habitats Directive (<http://www.jncc.gov.uk/page-4060>) gives the following broad estimates for the Habitats Directive Annex I habitats: tall-herb ledge vegetation, H6430 – 100–300ha; siliceous rock

and scree types, H8110 and H8220 – 87,000–123,000ha; calcareous rock and scree types, H8120 and H8210 – 800–1,700ha.