



UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Habitat Descriptions

Limestone Pavements

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Please note: this document was uploaded in November 2016, and replaces an earlier version, in order to correct a broken web-link. No other changes have been made. The earlier version can be viewed and downloaded from The National Archives:
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The definition of this habitat remains unchanged from the pre-existing Habitat Action Plan (<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110303150113/http://www.ukbap.org.uk/UKPlans.aspx?ID=26>), a summary of which appears below.

Limestone pavements are a scarce and non-renewable resource. They were exposed by the scouring action of ice sheets during the ice age which ended some 10,000 years ago. Since then water action has widened the cracks in the pavements to form a complex pattern of crevices known as *grikes* between which are massive blocks of worn limestone called *clints*.

The habitat is widely scattered in Britain, on Carboniferous limestone in Wales, Northern England and Northern Ireland, and Durness limestone in Scotland. The total area in the UK of this habitat is less than 3,000ha with the largest areas occurring in North Yorkshire and Cumbria, and smaller areas in Lancashire, Wales and Scotland. The UK holds a significant proportion of the resource of this habitat within the European Union.

Limestone pavements are of both geological and biological importance. The vegetation is rich in vascular plants, bryophytes and lichens and varies according to geographical location, altitude, rock type and the presence or absence of grazing animals. Limestone pavement vegetation may also contain unusual combinations of plants, with woodland and wood-edge species well-represented in the sheltered grikes. The clints support plants of rocky habitats or are often unvegetated. In the absence of grazing scrub may develop. In oceanic areas scrub over limestone pavement is important for epiphytes.