

Caomhnú Árann Field scoring system for assessing habitat condition

Caomhnú Árann EIP has a 5-point scoring scheme for determining the habitat quality of Aran grasslands. Each land parcel is allocated a score from 1 to 5 which reflect the condition of the grassland habitat. **Optimum grazing, regular scrub removal and adequate water, are the key factors required to produce species-rich grasslands and high scoring fields.**

A land parcel with score 5 has a higher associated biodiversity and contains more plant species which is reflected in the colourful swards full of yellow, pink and blue flowers during the summer. The score is based on the LPIS land parcel unit. However this can be further broken down to management units or habitat units where there are different scores within a large LPIS land parcel. Semi-improved and Improved/Arable will automatically receive a score of 2. Ungrazed areas such as areas of shoreline, areas overgrown with scrub or limestone pavement unsuitable for grazing, will receive a score of 1. For parcels with a percentage of semi-improved/improved land <30% of the total then the dominant score will be given to the whole area, areas greater than 30% will be scored as separate units. Damaged areas will reduce the score of a land parcel, e.g ring feeders and resulting bare ground, overgrazing and cultivation, bare ground from sand/soil removal.

Score 5

- Well managed grazed habitat, with a high number of positive indicator species (frequent yellow, blue and pink flowers).
- Orchids may be frequent.
- Appropriate grazing regime and management (thick thatch of dead vegetation absent and no signs of damage to the sward) with adequate water supply.
- Can contain up to 20% scrub as long as it is confined to field edges, some scrub control may be necessary to prevent further spread.
- The area contains five or more positive indicators in 1m² at eight out of ten random points in a field.

The Field Scores



Fields full of colour

Score 4

- Grazed species-rich grassland habitat with frequent positive indicator species.
- Scrub or bracken may occupy more than 20% of the land parcel, which requires targeted scrub removal and follow up treatment.
- May show some signs of undergrazing so an increase in stocking levels may be required particularly after scrub cutting along with provision of adequate water supply.
- The area contains four or more positive indicators in an area of 1m² at five out of ten random points in the field.



Scrub Issue

Score 3



Scrub and Undergrazing Issue



Molinia Issue

Damaged Machair

- Grazed habitat but with reduced numbers of positive indicator species.
- Not optimally grazed, may be undergrazed with widespread thick thatch of dead grass. Thick grassy tussocks may be frequent which would require increase in grazing to remove excess vegetation.
- Scrub and/or bracken occupy more than 20% of the land parcel which requires targeted scrub removal and follow up treatment.
- Areas may be dominated by Molinia (Féar bán) which can be grazed in Spring when grass is palatable to livestock.
- Over grazed areas of damaged Machair indicated by very short sward and frequent bare sand areas.
- The area contains two to four positive indicators in 1m² in at least six out of ten random points.

Score 2

- Semi-improved or agriculturally improved grasslands, very few positive indicator species, 'green' fields.
- Usually associated with summer grazed fields that have received fertiliser or fields that have been cultivated in the past.
- Fields are dominated by grasses, with much lower amounts of flowers. Usually there are higher levels of fertility, and/or deeper soils.
- In order to improve score, hay may need to be cut each year, followed by grazing. This will help reduce fertility.
- The field contains one or less positive indicator in 1m² in six out of ten random points.



Grass Dominated

Score 1

- Ungrazed areas of the farm, e.g. farmyards.
- Limestone crags unsuitable for grazing.
- Land parcels that have not been grazed for many years or where the present grazing level is too low to maintain sufficient areas of grassland habitat within the land parcel.
- Where possible reintroduce grazing, ensure adequate water supply and address any scrub issue.



Ungrazed for many years



Ungrazeable



Ungrazed shoreline

Positive indicator species form the basis for the Caomhnú Árann scoring system, and are species that indicate that the grassland is very species rich and is being managed in a way that maintains its high conservation value. Fields should be surveyed between May and September when these indicator species are in flower. At a first glance, high scoring fields should be filled with yellow, blue and pink flowers throughout the summer. Frequent orchids may also be present. Some positive indicator species are shown below and listed in the AranLIFE 'Plants of the farm' booklet.



Bird's-foot-trefoil



Spring Gentian



Harebell



Bloody cranesbill



Pyramidal orchid



Common milkwort



Early purple orchid



Wild thyme



Eyebright



Devils Bit scabious



Lady's bedstraw



Yellow rattle



Common spotted orchid



Kidney vetch



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