

The Wildlife Information Centre

The Scottish Borders Habitat Data

Guidance on carrying out ground-truthing surveys

Background

The Borders Habitat Data¹ is a Phase 1 Habitat Survey map produced from a computer analysis of digital aerial photographs flown in 2008 and 2009. During 2011 and beyond the accuracy of samples of this map are being checked by surveyors going out on to the ground and comparing the Phase 1 map with what they find in the field.

Deciding if you can do it

The ideal person to do this checking is someone who is very familiar with an area of countryside which they can compare to the habitat map. To make this comparison will need an understanding of the Phase 1 Survey methodology which is a relatively simple and basic system fully described in a freely available handbook. It is based on identifying habitats by the flowering plants found in them so some basic identification of common species of plants is required.

You can obviously do as much survey work as you want but it can be estimated that to check four 1x1 kilometre squares of fairly mixed habitats might take two hours.

Choosing a survey area

An area you know well will make it much easier to identify any differences between what is found on the site and the habitat map. Obviously we would like a wide range of habitat types and geographical locations to be checked and if you would like help with deciding which areas to choose TWIC can provide help with this.

We suggest that you try a fairly small area at first and feedback your results to TWIC to check everything is being done.

What information is needed before the survey?

Basically you require:

- A copy of the Handbook for Phase 1 habitat survey
- A blank map of your area at around 1:5000 scale (available from TWIC)
- A copy of the Borders Habitat Data map for the same area (available from TWIC)
- A notebook and pencil
- A digital camera
- A compass and Geographical Positioning System (GPS) device if you have them
- Permission from the landowner if the site is not open to the public

¹ A description of the Borders Habitat Data is available in a TWIC leaflet *The Scottish Borders Habitat Data*

How to survey on the ground

Before you start you should check the maps to see how you might walk around the site to cover all of the habitats shown on the Habitat map and identify a suitable route.

Walk round this route comparing the areas of habitat with those shown on the Habitat map, looking to see if they match, or do not match, the Habitat definitions as described in the Handbook for Phase 1 habitat survey Field Manual Chapter 2.

Differences could be minor or major with a deciduous wood being mixed woodland or a grassland habitat actually being woodland.

What information should be recorded?

Each habitat which matches the appropriate Habitat definition should be ticked on the Habitat map to show that it is confirmed. Habitats which do not match should have a note made of how they differ referring to the habitat definitions to be clear of the nature of the mismatch. It should be made clear how much of the habitat 'patch' this difference applies to.

Photographs of any mismatches can be extremely helpful and it is suggested that a photograph is taken, taking a note of the eight figure, or better, grid reference of where you are standing and the compass direction you are looking. A medium distance shot of the habitat is helpful and a close up of the vegetation can provide very useful evidence of what is growing there.

If the difference applies to an area not shown separately on the Habitat map then drawing in the boundary of your 'new habitat' (preferably checking the accuracy of your line with GPS) and linking the area unambiguously to your note about the area.

We are expecting the Habitat map to be correct and it is just as important to send in maps where there is no change as those that show changes.

Should you see any wildlife of interest on your survey then do make a record of what it was, where you saw it (including at least a six figure grid reference) and send it in to TWIC.

What to do next

Your annotated Habitat map of the area with the notes you have made should be sent back to TWIC

We may want to ask you specific points about the survey so your name and contact details are very important, as well as the date when you did the survey.

We will inform of any changes made to the Borders Habitat Data as a result of the ground truthing on the TWIC website.

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