

# MONTANE HABITATS (UK BAP BROAD HABITAT)

This broad habitat includes all ground above the altitudinal limit of woodland: an altitude varying from over 600 m in south and east Scotland to under 300 m in the north and west. This encompasses a wide assortment of plant communities:

- Exposed summit heaths made up of either the moss *Racomitrium lanuginosum*, the sedge stiff sedge *Carex bigelowii* or the three-leaved rush *Juncus trifidus*, or mixtures of these.
- Late snowbeds dominated by mosses including *Kiaeria* spp., *Racomitrium* spp. and many small liverworts.
- Montane mat-grass *Nardus stricta* and tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa* snowbed grasslands.
- Montane dwarf shrub heaths with ling *Calluna vulgaris*, *Vaccinium* spp., crowberry *Empetrum nigrum* ssp. *hermaphroditum*, dwarf juniper *Juniperus communis* ssp. *nana*, *Arctostaphylos* spp., the moss *Racomitrium lanuginosum* and many lichens including species of *Cladonia*.
- Cliff ledge habitats with montane willows such as downy willow *Salix lapponum*.
- Bryophyte-dominated springs and bryophyte-sedge-rush flushes.

The soils in these habitats are mostly thin, leached, acidic humic rankers, and there are extensive areas of rock outcrop and scree. The structure and flora of the vegetation reflects the harsh climate in these places, for example the *Calluna* heaths in this broad habitat have heather growing prostrate, its wind-blown stems hugging the ground so as to form very low carpets. Some of the vegetation in the montane zone is amongst the most near-natural in Scotland. Many rare species of vascular plants, bryophytes and lichens occur among the various montane habitats in this broad habitat.

The Montane habitats broad habitat is widespread and common in the Highlands and Hebrides and is locally common in the Southern Uplands, Orkney and Shetland.

Light grazing maintains this broad habitat in good condition. Heavy grazing and associated trampling can be very damaging in short vegetation on these thin soils. Undergrazing can lead to over dominance of common, widespread grasses, sedges and dwarf shrubs at the expense of smaller, less competitive montane species, many of which are apparently confined to the montane zone because they cannot tolerate competition from the larger plants that grow in more temperate conditions.

Almost all of the land and vegetation within this broad habitat belongs in the Mountain heaths and willow scrub priority habitat. The only exceptions are examples where the vegetation has clearly been severely degraded by factors such as grazing, trampling and burning.

The priority habitat included within this broad habitat type is:

- [Mountain heaths and willow scrub](#)