



Wood Fescue (*Festuca altissima*)



Biodiversity Action Plan | Cummey Yanno Beiy-Feie

Background

Wood Fescue is a long-lived perennial grass that is present at a single site on Island (Dhoon Glen).

This Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) has been reformatted from a Rare Species Action Plan, produced by Wildflowers of Mann in 2004, and approved by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry in the same year.

Description

A tall grass with yellowish-green flowering panicles. It is strongly associated with humid ancient woodland sites.



Credit: A.J. Richards

British Isles Distribution

This is an upland European species that principally grows in the north and west of the British Isles. A small population also occurs in the High Weald of East Sussex. Whilst widespread, the species is not common.

Isle of Man Distribution

On the Isle of Man, the species only grows in Dhoon Glen, with no further past records elsewhere. Records are intermittent from 1946/47 onwards, probably due to the species being overlooked. It was last seen in 2007, with less than 20 plants seen in one area. This would indicate a decrease since the 1980s when it was recorded as locally abundant.

The Dhoon population is streamside, just below the waterfall - a very typical location for the species.



Habitat and Ecology

A predominantly woodland species, Wood Fescue is a long-lived perennial grass. It prefers wet or humid, shady conditions by streamsides, and often base rich soils. It is considered an Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland indicator in the British Isles.

Growing to one metre or more, it stands out from Greater Woodrush (*Luzula sylvatica*) and False Wood Brome (*Brachypodium sylvaticum*) in woodland vegetation, although, in many ways, it resembles the latter species. It flowers in mid-summer and produces copious seed that falls locally. Typical of most Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland indicators, it is very loyal to site and will not disperse freely.

Legal protection

Listed on Schedule 7 of the Wildlife Act 1990 and red-listed under *Plants of Conservation Concern in the Isle of Man 2022*.

Threats

It is hard to assess how threatened this species is, but the low numbers, and indications of long-term decline, are worrying enough to recommend action.

There is little in-situ work that can be done, but the site manager (Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture) should be notified of the species location and requirements. While this site is a designated an Area of Special Scientific Interest, major riverbank engineering work have been carried out above and below the population in recent years.

Reason for BAP

Threatened with local extinction.

Aims

Recover seeds for introduction at new sites. Establish at new sites (Hairpin Woodland Park).

Linked BAPS

Woodlands For Wildflowers, Action for Wildlife Project and associated BAPs.

Delivery Options	Active	Challenges
Seed from this population has been found to be fertile, with germination achieved from an old seed head taken for identification purposes. The species would also propagate from cuttings if needed.		

Delivery Plan

Strategy	Lead
This plant can be re-introduced to other parts of Dhoon Glen, as part of remedial action following engineering work. This site should be the priority for action.	Mand Wildlife Trust, Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture



Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland restoration work in Ohio Plantation, is a once in a generation opportunity to introduce Wood Fescue to a second site. It has the requisite damp streamside banks and waterfall features, as well as a shady north facing aspect that would mimic Dhoon Glen conditions perfectly. Introducing this species to the site should take place in several locations, over many years, as conifer cover is removed.

Action	Timing	Responsibility
Grow plants/collect seed.	2008	Wildflowers of Mann
Maintain nursery supply of 15 plants.	2008 onwards	Wildflowers of Mann
Introduce to Ohio Plantation and Dhoon Glen as opportunities appear.	2008 onwards	Wildflowers of Mann, Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture
Monitor.	Summer >2009	Wildflowers of Mann
Review.	Summer 2011	Wildflowers of Mann, Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture

Annual Updates

Year	
2008	Seed collected and plants in cultivation.
2009	Plants introduced to Ohio Plantation.
2010-11	Ohio Plantation now un-viable as a receptor site due to severe windblow.
2016	Hairpin Woodland Park (Claughbane) selected as alternate receptor site. Plants grown for introduction.
2018	10 plants introduced to Hairpin Woodland Park (Claughbane).
2020	10 plants introduced to Hairpin Woodland Park. Stock plant perished in drought at University College Isle of Man due to Covid-19 lockdown.
2021	Single plant flowered at Hairpin Woodland Park and seed collected and sown. Survival of plants at Claughbane probably low, but plants hard to find in non-flowering state. Population at Dhoon Glen checked and none flowering. No plants seen, but check was not exhaustive.
2022	15 plants planted into Hairpin Woodland Park, mostly quarry area.

