

PRIORITY HABITAT FACTSHEET



*Covehithe (Emma Aldous), Sea-aster Collets Bee (Paul Kitchener),
Rest Harrow (Neil Sherman).*

Maritime Cliffs and Slopes

Sloping to vertical faces on the coastline where breaks in the slopes may be formed by slippage and/or coastal erosion.

They extend to immediately above high water and include splash zone lichens and other species which occupy this zone.

In Suffolk the cliffs and slopes are all classified as soft.

IMPORTANCE FOR WILDLIFE

The range of microhabitats supported by soft cliffs are excellent for invertebrates including mining bees, solitary wasps, rove beetles, tiger beetles and butterflies, including blues, and skippers. It is also worth looking out for migrant birds in scrubby patches and burrowing sand martins. Bare ground suits 'pioneer' plants such as coltsfoot and small catchfly.



IMPORTANT ASSOCIATED SPECIES

Birds

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*
Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*

Bees and Wasps

Sea-aster Colletes Bee *Colletes halophilus*
Brown-banded Carder Bee *Bombus humilis*
Weevil Hunting Wasp *Cerceris quadricincta*
5-Banded Tailed Digger Wasp
Cerceris quinquefasciata

Butterflies

Grayling *Hipparchia semele*
Wall *Lasiommata megera*

Beetles

Black Oil-Beetle *Meloe proscarabaeus*

Moths

Rest Harrow *Aplasta ononaria*

Spiders

Silky Gallows-Spider *Diplocephalus inornata*

Antlion

Antlion *Euroleon nostras**

*Suffolk Priority species



Images: Top – Wall Brown (Chris Upson). Bottom, left to right – Sand Martin (Chris Baines), Antlion (Pete Etheridge), Antlion (Brian Eversham), 5-banded Tailed Digger Wasp (Paul Kitchener).

FACTORS AFFECTING HABITAT IN SUFFOLK

- Coastal Protection measures disrupting coastal processes resulting in the loss of bare soil and early successional stages. Re-vegetating with non-native species can result in a reduction in biodiversity.
- Cliff-top developments increasing demand for further coast protection works.
- Agricultural intensification resulting in loss of vegetation from cliff-tops. Arable farming and outdoor pig-rearing runoff affecting the composition of plant communities and increasing erosion where land drains discharge. Loss of low-intensity grazing on cliff grasslands or neglect resulting in scrub development impacting the flora and degrade cliff top resources.
- Invasive plant species out-competing and shading out native species adversely transforming vegetation and often smothering bare ground needed by invertebrates.
- Changes in drainage patterns can stabilise cliffs by countering natural slippage processes eliminating aquatic/semi-aquatic slope habitats.
- Climate change altering erosion patterns due to rising sea levels and increasing storm frequency.
- The popularity of the coastline for informal recreation has resulted in some soft cliffs and slopes suffering from increased rates of erosion.

HABITAT MANAGEMENT ADVICE

Maintain natural processes

- The most important requirement for soft-rock cliffs is the continuation of erosion which maintains areas of bare ground and early successional stages of vegetation. These cliffs should therefore be left alone and natural patterns of erosion accepted and allowed to continue without human interference. Any activity that changes the natural rate of a cliff or slope erosion, such as re-profiling or the introduction of coastal defences, should be avoided wherever possible.

Maintain natural freshwater seepages

- Freshwater seepages on the cliff face are very important features, supporting a number of scarce invertebrate species. It is necessary to maintain the continued water flow of cliff seepages and to prevent any pollution of groundwater sources.
- Drainage of soft cliffs by surface or sub-surface measures or by inland abstraction has a direct impact on the geomorphological functioning of sites, and thus the maintenance of the habitat and should be prevented.

Encourage vegetational diversity on cliff-tops through grazing

- Cliff-tops provide habitat for several very scarce insect species, probably in part because of the mild climatic conditions and warm soil that such species may require. Seed rain from the clifftop will influence what plant species grow further down the slope, so the quality of the vegetation at the clifftop should be an important consideration in any management plan.
- Where hedges and bushes are a feature of the clifftop landscape they should be valued as part of cliff ecology.
- Flower-rich semi-natural grassland will provide nectar and pollen sources for invertebrates such as mining bees that nest in soft-rock cliffs. This is best maintained through grazing or cutting, which will prevent the invasion of scrub or coarse grasses and produce open-structured grassland. Ideally, management should aim to create a mosaic of short and longer vegetation mixed with bare and stony areas and patches of scrub.
- The adoption of a flexible grazing arrangement is advisable so that any problems of overgrazing can be quickly remedied using backup adjoining land as holding areas for livestock. Livestock should not be dosed with broad-spectrum avermectin wormers, which are damaging to insect development; alternative treatments should be used. Rabbit grazing can be beneficial,

as it helps to maintain areas of short grassland, particularly where livestock cannot gain access.

- The exclusion of stock through the erection of fences beside clifftop paths can lead to the development of a band of scrub, which will overshadow low-growing plants and may act as a barrier to cliff species.
- Ploughing undisturbed turf, conversion to arable or the growing of crops such as oil-seed rape close to cliff tops should be avoided, as should the use of agricultural fertilisers, as this will reduce species diversity.
- Where cliff top is managed for arable or intensive pasture, it should ideally be reverted back to low intensity and managed to restore floristic diversity

Retain tide-swept debris

- Accumulations of seaweed and other natural tide-swept debris such as driftwood should be left unmanaged. Strandline removal in the interests of cleaning beaches removes a habitat important for both terrestrial and marine invertebrates. Removal of driftwood, e.g. for beach fires, should be discouraged.



Grayling (Paul Kitchener).



VISION FOR SUFFOLK

1. Improve knowledge of extent and quality of maritime cliffs and slopes.
2. Maintain the existing extent of maritime cliffs and slopes to ensure no net loss.
3. Re-create maritime cliffs and slopes as opportunities arise.
4. Encourage the restoration and improvement of degraded maritime cliffs and slopes.



WHERE TO FIND FURTHER INFORMATION

Buglife – advice on managing BAP habitats

- <https://www.buglife.org.uk/resources/habitat-management/maritime-cliffs-and-slopes>

Buglife – Notable invertebrates associated with maritime cliffs and slopes (pdf)

- <https://cdn.buglife.org.uk/2019/06/Notableinvertebratesassociatedwithmaritimecliffsandslopes.pdf>

JNCC Habitat Description (pdf)

- <https://data.jncc.gov.uk/data/b7023678-30e5-4e0b-8a27-67bd5b64aa41/UKBAP-BAPHabitats-34-MaritimeCliffSlopes.pdf>

MAGIC website – interactive mapping information including designations • <https://magic.defra.gov.uk>

Making Space for Nature, a Review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network 16 Sep 2010.

- Chaired by Professor Sir John Lawton CBE FRS. Defra website (pdf) • <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20130402151656/http://archive.defra.gov.uk/environment/biodiversity/documents/201009space-for-nature.pdf>

Natural Environment White Paper June 2011 – *The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature* (pdf)

- https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/228842/8082.pdf

Suffolk Wildlife Trust Habitats Explorer • <https://www.suffolkwildlifetrust.org/habitats/coastal/maritime-cliff>

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