



## 27.1 Introduction

Pasqueflower *Pulsatilla vulgaris* is an erect perennial herb with stems between 10-30 cm. Basal leaves form a rosette and are long stalked, feathery and twice-pinnate. Stem leaves are also hairy, but are sessile and deeply divided into long linear segments. The flowers consist of six petaloid sepals which are large (5-8 cm across), solitary and bell shaped. They are deep purple on the inside and paler violet and silky on the outside, with many golden anthers, making it one of the most attractive native flowers. The species flowers for a short period only in April and May. It occurs only on dry unimproved calcareous grasslands, usually on south or south-west facing slopes, where it favours a short sward.

## 27.2 Current status

This species is very local in central and eastern England, found from Gloucestershire to Essex and north Lincolnshire.

In Hertfordshire, it is now confined to one site, Therfield Heath, which is one of the largest colonies in the country. However, it was never abundant and has only been recorded from four other sites in the past. These include Aldbury Nowers, where it became extinct in the 1970s, the slope below Tingley Wood and Ravensburgh Castle (Dony *et al.*, 1967).

## 27.3 Current factors causing loss or decline

### 27.3.1 Habitat deterioration

A decline in habitat quality was responsible for the loss of this species from most of its Hertfordshire locations. With the decline of sheep farming in the chalkland areas followed by the crash in rabbit numbers in the 1950s, due to myxomatosis, remaining chalk grassland sites became ranker and scrub invaded. Under these conditions the low growing Pasqueflower becomes out-competed by taller growing grasses and herbs. A lack of open ground in such conditions may also prevent germination of Pasqueflower seedlings.

### 27.3.2 Fragmentation and isolation of remaining habitat

The loss of chalk grassland this century to arable cultivation, has resulted in the fragmentation and isolation of remaining sites. Under such conditions, when a species is lost from one site it is less likely to re-colonise.

## 27.4 Current action

The remaining colony on Church Hill, Therfield Heath has been intensively managed for over 15 years, with scrub removed and the grassland initially cut and raked. Since the mid 1980s Church Hill has been regularly grazed to maintain the desired short sward and the numbers of Pasqueflowers are reported to have increased.

The requirements of Pasqueflower have been researched by English Nature and this information is available to aid management and re-introduction programmes.



## 27.5 Pasqueflower Action Plan

### Objectives, actions and targets

**Objective 1:** To protect and safeguard from loss, as a result of development, Hertfordshire's grasslands where Pasqueflowers exist or could potentially exist

**Target:** To ensure grassland sites where Pasqueflowers are present or could potentially exist are identified and these are protected through objective one of the Herts Grassland and Heathland Action Plan

Action code	Action	Target start date	Target end date	Lead partner	Other partners
P/A/1.1	Update details of the sites where Pasqueflowers exist and sites where it can potentially exist in the future	2006	2007	HBRC	HMWT, TH
P/A/1.2	Liaise with the Herts Grassland and Heathland Action Plan to ensure protection policies are within LDF's and local plans for grasslands where Pasqueflowers exist			HMWT	HBRC, TH

**Objective 2:** To promote the positive management of grasslands where Pasqueflowers exist

**Target:** To ensure that sites where the Pasqueflowers exist are in positive conservation management by 2007

Action code	Action	Target start date	Target end date	Lead partner	Other partners
P/A/2.1	Support grazing management on Therfield Heath SSSI ensuring that Church Hill (where the Pasqueflowers exist) is included within the heaths grazing regime	2006	Ongoing	EN	HMWT, TH
P/A/2.2	Support and encourage grazing on sites where there is potential for Pasqueflowers to exist	2006	Ongoing	GWG	HMWT, CMS, landowners
P/A/2.3	Ensure that all sites and potential sites for the Pasqueflower have up to date conservation management plans	2006	2007	GWG	EN, HMWT, CMS, landowners, TH
P/A/2.4	Continue annual monitoring of Pasqueflower at Therfield Heath and monitor newly established populations	2004	Ongoing	TH	HMWT

**Objective 3:** To promote awareness of the conservation needs of the Pasqueflower

**Target:** One article to be published annually in relevant magazines

Action code	Action	Target start date	Target end date	Lead partner	Other partners
P/A/3.1	Publicise the conservation needs of the Pasqueflower through at least one article per year	2006	Ongoing	TH	HMWT, EN

**Relevant Action Plans:**

*Hertfordshire Plans*

Grassland and Heathland; Chalkhill Blue; Grizzled Skipper; Great Pignut

*National Plans*

Lowland calcareous grassland

**Abbreviations (Partners)**

**CMS** – Countryside Management Service

**EN** – English Nature

**GWG** – Grassland Working Group

**HBRC** – Hertfordshire Biological Records Centre

**HMWT** – Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust

**TH** – Therfield Conservators

**WSP** – Wildlife Sites Partnership (HMWT, HBRC, CMS, FWAG, EA, EN, DEFRA, Chilterns AONB)

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