

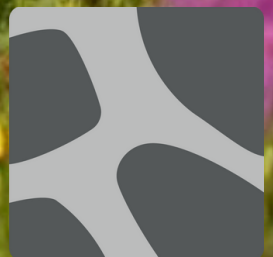


Mendip Hills
National
Landscape

Mendip Grasslands

and what we are
doing to preserve
them

The Mendip Hills National Landscape is committed to the "right tree, right place" ethos and while it can be tempting to look at an empty field and feel the pressure to fill it with trees it's important to remember that Mendip is home to some nationally important grasslands. We have lost 70% of ancient woodland (Source WWF) but we have lost over 97% of our flower rich meadows (source Plantlife). Our calcareous limestone grasslands form part of the Big Chalk network, a National Landscape ambition to connect our chalk and limestone habitats across England (this targets an area 20% of England!); our calaminarian grasslands also paint a rich picture of our mining history; and adopting good grassland management can even help build Mendip's climate resilience while continuing to support our farming community.



Grasslands are a vital habitat for several of our champion species including skylarks, small pearl-bordered fritillary, adder, black oil beetle and greater horseshoe bat, which use these habitats for food, shelter and breeding. Calcareous grasslands are flower rich environments, which are so important to many pollinators. By supporting habitats with our champion species in mind, we also support a myriad of other species too.

However, lowland calcareous grassland is thought to include some of our most ancient grasslands and as a result in and of themselves also host a diverse suite of botanical species only found in this particular habitat. Additionally, due to our landscape's mining history several areas have been "poisoned" with toxic heavy metals, such as lead, which has led to some grasslands consisting of an even rarer suite of 'metallophyte' species that make up what's called calaminarian grassland. There is only an estimated 450 hectares of this habitat in the UK making it truly special to Mendip.

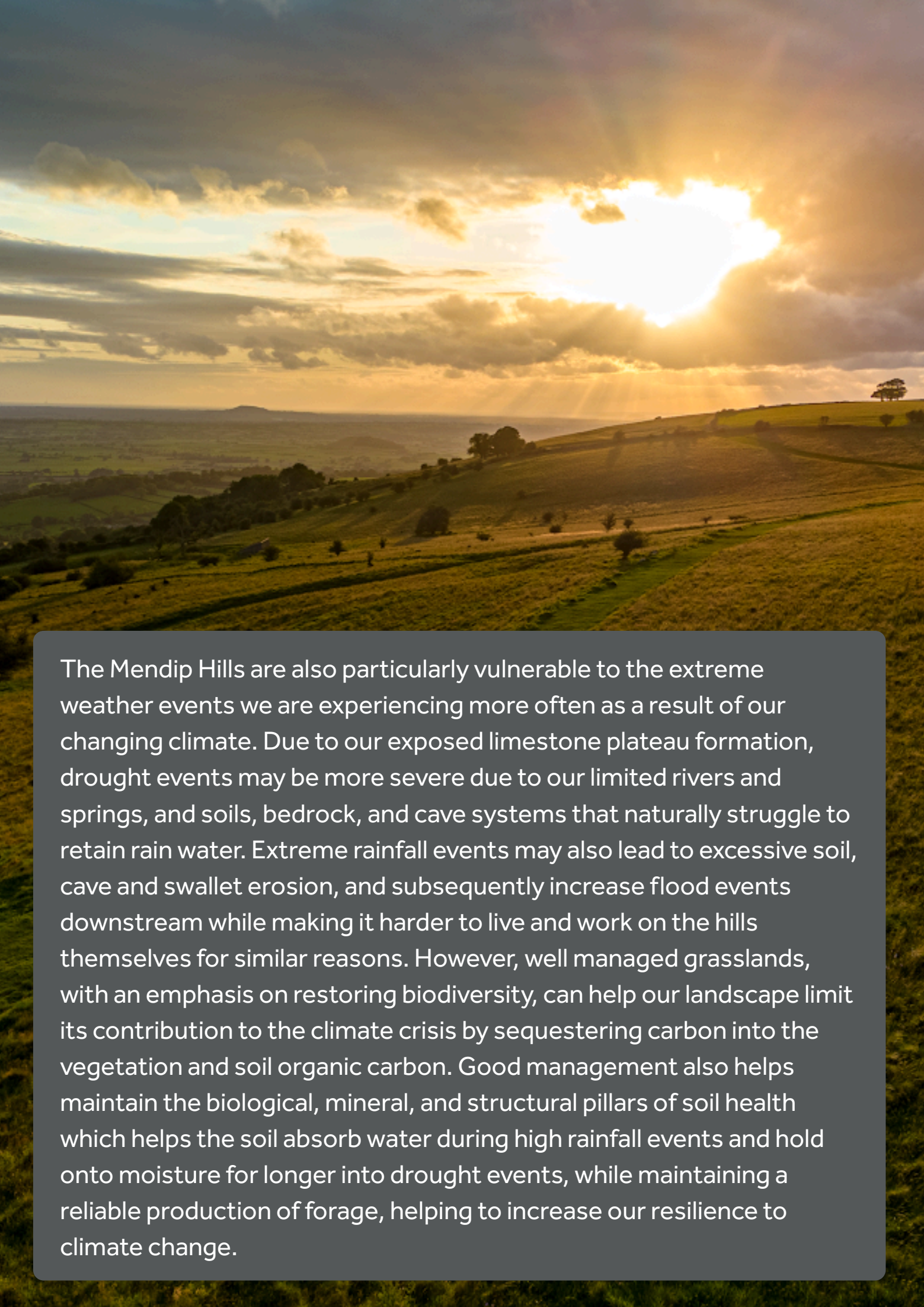


Following this, the Mendip Hills has a rich history and as a result the landscape is peppered with Scheduled Monuments, ex-mines and geological Sites of Special Scientific Interest which we work hard to preserve for generations to come. Supporting conservation grazing to maintain a grassland habitat helps to protect these sites from deeper or more aggressively rooting plants from damaging the integrity of these historic sites and help to showcase the often interesting visible topography to the many visitors we welcome to landscape each year (the visible geology is also one of our landscapes 12 official Special Qualities!). We regularly support land managers in this aspect by delivering funds with the purpose of facilitating conservation grazing and reducing scrub encroachment. This has been through simple measures such as funds for fence restoration to more bespoke scrub clearance projects.



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The Mendip Hills are also particularly vulnerable to the extreme weather events we are experiencing more often as a result of our changing climate. Due to our exposed limestone plateau formation, drought events may be more severe due to our limited rivers and springs, and soils, bedrock, and cave systems that naturally struggle to retain rain water. Extreme rainfall events may also lead to excessive soil, cave and swallet erosion, and subsequently increase flood events downstream while making it harder to live and work on the hills themselves for similar reasons. However, well managed grasslands, with an emphasis on restoring biodiversity, can help our landscape limit its contribution to the climate crisis by sequestering carbon into the vegetation and soil organic carbon. Good management also helps maintain the biological, mineral, and structural pillars of soil health which helps the soil absorb water during high rainfall events and hold onto moisture for longer into drought events, while maintaining a reliable production of forage, helping to increase our resilience to climate change.

A key method often used to achieve these goals is mob-grazing and is a method that has been adopted by several of our Mendip farmers. This involves frequently moving grazing stock on a long rotation. This allows for a long period of time to pass from when an animal last grazed any one area, which leaves time for the grass to re-grow tall and root deep and for detritivores to draw organic matter (such as dung) into the soil which feeds the soil biology that helps retain carbon and moisture. However, frequent rotation of livestock and the small paddocks required results in the challenge of how to make sure the livestock have access to water and any supplementary forage when needed as they could be far from a trough, a gate, or a ring feeder. We have been able to support farmers in transitioning to mob-grazing practices by helping to fund equipment such as bale unrollers which allow easy transport and distribution of round bales in a way that limits poaching of the soil, and innovative and adaptive drinker systems that enable farmers to move livestock's access to water quickly and easily to different paddocks across the farm. We are always learning and are open to supporting new and exciting ideas to help farmers transition to more sustainable methods of grazing.



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Here it is clear to see how important the role grassland habitats are within our diverse landscape. If you are a farmer or land manager and want to explore ways in which we can help support you to look after your grasslands please get in touch!