

## Flowers in limestone grassland at Lower Winskill

The limestone pastures at Lower Winskill are managed to encourage wild flowers as part of the farm Higher Level Stewardship scheme in partnership with Natural England. The pastures are home to a number of rare species. By carefully controlling when the pastures are grazed many different kinds of wild flowers are able to flower and set seed from the spring through until the early autumn.

The earliest wild flowers such as early purple orchid and cowslip start to grow in March. By the beginning of April the first flowers appear and by the end of April the cowslips are so abundant that they turn the limestone grasslands along the edge of Stainforth Scar a pale lemony yellow.



Cowslips in the Scar Edge limestone pasture at Lower Winskill in early May, looking towards Penygent.

These cowslips could not flower so abundantly if the pasture was grazed by sheep in the spring. The Higher Level Stewardship scheme provides funding to maintain these pastures.



Early purple orchids in the Scar Edge pasture at Lower Winskill in early May.

The early purple orchid is one of the first flowers to appear in the spring alongside the cowslips in the limestone pastures. With its vivid purple colour it looks exotic and somewhat out of place in this high limestone pasture nearly 1000 feet above sea level. The purple colour is quite variable and occasionally a white flower spike is produced. The leaves are generally marked with dark spots and lie close to the ground making them difficult to see before the flower spike grows. The camouflage might be a defence against grazing animals, but the flower spike is sometimes nibbled off and toppled over at the base possibly by slugs.





Close up of an early purple orchid, Scar Edge pasture at Lower Winskill.



Early Purple Orchids

2000



Fragrant Orchid

1999



Spotted Orchid

1999

The limestone pastures at Lower Winskill are home to a number of different orchids including the delightfully scented fragrant orchid. All the orchid species are becoming more abundant in the limestone pasture as a result of the management as part of the Higher Level Stewardship scheme.



Early purple orchid flower spikes setting seed, Scar Edge pasture at Lower Winskill. By carefully controlling when the limestone pastures are grazed wild flowers are able to flower and set seed.



Horse-shoe vetch Scar Edge pasture at Lower Winskill. This is another plant which benefits from careful control of grazing.





Rock rose and wild thyme, Scar Edge pasture at Lower Winskill.

Two typical early summer flowers in limestone pasture. Rock rose is the sole food plant for the caterpillars of the rare northern brown argus butterfly. The Higher Level Stewardship scheme management for the limestone pastures aims to encourage the spread of rock rose to support the colony of northern brown argus butterflies at Lower Winskill.





The delicate yellowy, green flower heads of a rare lady's mantle, *Alchemilla glaucescens*, growing in the Scar Edge pasture at Lower Winskill.

This nationally rare plant is becoming more abundant at Lower Winskill especially where it is not out competed by grass. It will even grow along the edges of the public footpaths where trampling keeps the grass short.



Small scabious and lady's bed straw, Scar Edge pasture at Lower Winskill. Two typical flowers in limestone pasture in mid-summer.



Mid-summer flowering plants in limestone pasture; burnet saxifrage, quaking grass and common knapweed, in the Scar Edge pasture at Lower Winskill. The flower head of a cowslip (right foreground) sets seed. Common knapweed provides a valuable late summer nectar source for butterflies.





Yellow hawks-bits and harebells grow on ledges at the edge of the Caker Scar meadow at Lower Winskill during mid-summer.



Close up of harebells on a ledge at the edge of the Caker Scar meadow in mid-summer at Lower Winskill.





The distinctive dark red flower heads of greater burnet, a late summer flowering plant more typically associated with traditional hay meadows, in the Crutching Close pasture at Lower Winskill.



Autumn gentian, a late summer flower, Crutching Close at Lower Winskill.





The delicate flower head of grass of Parnassus growing in the Crutching Close at Lower Winskill.

This is another late summer flower coming out in mid-August. It is typically a plant of damp areas flushed with lime rich ground water. However, it grows in fairly dry locations in the limestone pastures at Lower Winskill suggesting that with the right management this beautiful wild flower can expand beyond its more familiar range. Grass of Parnassus is gradually spreading in the limestone pastures at Lower Winskill maintained under the Higher Level Stewardship scheme.