

What are dry grasslands?

The term “dry grasslands” covers a variety of grassland biotopes that all have relatively dry and nutrient-poor soils. Years ago these were used as common grazing pastures for the nearby villages, and until the late 18th century large areas of Denmark were covered by dry grasslands.

Dry grasslands are characterized by the short plant cover and a rich variety of flowers.

Dry grasslands are rich in species

The plants on dry grasslands have evolved and adapted to the nutrient-poor soils and grazing animals. Some have evolved thorns or a bad taste to avert grazing altogether, while others have a low growth zone, out of reach of grazing animals.

Grazing animals on dry grasslands, however, also help create habitat variation, enabling plant species with different habitat requirements to thrive.

Trampling animals expose the soil in some places, creating favourable germination sites for new seeds. They also redistribute the nutrients, and hardy plants thrive where nutrients are removed, while for example the areas around cow pats are suited to more nutrient-demanding plant species.



Large Blue. Photo: Per Stadel Nielsen

Therefore, plants do not compete for light, water and nutrition. Once a seed has germinated, its place is secure, given that it can tolerate the constant grazing.

On dry grasslands as many as 50 species of plants can be found per square metre. This provides favourable conditions for insects. Many of the 18,000 insect species in Denmark live on dry grasslands – including more than half of Danish butterfly species.

Grazing is necessary

Dry grasslands will only be preserved if they are grazed. This is because the plants cannot compete with the taller herbs without the help of grazing animals.

Left to themselves, dry grasslands will develop into forests. Nowadays fewer animals are used for grazing, and as a result trees and bushes can establish themselves and block sunlight from reaching the dry grassland species.

Restoration of dry grasslands in Denmark

The dry grasslands are considered a threatened and vulnerable habitat in both Denmark and abroad. Many rare and endangered plant and animal species live on dry grasslands, and conserving these habitats is therefore of great importance.

The EU is co-financing a project through the Life-Nature programme, which aims to increase the area of grasslands and to improve the conditions of existing dry grasslands in Denmark.

Eleven Sites of Community importance, covering an area of more than 4330 ha are included in this project. Generally the sites are suffering from a lack of grazing or inappropriate grazing. This has led to overgrowth, and bushes and trees are changing the structure and function of the ecosystem. The aim of the project is to restore the dry grasslands by clearing the overgrowth, and ensuring proper grazing.

Clearing of overgrowth



Activities

- Clearance of smaller plantations on former dry grasslands.
- Restoration by clearing bushes and trees.
- Establishment or continuation of appropriate grazing regimes.
- Public awareness campaigns concerning the value of dry grasslands for conservation of biodiversity and the role of NATURA 2000. Information boards will be erected at project sites, leaflets will be distributed, guided tours and public meetings will be arranged and a web-site will be set up.
- Exchange of experience and capacity building through seminars and reports for all professional staff in Denmark involved in management of dry grasslands.
- Guided tours of the project sites.



Lady Orchid



Glanville Fritillary



Photo: Storstrøms Amt

Photo: Per Stadel Nielsen

Photo: Ole Malling



LIFE Nature is an EU programme aiming to conserve natural habitats and the wild fauna and flora of European Union interest, according to the Birds and Habitats directives, thus supporting implementation of the European Union's nature conservation policy and the NATURA 2000 Network.

www.ec.europa.eu/environment/life



NATURA 2000 is the Sites of Community Importance designated according to the Habitats Directive and the Special Protection Areas designated according to the Birds Directive. The Danish Ramsar Sites are all in Special Protection Areas.

www.ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000

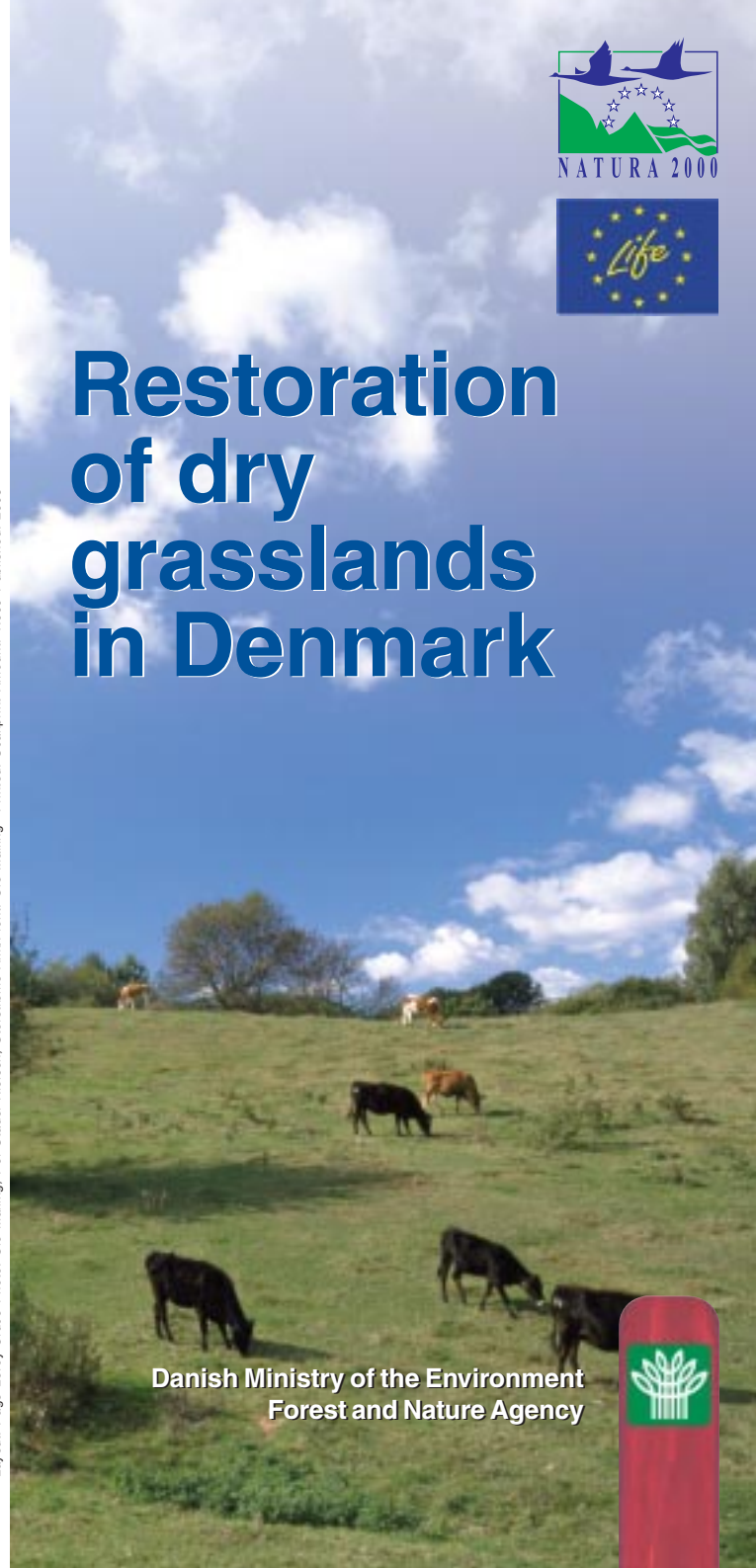
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The Forest and Nature Agency under the Danish Ministry of the Environment is responsible for a wide variety of nature areas all over Denmark. Forest management must take into consideration recreational activities, timber production and nature conservation. Visit us on www.skovognatur.dk



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