

Culm Grassland



The North Devon Coast AONB contains a wide variety of habitats, including sand dunes and estuaries, rocky shores, species-rich hedgerows, coastal oak woodlands and culm grasslands.



Rhôs pasture (or Culm as it is known in Devon), is characterised most particularly by purple moor grass, the tussocky deciduous grass which gives Culm its distinctive pale brown colour in winter, and for which it is sometimes locally known as the 'white lands' (e.g. Whiteleigh Meadow - white meadow). On most Culm sites this grass shares prominence with rushes, particularly sharp-flowered rush, together with patches of willow and birch scrub.

Culm pasture supports a wide variety of colourful plants, such as meadow thistle, devil's-bit scabious, heath spotted orchid, bog asphodel, creeping willow, meadowsweet, greater bird's-foot trefoil, water mint and a variety of sedges. Less common are plants like round-leaved sundew, pale butterwort and lesser butterfly orchid.

Bog mosses are also frequent and open pools support marsh, St John's-wort, bog-bean, marsh pennywort, bog pondweed and other aquatic plants.

This rich variety of flowering plants supports an equally rich insect fauna. Butterflies are especially prominent, with species like marbled white and small pearl-bordered fritillary being quite common, despite their scarcity in the countryside as a whole. Dragonflies and damselflies are frequent, with keeled skimmer and golden-ringed dragonfly being especially prominent.

Typical birds of Culm pasture include breeding and wintering snipe, barn owl and short-eared owl, reed bunting, willow tit, grasshopper warbler and woodcock. Common countryside animals like fox and deer find particular shelter on Culm pasture, while many sites are closely associated with watercourses supporting otter populations. The scrubby margins of many sites support dormice.