

## Purpose:

The results from this rapid assessment will give you an indication of the diversity of vegetation at your location. There are a number of things this data can be used for: Compare data from one year to the next to see if diversity at your location is increasing, decreasing or staying the same. This can help give you an idea if your management is working. If your diversity is increasing year on year, your management is likely to be having a positive effect. If your diversity is decreasing you may need to change what you are doing slightly. That being said, there are a number of factors beyond your control which may also be causing them to decrease. If you have multiple sites for a potential project but limited funds or time, you can use these diversity levels to help decide where to focus your efforts. You may decide to focus on the area with the lowest levels of diversity as this is likely to result in the biggest increase. If there are plans to change a management regime in an area, such as changing the amount of mowing, you can use these results to provide evidence to argue either for or against proposed changes.

## Before getting started:

Before starting the survey for the first time it is worth creating a species list for your site if you haven't done so already. It might also be useful to create a photo guide, depending on your skill level and the skill level of others carrying out the surveys. Identify as many species of flower, grass, sedge and rush as possible or at least the most commonly occurring species. Identify to species where you can, but you can also record different species where you are sure they are different but unsure of the actual species e.g. buttercup 1 and buttercup 2, or grass 1, grass 2, grass 3, etc. You will need to take photos of these to help you remember which one you have labelled as "1" "2" "3" at later squares or future surveys. When plants come into flower later in the year you may find you are able to identify species that previously you were unsure about.

ID advice: Getting started with ID of flowering plants can be relatively straightforward when you work gradually through one habitat type at a time. A good place to start is with the flowering plant ID guides available from FSC these are broken down by habitat types: <https://tinyurl.com/4rht7hrp> A very useful book to further your knowledge is: The Wildflower Key by Francis Rose. If you need more help there are some very useful UK identification groups on Social Media where the community can help you with your ID. There are also useful apps such as: "Seek", "ObsIdentify", "iNaturalist", and "iSpot" to name a few. **We strongly advise you to only use plant ID apps as a training tool rather than solely for identification. You could use the app to narrow your identification down to a genus, then use your favourite plant guide or book to check and confirm species.**

## Methodology:

- Where the grassland area is big enough, survey 10 x 1m<sup>2</sup> random plots. Walk a random W or Z pattern across the area to include an even spread across the area. Stop at random intervals to measure and survey your 1m<sup>2</sup> plots. You will not be surveying the same plots each time, you will survey new random plots each time.
- You can adjust the number of plots according to the size of the area. For example, a 100m road verge of an average 2m width gives you 200 square meters. Stopping every 10m of the 100m would be perfectly adequate. For a 10m strip 2-3 plots may be sufficient. It's not recommended to exceed a maximum of 20 plots in total.
- If you have a particularly rich area, ensure one of your plots is within this area. The aim of this survey is to get an idea of how many species are present in your site, so if you miss out any particularly diverse patches you may also miss several species. Alternatively, you can add details of any obvious species that weren't in the plots within the notes.
- List the species in the left-hand column as you find them and then mark under each plot number where you find that species. You are not counting how many of each species are in each plot, you are just marking whether they are present in the plot or not. When you have finished, count up the totals. The right hand column shows how many plots each species occurred in (abundance). The bottom row shows how many different species each random plot had in it (diversity). In particularly rich areas you may need to add extra rows, but your species list should give you a good idea before you start.
- Record any potentially "negative" species in the second table.
- Repeat the survey once or twice per year during the peak flowering season (May-July). When you first begin recording in a wildflower area you may want to survey once per month May-August. This will help you to learn when your area is in peak flowering time. Then in future years you may reduce the number of surveys accordingly.

Record all species you've been able to identify on Living Record, at least annually is recommended. Make a note of the location of each plot to enable you to do this – mark on a map or use what3words



