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**Restoring diverse grassland:
What can be achieved where, and
what will it do for us?**

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INTRODUCTION

Grassland is a major feature of the landscape, and the major resource for livestock production, in the UK and across much of Europe. It is also of vital importance for wildlife and the wider natural environment and many hundreds of millions of pounds have been spent within agri-environment schemes maintaining and attempting to restore grassland with a diversity of plants, invertebrates, birds and other taxa. This has been supported over the last twenty years by applied ecological research and monitoring which has provided new insights into soil-plant-animal relationships, new techniques and new guidance.

Fresh impetus has been given to these developments by the publication of ‘Making Space for Nature’ (the Lawton review) and ‘The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature’ (the UK Natural Environment White Paper). These both identified the restoration of coherent ecological networks as a high priority – such networks will require restoration of grassland with particular characteristics on a significant scale to extend, link and buffer core sites. Climate change mitigation and adaptation are also imperatives, as is resource protection, and grassland can play a major role by improving soil structure and infiltration, preventing erosion and storing carbon. And food security is a further driver – grassland must support livestock, ideally producing more and of higher quality.

This was the stimulus for the three learned societies represented here, supported by Natural England, to convene this meeting. We are delighted that it attracted over seventy delegates representing not only research and agencies of national government but also a wide range of local government, charitable and commercial organisations and farmers. In addition to the theatre and poster papers in this volume there was a keynote address on ‘*The need for change*’ by Sir John Lawton and visits to field sites demonstrating successes and problems of grassland restoration. There was also a two-hour session for three workshops with the topics:

- Selecting sites and setting objectives – scale and placement, limiting factors, trajectories of progress.
- Techniques – seeds, sowings, site preparation & management, setbacks.
- Making it worthwhile – fitting into a business, ecosystem service benefits, connecting with consumers and taxpayers.

The aim was to synthesise the information presented at the meeting with existing knowledge to form the basis of improved recommendations and guidance, and to identify knowledge gaps. We hope to make summaries of the workshops available via the AAB website.

We thank the sponsoring organisations for their support and the site hosts, authors and sub-editors for their hard work. We also thank Carol Millman and her team at AAB for the efficient administration of the conference and timely production of these proceedings.

Steve Peel, Natural England, Chair of Organising Committee
Barbara Smith, GWCT, Secretary of BES Agricultural Ecology Special Interest Group

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