### Community Synopsis

#### Scientific name
*Briza media – Thymus polytrichus* grassland

#### Common name
Quaking-grass – Wild Thyme grassland

#### Community code
GL3A

### Vegetation

This is typically a very species-rich assemblage and has a large number of constants. The main graminoids are *Carex flacca*, *Briza media*, *Anthoxanthum odoratum* and *Sesleria caerulea* with *Carex caryophyllea*, *Festuca* spp. and *Koeleria macrantha* being less frequent but still characteristic plants. The turf is typically rather low (mean graminoid height = 12.6 cm, \( n = 364 \)). The plentiful and colourful forb component contains several good calcareous indicators such as *Thymus polytrichus*, *Linum catharticum*, *Galium verum*, *Lotus corniculatus*, *Campanula rotundifolia*, *Polygala vulgaris*, *Leucanthemum vulgare* and *Pilosella officinarum* (mean forb height = 8.3 cm, \( n = 364 \)). Other forbs present usually include *Succisa pratensis*, *Plantago lanceolata*, *Potentilla erecta*, *Centaurea nigra*, *Viola riviniana* and *Euphrasia officinalis agg*. The calcicole moss *Ctenidium molluscum* is frequent.

### Ecology

This community comprises swards of calcareous grassland on shallow, well-drained soils of poor fertility (mean organic content = 26.6%). It is the typical grassland community to be found in association with limestone pavement and eskers and occurs at middling altitudes (mean altitude = 101 m, \( n = 364 \)), often on sloping ground which improves the drainage (mean slope = 13.0°, \( n = 364 \)). Consequently, it has a distinct geographical distribution, with some of the best examples being concentrated in the Burren and in the Dartry Mountains.

### Sub-communities

There are two sub-communities described. The *Sesleria caerulea – Tortella tortuosa* sub-community (GL3Ai) is found in association with limestone pavement and species indicative of that habitat have higher frequency than in the more typical *Cynosurus cristatus – Centaurea nigra* sub-community (GL3Aii). These indicative species include *Geranium sanguineum*, *Asperula cynanchica*, *Neckera crispa*, *Carlina vulgaris* and *Tortella tortuosa*. *Sesleria caerulea* is almost always present in sub-community GL3Ai, but may also occur in GL3Aii.

### Similar communities

This is generally a distinct community which differs from others in the GL3 group in the richness of species and presence of numerous calcicole species.

### Records and distribution

**Number of records (all)**

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**Number of records (mapped)**

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<td>1971-1985:</td>
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<td>Pre-1971:</td>
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**Number of hectads (most recent records)**

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<td>1986-2000:</td>
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<td>1971-1985:</td>
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<td>Pre-1971:</td>
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**Number of hectads (all mapped records)**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year Range</th>
<th>Number of hectads</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>1971-1985:</td>
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<td>Pre-1971:</td>
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</table>
**Synopsis**


**Key references**


**Synoptic table (n = 657)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Frequency (from I-V)</th>
<th>Cover (min (med) max)</th>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Frequency (from I-V)</th>
<th>Cover (min (med) max)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Carex flacca</td>
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<td>Festuca rubra</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lotus corniculatus</td>
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<td>Centaurea nigra</td>
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<tr>
<td>Succisa pratensis</td>
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<td>Campanula rotundifolia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Plantago lanceolata</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>+(3)-8</td>
<td>Achillea millefolium</td>
<td>III</td>
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<tr>
<td>Potentilla erecta</td>
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<td>+(3)-7</td>
<td>Cynosurus cristatus</td>
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<td>Thymus polyclinchen</td>
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<td>Scleropodium purum</td>
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<td>Koeleria macrantha</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Viola riviniana</td>
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<td>Sesleria caerulea</td>
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<td>Trifolium pratense</td>
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<td>Euphrasia officinalis ag.</td>
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<td>Calliergonella cuspidata</td>
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<td>Agrostis capillaris</td>
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<td>Hypericum pulchrum</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Danthonia decumbens</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prunella vulgaris</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>+(2)-6</td>
<td>Carex pulicaris</td>
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<td>+(3)-7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carex caryophyllea</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>+(3)-7</td>
<td>Holcus lanatus</td>
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<td>Ctenidium molluscum</td>
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<td>Helicotrichon pubescens</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Affinities**

GH: G51 Dry calcareous and neutral grassland (97.6%) (n = 373)

ZM: Bromion erecti / Xerobromion

EUNIS: E1.26 Sub-Atlantic semi-dry calcareous grassland (E1.2612 Hibernian dry calcicolous grasslands)

NVC: CG2c Festuca ovina-Avenula pratensis grassland Holcus lanatus-Trifolium repens sub-community (59.7%)

Annex I: 6210 Orchid-rich calcareous grassland* (92.0%) / 6170 Alpine and subalpine calcareous grassland (1.6%) (n = 373)

**Proxy environmental data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Light</th>
<th>Reaction</th>
<th>Wetness</th>
<th>Fertility</th>
<th>Salinity</th>
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<td>5.2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
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**Conservation value**

This is a very species-rich grassland community (species/4 m² = 41.9, n = 373) of which most examples correspond with the priority EU HD Annex I habitat 6210 Orchid-rich calcareous grassland*. In addition to supporting populations of rare orchids (e.g. Gymnadenia conopsea, Ophrys apifera) and being important for a range of pollinators, permanent pastures of this type can be notable for their ant hills. Rare swards of the Dartry Mountains with Silene acaulis match the EU HD Annex I habitat 6170 Alpine and subalpine calcareous grassland.

**Management**

These swards are managed as light intensity grazing land for cattle or horses. The main threats to these grasslands include improvement and abandonment. As they tend to occur on limestone or eskers these sites are also at risk from quarrying.

**Synopsis version:** V1.0  **Synopsis date:** December 2016  **Synopsis author(s):** P.M. Perrin

Photo 2. GL3A *Briza media – Thymus polytrichus* grassland, Cahermaclanchy, Clare (C. MacMahon/K, McNutt, June 2011)