# Natura 2000 habitat 6430 : Hydrophilous tall herb fringe communities of plains and of the montane to alpine levels


(photo Patrick Keirsebilck)

Habitat 6430 consists of species-rich tall herb communities on rich soils along water courses and woodland borders. The vegetation is easily more than one meter tall, sometimes even more than two meter, and the dominant species are perennial herbs. Abundant flowering brings a rich insect life and many spider species, as well as numerous insect eating birds.

Tall herb communities on wet to humid soil often contain meadowsweet (Filipendula ulmaria), common meadow-rue (Thalictrum flavum) and cabbage thistle (Cirsium oleraceum). On even more nutrient-rich places along water courses great willowherb (Epilobium hirsutum) is typically dominant. Transition situations between tall herb communities and reed beds (common reed – Phragmites australis), even in more brackish conditions, are also contained in this habitat. In fringes along borders of woodlands on rich soils red campion (Silene dioica), wood avens (Geum urbanum) and hedge woundwort (Stachys sylvatica) often occur.

## Where to find it?

The tall herb communities of habitat 6430 can be found (almost) all over the European Union. They are often described as nitrophilous pointing to the soils rich in nitrogen. But other soil nutrients are also highly available. The habitat can be found in plains, on hills and mountains, where specific species may occur.

## Typical species

The following typical plants are mentioned in the European habitat description :

- ground ivy (Glechoma hederacea)

- great willowherb (Epilobium hirsutum) (photo Misjel Decleer/Vildaphoto)

- meadowsweet (Filipendula ulmaria) (photo Yves Adams/Vildaphoto)
- garden angelica (Angelica archangelica)
- butterbur (Petasites hybridus)
- cabbage thistle (Cirsium oleraceum)
- ground elder (Aegopodium podagraria)
- garlic mustard (Alliaria petiolata)
- herb-Robert (Geranium robertianum)
- red campion (Silene dioica)
- white nettle (Lamium album)

- dotted loosestrife (Lysimachia punctata)

- purple loosestrife (Lythrum salicaria)
- marsh hawk's-beard (Crepis paludosa)
- wood cranesbill (Geranium sylvaticum)
- a species of small-reed (Calamagrostis arundinacea)

The following 6 species mentioned are very rare in Belgium, for sure more rare than the habitat 6430 itself :

- broad-leaved ragwort (Senecio fluviatilis)
- wolf's-bane (Aconitum lycoctonum)
- monk's-hood (Aconitum napellus)
- masterwort (Peucedanum ostruthium)
- yellow foxglove (Digitalis grandiflora)
- melancholy thistle (Cirsium helenioides)

The following 4 species mentioned are not present in Belgium :

- hairy chervil (Chaerophyllum hirsutum)
- globeflower (Trollius europaeus)
- Adenostyles alliariae
- alpine sow-thistle (Cicerbita alpina)

Typical animals :

- Jersey tiger (Euplagia quadripunctaria)
- willowherb hawkmoth (Proserpinus proserpina)
- small emperor moth (saturnia pavonia)
- dark bush-cricket (Pholidoptera griseoaptera)

Management and threats

Tall herb communities ultimately develop naturally towards forest vegetations in the case of absence of any management, but some situations appear to be more or less stable because of strong growth of the herbs keeping away tree seedlings during many years. In general to maintain habitat 6430 you have to cut young trees away every 5 to 10 years. Some plant

species prefer mowing every 2 or 3 years. It is important not to mow the complete area at once; a rotation system mowing for example only one third every three years is very important for the fauna. If grazing is applied in a very extensive way habitat 6430 can also develop on places where the grazing animals only pass rarely.

Pollution with nutrient rich material can make that common nettle (Urtica dioica) and cleavers (Galium aparine) become dominant and the vegetation species-poor. This can be from flooding with dirty water, garbage dumping or air pollution. Wet tall herb communities are sensitive to drainage and changes in the hydrological situation. Sharp borders between forests and shorter vegetations or fields can make that in forest fringes very little space can be used by habitat 6430. Gradual transitions over several meters create species rich woodland border areas.

Specific care is necessary for the elimination of invasive non indigenous species; the most important are Himalayan balsam (Impatiens glandulifera) and Asian knotweed (Reynoutria japonica).

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