

## Views About Management



### **A statement of English Nature's views about the management of Epsom and Ashted Commons Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).**

This statement represents English Nature's views about the management of the SSSI for nature conservation. This statement sets out, in principle, our views on how the site's special conservation interest can be conserved and enhanced. English Nature has a duty to notify the owners and occupiers of the SSSI of its views about the management of the land.

Not all of the management principles will be equally appropriate to all parts of the SSSI. Also, there may be other management activities, additional to our current views, which can be beneficial to the conservation and enhancement of the features of interest.

The management views set out below do not constitute consent for any operation. English Nature's written consent is still required before carrying out any operation likely to damage the features of special interest (see your SSSI notification papers for a list of these operations). English Nature welcomes consultation with owners, occupiers and users of the SSSI to ensure that the management of this site conserves and enhances the features of interest, and to ensure that all necessary prior consents are obtained.

## **Management Principles**

### **Broadleaved and yew woodland**

There are many different ways in which broadleaved and yew woodland can be managed to conserve its value for wildlife. The following gives broad views on a range of regimes that may be appropriate on your site.

A diverse woodland structure, with open space, a dense understory, and a more mature overstory is important. A range of ages and species within and between stands is desirable. Some dead and decaying wood, such as fallen logs, can provide habitats for fungi and invertebrates. However, work may be needed to make safe dangerous trees in areas of high public access. Both temporary and permanent open spaces benefit groups of invertebrates such as butterflies. They may require cutting to keep them open, and should be of sufficient size to ensure that sunny conditions prevail for most of the day.

In broadleaved woodland, felling, thinning or coppicing may be used to create or maintain variations in the structure of the wood, and non-native trees and shrubs can be removed at this time. To avoid disturbance to breeding birds the work is normally best done between the beginning of August and the end of February. Work should be avoided when the ground is soft, to prevent disturbing the soil and ground flora.

Normally successive felling, thinning or coppicing operations should be spread through the wood to promote diversity, but where there is open space adjacent plots should be worked to encourage the spread of species that are only weakly mobile. Natural regeneration from seed or stump regrowth is preferred to planting because it helps maintain the local patterns of species and the inherent genetic character of the site.

For the most part, yew woodland can be left unmanaged to benefit species that do best under low disturbance or in response to natural processes. Within these areas some trees will eventually die naturally and dead wood accumulate. However, felling or thinning may sometimes be carried out, for example to create or maintain variations in the structure of the wood, or to remove non-native trees and shrubs.

Deer management and protection from rabbits or livestock are often necessary, even though Yew is poisonous to some large herbivores, particularly cattle and horses. Whilst light or intermittent grazing may increase woodland diversity, heavy browsing can damage the ground flora and prevent successful regeneration. Species, such as *Rhododendron* or Himalayan balsam, should be controlled.

Parts of a wood should be left unmanaged to benefit species that do best under low disturbance or in response to natural processes. Within these areas some trees will eventually die naturally and dead wood accumulate.

### **Wood pasture**

Wood pastures are typically mosaics of scattered old trees (often pollards), and relatively extensive open areas (often acid grassland or heath), with patches of scrub and young growth. They are maintained in this mixed state by higher levels of grazing than are common in woods with a coppice or high forest history. Many wood pastures now lack one or other of the components of the mosaic or are no longer grazed. The preferred management is usually aimed at restoring the missing elements.

Old pollards may need attention in terms of reducing competition from younger growth or lightening the crown, for example, by repollarding. Dealing with old pollards is a specialist job as each has a unique structure and context. Large cut branches, fallen dead wood or the remains of old trees should be left on site as they may contain populations of important fungi or invertebrates. Grazing or cutting helps to maintain old trees in relatively open conditions, which is desirable where these are important for lichens on the lower trunks.

The pasture may be of conservation interest in its own right and grazing or cutting also promotes open semi-natural vegetation with some scrub and young trees in between the main woodland trees. Care needs to be taken to establish the most appropriate stocking density or cutting regime.

To promote saproxylic invertebrate habitat, wherever possible, old standard trees must be left to age naturally. Dead wood that has fallen should be left *in situ*. Where dead and dying trees are in short supply, pollarding or artificially wounding live trees could be considered.

### **Veteran trees in woodlands**

Veteran trees often require little long term active management, other than to reduce the risk of partial or total collapse. At this time, branches can be cut to 'balance out' the tree to prevent the collapse, or the tree can be coppiced (cut near ground level) or pollarded (cut above ground level). Which form of management is appropriate will need to be considered on a case by case basis, with the overall aim of prolonging the life of the tree. Specialist arboricultural advice will often be required.

The trees that surround the veteran(s) often require more active management than the veterans themselves. They must be kept at a density that does not provide excessive competition for light, water and nutrients. Appropriate light levels are particularly important as veteran trees are sensitive to both excessive shading and extreme desiccation, particularly after a fresh cut. The effect of competition from surrounding scrub may also need to be considered, and if climbing plants such as ivy are directly damaging the interest of the trees they may need to be removed.

Veteran trees may be susceptible to bark damage where there is heavy grazing or browsing. Action may be needed to prevent or discourage stock or deer access around the base of trees. Where trees stand in open ground the roots may also be sensitive to heavy trampling, trafficking from vehicles or ploughing. Such activities should be kept away from the trees.

### **Scrub**

Scrub habitats are low-growing communities where the main woody components are bushes or small trees, such as hawthorn, rowan and juniper. Scrub supports a wide variety of species and ecological communities. In particular, the transitional zone between scrub and other habitats can be important for wildlife, especially invertebrates.

Often, scrub is a transitional stage that will develop into woodland if unmanaged. Maintaining structural diversity and a mosaic of age classes within areas of scrub is important for maintaining the diversity of species the scrub is able to support. For example, hawthorn scrub supports the greatest variety of bird and insect species in the early and middle stages of growth.

Scrub can be managed using rotational cutting, which should aim to maintain a mosaic of patches at different stages of growth. Scrub can also be cut in small patches to create an intimate mixture of scrub and grass and/or heath.

Grazing is another method for managing scrub and on some sites may be a more suitable management tool than cutting. By its nature, grazing can help to create a patchy mosaic of scrub and other upland habitats. As with cutting, it can also help to maintain a range of age classes. However, stock levels do need to be carefully controlled. If grazing pressure is too high the structure of the scrub vegetation may become impoverished. Also, the scrub may not be able to regenerate naturally, leading to a loss of cover over time. Where the objective is to increase the area of scrub an initial period of fencing to control grazing may be required.

## **Ponds**

Both natural and artificial ponds can support a wide range of aquatic plants, and as many have few or no fish, they are often important habitats for amphibians and invertebrates. Some ponds may only contain water during certain periods of the year, and these temporary ponds are important for a specialised group of plants and animals which depend on the seasonal nature of the habitat. It is important that temporary ponds are not over-deepened or made into permanent ponds.

Ponds often require periodic management to prevent a build up of plants and silt which will reduce water depth and cause a build up of nutrients. However, on a site containing many ponds it may be desirable to maintain a range of ponds in various stages of succession, and some could be left to develop into damp muddy hollows whilst the value of the overall pond habitat may be maintained through the creation of new ponds nearby. Silt and plant material should only be removed from a portion of the pond at any one time, allowing sufficient time for recovery before other areas are dredged. A range of water depths should be retained and the importance of exposed muddy margins should not be overlooked. It is important when dredging artificial (and even some natural) ponds that any impervious lining is not broken.

The relatively small area and water volume of ponds means they are particularly vulnerable to pollution events, and accidental spillages may affect a whole pond. Increased nutrients may cause a loss of aquatic plants and increases in algal growth, whilst silt inputs may smother plants and lead to rapid infilling. Management of the pond and the surrounding areas should aim to maintain good water quality by limiting inputs of silt and nutrients.

The introduction of bottom feeding coarse fish, which uproot plants and disturb pond sediments, may also cause a loss of aquatic plants and increases in algal growth, as can the control or removal of aquatic plants. Ponds are also susceptible to invasion by non-native aquatic plants such as Australian swamp stonecrop and parrot's feather. These species are able to grow rapidly, taking up available habitat and smothering other plants. These plants should be removed as soon as they are observed. Some native species such as duckweed species are also able to take over in this way, but such growths are usually exacerbated by increased nutrients in the water.

Changes to the use of surrounding land can alter the amount of water reaching the pond, often resulting in the pond drying out. Ponds may be particularly vulnerable where large volumes of groundwater are abstracted nearby.

## **All habitats**

The habitats within this site are highly sensitive to inorganic fertilisers and pesticides, applications of which should be avoided both within the site itself and in adjacent surrounding areas. Herbicides may be useful in targeting certain invasive species, but should be used with extreme care. Access to this site, and any recreational activities within, may also need to be managed.