

## Views About Management



### **A statement of English Nature's views about the management of Barnham Heath 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**

### **Breckland grass-heath**

Traditionally, Breckland grass-heaths were used for a mixture of sheep grazing and rotational arable, with rabbit warrens being introduced from the thirteenth century. This caused disturbance, nutrient depletion, suppressed the growth of vigorous plant species, and prevented the build up of plant litter. This created a variety of habitats at an early stage of development, including bare ground, that support specialised plants and invertebrates.

Similar management principles apply today. Grazing is still the most suitable form of routine management. The precise intensity will vary both between and within sites, according to local conditions and requirements (for example, the need to avoid disturbance to ground nesting birds such as Stone-curlew). Whilst difficult to control, rabbit grazing remains useful, particularly for lichen-rich heaths and areas where more open and disturbed conditions are required. Some additional management may be required to prevent the encroachment of scrub and invasive species may need to be controlled manually by hand pulling or cutting. Bracken should be controlled, either by mowing, rolling or appropriate herbicide use.

## **Marshy grassland**

Marshy grassland requires active management if it is to retain its conservation interest. Generally, each year's growth of vegetation must be removed. Otherwise the sward becomes dominated by tall, vigorous grasses and rushes which, together with an associated build up of dead plant matter, suppress less vigorous species and lower the botanical richness of the sward.

Traditionally, this management is achieved by grazing. Cattle are often the preferred stock, being relatively tolerant of wet conditions and able to control tall grasses and rank vegetation. Cattle also tend to produce a rather uneven, structurally diverse sward. However, ponies, or even hill sheep, can be used if necessary. Grazing usually takes place at times between late spring and early autumn, but the precise timing and intensity will depend on local conditions and requirements, such as the need to avoid trampling ground-nesting birds. Heavy poaching should be avoided but light trampling can be beneficial in breaking down leaf litter and providing areas for seed germination.

Water levels should be maintained at appropriate levels to maintain the marshy conditions. Careful maintenance of existing ditches and drains is usually acceptable practice, but abandonment or deepening of ditches can be harmful. An element of managed scrub, both within and fringing a field can be of importance to birds and invertebrates, as can a surrounding hedge.

## **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.

**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 controlled.