

Views About Management



A statement of English Nature's views about the management of Upper Wye Gorge 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.

Please note that if you own land on both sides of the England/Wales border you will also receive a similar document from Countryside Council for Wales in due course.

Management Principles

Broadleaved semi-natural woodland

There are many different ways in which broadleaved 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.

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.

Deer management and protection from rabbits or livestock are often necessary. Whilst light or intermittent grazing may increase woodland diversity, heavy browsing can damage the ground flora and prevent successful regeneration. Invasive species, such as *Rhododendron* or Himalayan balsam, should be controlled.

The minimum intervention area at Lady Park Wood has been left largely unmanaged for the last 40 years, allowing study of natural processes within the wood. Within these areas some trees will eventually die naturally and dead wood accumulate.

Inland outcrops and stream sections (EO sites)

The ideal management for natural inland geological sites is the maintenance of rock exposure free of vegetation and, in some cases, the build-up of rock debris. Management usually involves periodic clearance of vegetation and rock debris. Vegetation growth is a problem on many sites, because erosion rates are usually too low to naturally maintain fresh exposure of the geological features.

It may not be always practical or entirely necessary to maintain full exposure of the geological features on a site. Site management will often involve defining specific areas that need to be kept clear of vegetation and rock debris.

Collecting of geological specimens may be acceptable if undertaken in a responsible manner. However, there are some sites where the geological interest is very finite in nature and over-collecting can result in damage or destruction of the interest. Collecting of specimens requires very careful management to ensure that the geological resource is conserved.

The main threats to conservation of inland geological sites are developments that obscure the rock exposures. Tree planting can also conceal rock exposures.

Limestone grassland

Limestone grasslands occur on shallow soils over limestone rock and can support a rich variety of plants and animals, including a number of rare plant species. Management has played an important role in the creation and survival of limestone grassland habitats and is important for maintaining the characteristic species-rich sward associated with these grasslands. Without management limestone grasslands may rapidly become dominated by stands of rank grasses, lowering the species diversity of the site, which may eventually scrub over.

Limestone grassland in the Upper Wye Gorge is largely found on rock outcrops (bluffs). These areas need to be maintained by careful work to remove some of the trees which are casting the most shade. Scrub also needs to be removed where it has swamped the grassland edge.

Caves

Caves represent a very important scientific resource for a number of reasons. Caves themselves provide important information on environment, climate and landscape development over the last several million years. Caves often contain sediments deposited by underground rivers that are also important in the study of environment and climate change in the recent geological past. Some caves contain animal bones where the animals once used the caves for shelter. On the surface, these bones and sediments would not have been preserved but would have been destroyed by weathering and erosion. Bones and artefacts from our early ancestors are also preserved in caves. Cave formations, such as stalactites and stalagmites, are important for a range of studies, including scientific dating, and are also of great aesthetic value. In addition, caves are an important habitat for bats and invertebrates.

Caves are sensitive systems which often suffer significant pressure from human activities, both above and below ground. It is important to manage the overlying land and catchment in a manner which takes account of potential consequences on the caves. Groundwater pollution from fertiliser, spreading of agricultural or industrial waste on land and dumping of rubbish or other waste in swallow holes or cavities are serious problems in some caves. Activities, such as pumping groundwater or diverting water courses, can affect the groundwater regime through cave systems and have serious effects on the dynamics of the system.

Blocking of cave entrances can also have serious repercussions below ground in altering air flow with consequent effects on underground climate. For example, the growth of stalactites and stalagmites is dependent on water composition, air temperature and humidity. These are easily perturbed so that growth is altered or ceases. Activities that may vary the amount of light available within the cave should also be considered carefully. Quarrying can result in partial or complete destruction of caves, or can disrupt their underground or surface catchment.

Direct pressures underground can arise from irresponsible caving. Problems associated with caving include inadvertent physical damage to cave features such as cave formations (flowstone, stalactites and stalagmites) and cave sediments, destruction of cave sediment deposits through irresponsible cave exploration, pollution and removal of cave formations or other minerals by collectors. The National Caving Association's guidelines on responsible caving are supported by English Nature and provide important information on caving and conservation.

Positive management of caves may require good access management which is often best undertaken by responsible local caving clubs and associations. Gating can be a solution to controlling access to sensitive caves, with access maintained by responsible caving groups.

The disturbance or removal of any geological material from caves can be damaging to the features that make this cave special. A precautionary approach should be adopted before removing or allowing any material to be removed from caves or before permitting any underground activities, such as digging of cave sediments, which could cause permanent loss or damage.

Greater and lesser horseshoe bat maternity and hibernation roosts

Hibernating bats require a range of environmental conditions within the hibernation site, as different species have different temperature requirements, which vary through the winter. The internal conditions within the hibernation site should remain consistently cool (between 6 and 10 °C) and dark away from the entrances with stable ventilation. Emergence points and flight lines should be maintained as unobstructed and free from artificial light, though vegetated cover around the entrance is desirable.

It is equally important to avoid disturbance to the bats while they are at the maternity roost as when they are hibernating. Entrances to the site should be secure to prevent uncontrolled or unauthorised access during the breeding season and winter months, but should remain unobstructed enough to continue to be accessible to bats. Activities of any kind within the site or close to the entrances should be largely avoided during these periods each year to minimise the risk of disturbance to the bats. Building or engineering works taking place within or around the area should be avoided, as should the use of vehicles or machinery that would be likely to produce noise, fumes or heat near roosting sites or access points that may disturb breeding bats.

The maintenance of some woodland and scrub cover in the vicinity of the breeding site will provide sheltered and secured access to commuting routes as well as valuable feeding habitat for the bats. Maintaining hedgerows, uncultivated field margins and extensively managed pasture near the roosting site will also provide appropriate commuting routes and foraging areas to support the bat population.

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.