

Views About Management



A statement of English Nature's views about the management of Lackford Lakes 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

Artificial standing waterbodies

Artificial standing waterbodies include manmade lakes, reservoirs, gravel pits, subsidence pools, and flooded peat diggings. They may support wildlife equal to that of natural lakes, and can be important habitats for a range of specialised aquatic plant and animal species. They often support important populations of wintering wildfowl and breeding bird assemblages, as well as a varied invertebrate fauna (in particular dragonflies and damselflies).

Conservation value is largely determined by structural diversity and water quality. Increases in the amount of nutrients within the waterbody can lead to a loss of aquatic plants in favour of excessive growths of algae. This may result in a fundamental shift in the way a waterbody functions, reducing plant and invertebrate abundance and diversity, both of which are important food sources for a range of wetland birds. Increases in the amount of sediment entering a lake may smother stony beds and plants, reduce water depth in shallow lakes and also increase the amount of nutrients present. Some lakes may also be susceptible to acidification though control of this will require action at a catchment scale.

Sympathetic management of water levels is necessary for the maintenance of optimal water depths throughout the year (according to the requirements of the plant and

animal species present). For example, the presence of extensive shallow water and wet marginal substrates will provide the feeding conditions required by a variety of wintering, passage and breeding wildfowl, such as dabbling ducks and waders, whilst other species may require areas of water at least 3 metres in depth. Water level management should take into account the requirements of submerged aquatic plants that are restricted to areas where there is sufficient light for growth and minimal wave action. In shallow waterbodies (with an average water depth of less than 3 metres) plants may be able to grow throughout the waterbody, whilst in deeper waters plants will be restricted to the shallow margins. Changes in waterlevels can also alter nutrient regimes.

Management should aim to maintain the habitats associated with shallowly sloping margins that are not too exposed to wave action, as they are important for many species associated with standing open waters. For example, the maintenance of structural diversity within and between stands of aquatic vegetation (including emergent, floating and submerged vegetation) can provide important habitat for the immature stages of different dragonfly and damselfly species that require a wide variety of vegetation types.

Artificial waterbodies are susceptible to the introduction of invasive species, such as non-native crayfish, bottom feeding coarse fish, and plant species such as Australian swamp stonecrop, therefore some management may be necessary to control these. Where native crayfish are present any measures which may limit the risks of transferring non-native crayfish or crayfish plague (such as information and awareness-raising initiatives amongst visitors to the waterbody) should be encouraged. The control or removal of the natural aquatic vegetation can lead to a decrease in aquatic plants in favour of algae, and should therefore be avoided.

Standing waters and their surroundings are often also a popular environment for recreational activities such as angling and boating which should be managed sympathetically to avoid conflict with the management of the waterbody for nature conservation.

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. An element of managed scrub, both within and fringing a field can be of importance to birds and invertebrates, as can a surrounding hedge. Careful maintenance of existing ditches

and drains is usually acceptable practice, but abandonment or deepening of ditches can be harmful.

Lowland acid grassland

Free-draining, acidic soil is the key requirement of the grassland communities at this site, but their maintenance also depends on active management. If neglected, the sward becomes dominated by tall, vigorous grasses or bracken which, together with an associated build up of dead plant matter, suppress less vigorous species and reduce the botanical richness of the site. Eventually the sward reverts to scrub and even woodland. Traditionally, management has consisted of stock grazing and this remains the most appropriate management tool. Grazing, through the removal of plant matter and nutrients, helps to maintain an open sward of small tussocky grasses. It also, through disturbance and trampling, creates areas of open ground suitable for colonization by the lichens, ephemeral plants and invertebrates that are often characteristic of this type of grassland. However, rabbit grazing, though difficult to control, can also be a useful management tool in some situations. Occasional management of invasive scrub and bracken may be necessary.

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.

Lowland wet woodland

Wet woodland includes a range of different woodland types but usually is dominated by ash, alder and willow species. It often supports important invertebrate species and assemblages.

Areas usually benefit from minimum intervention and are often best left undisturbed to limit damage to their fragile soils. This allows the development of old stands where individual trees reach maturity and die naturally to create gaps in the canopy, leading to a diverse woodland structure. However, works to remove dangerous trees in areas of public access may be necessary.

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 understorey, and a more mature overstorey 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.

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.

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 carefully managed.