

County Wildlife Site Management Statement



Litcham Common CWS 2052

Overview

This 24.6ha site is registered common land and a Local Nature Reserve with open public access. The site incorporates a range of habitats including mature secondary woodland, wet and dry heath comprised of a mosaic of ericaceous sp. and acid grassland, marshy grassland, neutral grassland, scrub and a number of ponds. The site is currently grazed year-round by Dartmoor ponies and seasonally by cattle.

Since 2012 when the management plan was written the expansion of heather sp. has been significant across Area B. This has not been the case at Area E and preparing and seeding this area would aid the expansion of heather sp. significantly.

Current site condition & site management

B2.1 - Neutral Grassland (Area C)

This lies adjacent to the car park and the vegetation is very variable in nature and apart from a small area adj. to the road which was managed by cutting this area was unmanaged prior to the installation of the cattle grids in 2012. Some areas are tightly grazed and others have a less diverse tall herb type vegetation which is a result of the period of non-intervention. It also contains scattered scrub primarily bramble which in 2016 was being controlled, resulting in significant areas of bare ground. Areas of the grassland can be described as species-rich, especially near the roadside.

A1.1 - Broadleaf Semi-natural woodland (Areas A, D, G)

Woodland is the predominant habitat of the site especially in the northern half north of the road. Pedunculate oak is the dominant tree and in many areas forming a pure stand. Mature silver birch and downy birch are locally frequent and rowan, hawthorn and crab apple also occur. The understory is dominated by bramble.

D6 – Wet heath/acid grassland mosaic (Area B)

Area B has been extended significantly over the last 10 years through the clearance of trees and scrub. It is apparent that many areas are under grazed with significant levels of regeneration of bramble and silver birch. It has wet flushes and is moderately species rich. Heather sp.* (see note page 6) are primarily in the pioneer phase and locally abundant over significant areas and especially to the west. There are pockets of scrub comprising young oak, gorse and common hawthorn. More mature silver birch are encroaching where the woodland and grassland meet.

Due to the presence of adder in the far western section of B (see map), their population and the location of the hibernacula will need to be monitored to prevent the species being disturbed by tree and scrub removal work (see bold text in table for further information).

County Wildlife Site Management Statement

D5 – Dry heath/acid grassland mosaic (Area E)

Area E has also been subject to much tree and scrub removal with significant levels of gorse regeneration. Its sward is in general tightly grazed and bracken is locally dominant. Ling is in the pioneer phase and is in general rare although it is locally abundant in localized areas and especially east of the track. Bramble and gorse scrub (much of it re-growth) is locally dominant around the periphery.

B5 - Marshy grassland (Area F)

This is a seasonally spring-fed, wet acid grassland, the north-east corner being damper, particularly in the winter. Purple moor grass is abundant and tormentil and rosebay willowherb frequent. There are patches of mature ling present and where there is bare ground sheep's sorrel is found. Bramble is beginning to encroach throughout the area. The area is undergrazed with a tall sward and in the summer of 2016 the sward was cut and the arisings left in situ.

Open water; standing water; eutrophic (Ponds 1 – 6)

There are a number of established ponds throughout the site and which are both managed and unmanaged. Ponds 1,2,4,5,6 are seasonally wet (all dry by late summer 2016) and Pond 3 is permanently wet. As well as the ponds there are numerous seasonally wet areas especially in Area B and Area F. A number of small pools have been dug in Area B and still contain water in late summer and provide a water source for the cattle and ponies.

Ideal site condition and conservation priorities

B2.1 - Neutral Grassland (Area C)

The rank areas through the influence of grazing become more species rich and develop a finer sward which in turn will reduce the grazing pressure on the more species rich areas. That bramble and birch regrowth is controlled so as to facilitate the expansion of the grassland.

A1.1 - Broadleaf Semi-natural woodland (Areas A, D, G)

Excepting for the development of a woodland fringe there are no issues and continue to manage as non-intervention. Once the final extent of the open areas has been established a woodland fringe should be established along south facing areas and most notably along the northern boundary of Area B and with a width of approx. 5m forming a graduated ecotone between woodland and grassland/heathland.

D6 – Wet heath/acid grassland mosaic (Area B)

It is apparent that some areas are under grazed hence the significant levels of regeneration of bramble and birch sp. The area does though contain a balanced mosaic of scrub, tussocks and finely grazed areas and an increase in grazing density would threaten this important habitat mosaic and the present grazing pressure seems appropriate. The management of the scrub by knocking it back and tackling re-growth will need to continue on an annual or biannual basis into the future. Heather sp. are spreading across the area naturally although their spread into areas recently cleared of scrub could be assisted by the scattering of seed.

County Wildlife Site Management Statement

D5 – Dry heath/acid grassland mosaic (Area E)

In general this area is significantly more heavily grazed than Area B with a tight sward predominating and tussocks being rare. As in Area A the control of re-growth of scrub which is re-generating in the cleared areas is required. The continued cutting of bracken and its raking off should occur. Heather sp. are generally rare west of the track and are in the pioneer phase and the level of grazing is likely to be affecting their expansion. A notable stand occurs to the east of the track on the old playing field with all phases of growth occurring. Spread of heather into areas recently cleared of scrub could be assisted by harrowing and the scattering of seed.

B5 - Marshy grassland (Area F)

This area represents the most undergrazed area of grassland being tussocky in nature across its area. Heather sp. are occasional and are primarily in the building and degenerate phases. In 2016 there was evidence that the sward had been cut and arisings left in situ. The rate of colonisation of new species and the spread of heather sp. would be impeded if the arisings are left in situ, supressing germination or the growth of forbs and the finer grasses and adding nutrients to the soil.

Open water; standing water; eutrophic/mesotrophic

The creation of pools at Area B has had the effect of reducing the pressure on ponds 3, 5 and 6 as water sources for the ponies and cattle. The continued management of Pond 3, 5 and 6 including the management of surrounding trees and scrub and intermittent vegetation clearance will maximize their value for wildlife. Pond 1 is presently non-intervention and could remain as such to maintain a variance of habitats in order to support a wide variety of aquatic fauna. Pond 2 was very boggy in summer 2016 and has potential for restoration with opening up, and sediment removal would be likely to result in it holding water for longer. Pond 4 appears to be permanently dry.

Conservation Priorities	Prescriptions	Timing	Who to deliver	Details
<p>Create woodland fringe and most specifically at Area B.</p> <p>Carry out any further tree removal that is required in order to enlarge wet heath then establish woodland edge along south facing northern boundary (see bold text below for information)</p>	<p>Remove scrub and young trees of mainly silver birch .</p>	<p>Oct – Feb</p>	<p>Contractors/volunteers</p>	<p>Scallop woodland (northern boundary) and allow approximately 5m of scrub including oak birch and bramble to regrow to form woodland edge</p> <p>Manage by coppicing on a 15 year rotation in order to maintain scrub with a diverse age structure</p> <p>Check if felling license required</p> <p>Stump treat with Timbrel or similar brushwood killer; apply with brush within 90 minutes of cutting.</p> <p>If necessary, treat re-growth of birch from stumps and of seedlings between June and July</p>

County Wildlife Site Management Statement

<p>Increase area of heathland and grassland (remainder of site).</p>	<p>Selectively remove mature and sapling birch and other tree species and treat stumps</p>	<p>Oct-Feb</p>	<p>Contractors/volunteers</p>	<p>For example: At Area B the far western corridor and glade could be widened/enlarged. Prior to any work being carried out the adder population and the location of the hibernacula will need to be monitored to ensure tree and gorse work do not disturb them; where trees to be removed are near hibernacula, they should be ring barked if possible.</p> <p>Area E (east of track) to improve connectivity with Area F and which would help to equalise grazing pressure at Areas E and F</p> <p>Check if felling license required</p> <p>Stump treat with Timbrel or similar brushwood killer; apply with brush within 90 minutes of cutting</p>
<p>Management of sward at Area F and improving connectivity with Area E to increase level of grazing at Area F and reduce it at E</p>	<p>If under grazed cut sward and remove arisings</p> <p>Selectively remove mature and sapling birch and other tree species and treat stumps in order to improve connectivity with Area E</p>	<p>Aug-Sept</p>	<p>Contractors/volunteers</p>	<p>In order to preserve stands of heather sp. a brush cutter could be used in localised pockets. This would assist in diversifying some areas but keep labour costs to a minimum</p>
<p>Encourage the spread of heather sp. at Area E</p>	<p>Break up sward to expose soil such as through harrowing in areas where heather species are absent and re-seed with heather sp. from other areas of the common</p>	<p>Sept-Nov</p>		<p>Depending on season mid – late October should be the most appropriate time to cut and scatter heather sp. cuttings</p>
<p>Infield birch sp. trees and seedlings</p>	<p>Remove to prevent seeding into open areas</p>	<p>Sept - Feb</p>	<p>Contractors/volunteers</p>	<p>Mature birch is a real issue on the site – trees that are a source of seed into open areas should be identified and removed over time, perhaps by ring barking.</p> <p>Where there is a carpet of birch seedlings, these should be removed by weed wiping. Treat with Timbrel or similar</p>

County Wildlife Site Management Statement

Bramble	Control bramble by mechanical flailing or with hand tools.	Sept - Feb	Contractors/volunteers	<p>Retain some infield bramble and within woodland edge in order to benefit nesting birds and butterflies especially</p> <p>Spot treat re-growth with Timbrel or similar herbicide.</p>
Control bracken	Control bracken by cutting or hand pulling or chemical treatment	June-Sept	Contractors/volunteers.	<p>Cut 1 - 2 times June-August, collecting arisings if practicable</p> <p>In localised areas where bracken is at its densest Asulox could be applied by licenced contractor with backpack sprayer when fronds are at maximum expansion (end July – end Aug). Follow up treatment following summer is required</p> <p>Bracken control primarily required across Area E and especially east of the track (southern half) where heather sp. are in competition with bracken. Restoration of this area will also reduce the grazing pressure of the northern half where heather sp. form a notable patch</p>
Gorse	<p>Manage areas of mature gorse</p> <p>Remove emergent gorse</p>	Sept - Feb	Contractors/volunteers	<p>Manage infield gorse and gorse within woodland edge, reducing area of stands where necessary, opening it up and managing it to diversify age and height structure to benefit reptiles and nesting birds</p> <p>Emergent gorse in areas intended to be heathland such as at Area E can be removed by spot-treatment with herbicide</p> <p>Treat with Timbrel or similar</p>
Eradicate variegated yellow archangel if still present	By digging up by hand or through chemical treatment	Chemical treatment at height of growth (Mid-summer)	Contractors/volunteers	<p>This was present on the verge south of the road in 2012</p> <p>Hand pulling partially effective if followed up with chemical control</p> <p>Herbicides effective, although re-treatment is necessary as small amounts of surviving plants will quickly re-colonise area.</p> <p>Depending on density of plants, underlying sward may be lost and require re-seeding by the spreading of green hay from site</p> <p>Treat with Glyphosate</p>

County Wildlife Site Management Statement

<u>Ponds</u>				
Pond 1	Maintain as non-intervention			
Pond 2 is deeply sedimented and overshadowed by trees	Restore by opening up area around pond creating a woodland glade	Sept – Feb	Contractors/volunteers	Remove overhanging trees and especially to the south to increase light levels and decrease leaf litter input. This should result in the pond containing water for a significantly longer period
	Remove sediment across around 1/3 of its area	End Sep – end Oct		

*Note

The term heather sp. is used to describe the 3 ericaceous species that occur at Litcham Common: bell heather, cross leaved-heath and ling.

County Wildlife Site Management Statement

ANNOTATED MAP

