

The Green Linnet

The Newsletter for owners of Sites of Nature Conservation Interest



Issue 21 : December 2016

A Blooming Success Story

A square metre of this diverse habitat can amazingly hold as many as 45 different grasses and wild flowers....

Chalk grassland is sometimes referred to as the European equivalent of tropical rainforest due to its remarkable species-richness. A square metre of this diverse habitat can amazingly hold as many as 45 different grasses and wild flowers, which a marvellous array of invertebrates like the Adonis blue butterfly relish for food and shelter. As many of the most flower-rich examples of chalk grassland remaining in Dorset are on steep slopes, the best management tools are livestock. This brings the bonus of lamb and beef ready-marinated with herbs like thyme and marjoram growing wild in the sward, but over-grazing can restrict flowering to the disappointment of all attendant wildlife.

A Stewardship agreement on one of our superb SNCl's on the South Dorset Ridgeway has enabled the grazier to relax sheep grazing for several months during the spring and summer with delightful results. Rare and beautiful orchids, hawkbits, scabious and bellflowers now embroider the slopes providing a pollen and nectar bonanza and multifarious food plants for moth and butterfly larvae.



The agreement between Natural England and the grazier was tailored to the site during negotiations between both parties coordinated by DWT Conservation Officer, Nick Gray. An effective compromise was reached between allowing the many chalk species to flower for the benefit of wildlife and not letting the sward get so long that grazing animals would struggle to get back on top of it once they were let back on in late summer. Additionally, across the extensive site there is room to alternate target areas to provide sufficient grazing but also ensure plentiful flower-rich habitat every year.

The challenge of wider countryside conservation is always balancing the many elements of biodiversity (and the natural assets, essential for our flourishing lifestyles, that they represent and support), with the reality of food production under demanding political and cultural circumstances. This management agreement recognises and celebrates both.



Part of a nationwide network of Wildlife Trusts



Protecting **Wildlife** for the Future

Glorious Grasslands

by Sharron Abbott & Imogen Davenport

Dorset's varied geology and soils produce a wonderful range of wildlife-rich grassland which support hundreds of different animals, from butterflies to skylarks. But data from the SNCI project shows they need our help.

Wildlife-rich grasslands:



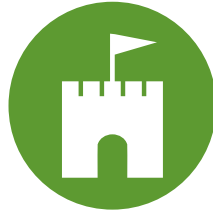
Support 206 of the UK's priority species



Provide havens for declining pollinator species



Are vital to important landscapes like AONBs



Protect archaeology like Dorset's hill forts



Filter water and prevent soil run-off



UK grasslands capture more carbon per year than our slow growing forests

How are grasslands doing?

97% of wildlife-rich lowland meadows lost in England and Wales 1930-84

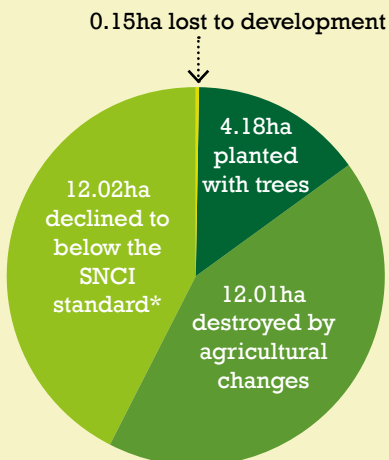


70% of Dorset's chalk downland and rough grazing lost 1946-2002



Why are we still losing priority grasslands?

In the last **10** years on SNCIs:



*due to inappropriate or no management

A much larger area has declined in quality although still qualifying as SNCI – only **46%** of SNCIs are assessed as being in good condition.

Dorset's grasslands

43% of Dorset is classed as grassland. Most has been 'improved' by fertilizers or re-seeded and has low species diversity.

The best (or 'priority') grassland habitats are just **2.4%** of Dorset's area made up of:



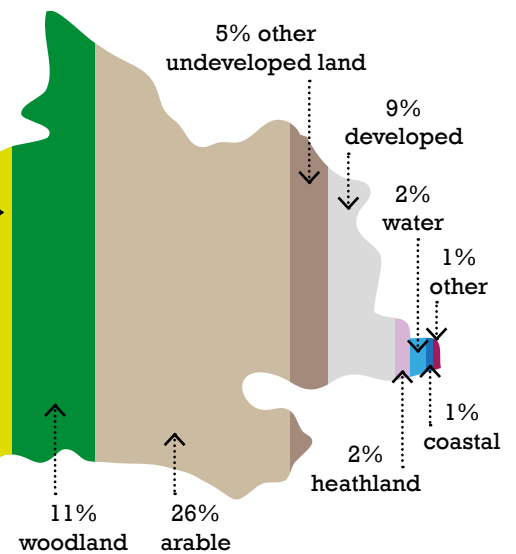
51% of this is protected as SSSI¹
36% is recognised as SNCI²
12% has no recognition

¹ Sites of Special Scientific Interest, national sites

² Sites of Nature Conservation Interest, Dorset's local wildlife sites

What can you do?

- Ensure that your local council is aware of the wildflower areas you enjoy e.g. churchyards, road verges.
- Enjoy some amazing grasslands on DWT nature reserves.
- If you own a grassland site and would like advice on enhancing its wildlife value, please contact DWT.



What is DWT doing to help?

- Advising owners on management and grants.
- Making sure development does not harm special sites.
- Organising management works - 300ha meadow management, 70ha meadow restoration & 40ha chalk grassland restoration since 2006.
- On Portland we have rescued 200ha of limestone grassland from invasive cotoneaster, removing 200 tonnes of the shrub since 2011 and several plant and butterfly species have increased.

Dorset Wild Rivers Project



*Tinleton.
Before clearance work*

Photo © Jacob Dew



*Tinleton.
After tree clearance work*

Photo © Jacob Dew



Upstream 'V' logs installed at Piddlehinton to encourage development of a pool feature.

Photo © John Aplin

Dorset Wild Rivers project (DWR), a project funded by Wessex Water, has been out across Dorset this autumn delivering in-river habitat improvements to the rivers of Dorset. Projects on the River Frome at Dorchester, East Stoke and Tinleton and the River Piddle at Piddlehinton have been undertaken, with help from contractors, partners and volunteers, to improve in-stream and marginal habitat and to contribute towards the rehabilitation plans set out by the Environment Agency (EA).

At Tinleton the EA were about to undertake tree clearance as part of a maintenance agreement along one of the many side channels of the River Frome. The channel was very over shaded and in parts lacked any marginal vegetation or in-stream habitat. An opportunity was identified for DWR to work with the EA to sensitively remove the trees, letting light onto the river, without clear felling, and improving the marginal habitat by hinging or felling a number straight into the channel.

Volunteers from Dorset Wildlife Trust, as well as the team from DWR, completed the works over several weeks with help from the EA Ops team who cut and removed the marked trees from the channel. The project is being monitored for Trout and Salmon parr by the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust and it is hoped with the installation of marginal cover next year's surveys will show a dramatic increase in numbers as a result of the scheme.

DWR has also been working with Casterbridge fisheries on the Piddle at Piddlehinton to deliver in-river improvements and install stock fencing on 1 kilometre of river to improve in-stream habitat, reduce over shading in enclosed areas, improve shading in open areas and prevent continued poaching by cattle and horses. An electrofish survey was undertaken prior to the works with no large fish species present, only an abundance of Minnows and Bullheads. It is hoped that the survey next year will include the larger fish species as the opportunities for them to survive and thrive have been greatly improved through the project.



Blackmore Vale Farm Group



In August 2016, a small and friendly farm group came together in the Lydlinch area to meet and share ideas and work together to improve their business through a range of management practices, events and demonstrations.

The group hope to apply for the Countryside Stewardship (CS) Facilitation Fund in March 2017 which will help to deliver CS priorities for water, biodiversity, woodlands and the historical environment.

The farm group are currently meeting bi-monthly at the Green Man, King's Stag to discuss current land management, CS priorities and collaborative training events.

In October's meeting farmers discussed future training opportunities including a range of topics such as Owls - where do you put that box? Bats - what bat, where? Hedgerows - Help! my hedgerows are getting out of hand! Soils - Save that worm! Water - where have all the fish gone?

The next meeting will be held at Lymburghs Farm, Marnhull to discuss water management techniques and maybe see a lapwing!

You do not have to be in any agri-environment schemes to be a part of this group, as it is open to all landowners in the Blackmore Vale Area.

If you would like further information about the group or are interested in this or future events please contact Emma Tomlin at etomlin@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk



Photos © Emma Tomlin & Stewart Canham

CONTACTS

For further information on SNCIs: Sharron Abbott 01305 264620
Dorset Wildlife Trust
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For advice on Environmental Stewardship:
Initially contact our West Dorset Team. They can advise you as to the best person to contact within Natural England for further help.
Forestry Authority for: West Dorset & Weymouth & Portland - Chris Gibbard 01392 834278
and for the rest of Dorset - Ian Briscoe 01392 834259
FWAGSW: Alex Butler 07557 094029

SNCI Project supported by



Front cover photos © Nick Gray