

Local Wildlife Sites – South East Wales Project

The following information outlines the best practice guidelines for managing the habitat type listed below in a manner that is sympathetic to wildlife. It is part of a series relating to various habitat types and management issues that have been produced by your local Wildlife Trusts.

No.11 Scrub Control

What is Scrub?

- Scrub is difficult to define exactly, but in general terms it is habitat consisting of lower growing shrubs and bushes. This definition excludes woodland which is dominated by taller tree species, although scrub may contain some of these tree species when they are younger. Indeed, scrub is generally just a successional stage that if left unmanaged would eventually change open habitat such as grassland into woodland.
- Scrub can occur in two main types which are:
 - ❖ Scattered Scrub – where the shrubs are scattered or in small clumps within the wider habitat.
 - ❖ Dense Scrub – where the shrubs and bushes are dense and sometimes impenetrable and as such are the dominant feature of the habitat.
- Typical scrub species are gorse, willow, Blackthorn, Hawthorn and young birch, with Bramble also forming an important component.
- Scrub is an important habitat for a wide range of wildlife and particularly breeding birds.



Scrub invading grassland



Scrub management

Why does scrub need to be controlled?

- “Scrub” whilst a valuable habitat in its own right, particularly where it forms a mosaic with other habitats, can if present in abundance in the “wrong” location reduce the ecological value of grassland and heathland habitat.
- Scrub is a particular problem where it is invading already valuable habitats either by the gradual encroachment of hedgerows or general scrubbing over through lack or grazing/management. In these situations grassland will rapidly become dominated by shrubs and trees.

Management Recommendations

Prevention

- Prevention is better than cure. It is far better not to give opportunity for undesired levels of scrub to gain a foothold in the first place.
- To do this the aim is to ensure appropriate levels of cutting/grazing. It is however recognised that the generally low intensity levels of grazing necessary to manage grassland sympathetically for wildlife can lead to some scrub development. This should be monitored and any unwanted scrub plants removed when they are smaller and easily dealt with.

Control

Is Scrub control necessary or desirable?

Before taking action to control scrub, its conservation value should be assessed together with that of the habitat it is encroaching upon. The following should be considered when assessing the ecological value of scrub:

- **Scrub of High Conservation Value**
 - ❖ Contains a range of shrub species with mixed age structure.
 - ❖ Has a complex three dimensional structure – physical, age and spacing.
 - ❖ Has many clearings and glades giving a high boundary/area ratio.
 - ❖ Has a well developed edge, with a range of tall herbs and grazing intolerant species.
 - ❖ Supports a range of rare/local invertebrates.
- **Scrub of Low Conservation Value**
 - ❖ Dominated by one species, with all about same size.
 - ❖ Simple three dimensional structure – even age, height and spacing.
 - ❖ Closed canopy – not much can grow underneath.
 - ❖ Edge similar to adjacent grassland.
 - ❖ No rare/local invertebrates.

Advice/surveys can be provided to assist with this.

As a general rule you would only be wishing to clear scrub if it is of lower conservation value and encroaching on high conservation value grassland/heathland. High conservation value scrub would generally be left although some control may be necessary to strike a balance with other high value habitats in the area.

Should it be deemed necessary to control scrub then the following is recommended:

Scrub clearance

- This should be undertaken outside of the bird breeding season (carried out September – February inc.) to avoid disturbance of breeding birds.
- Where **Dormice** are a consideration further advice should be sought as **licensing may be required**. If Dormice are known to be present then the work may need to be further limited to just the winter months with a two phase cutting regime.
- Cut as near to the base as possible and remove cuttings from the site to prevent excess nutrients in the soil which will promote weedy species and rank grasses.
- For small areas of scrub use hand tools such as saws, mattocks and axes.
- For large areas of scrub using power tools or machinery may be more appropriate. Chainsaws, brush-cutters and clearing saws will allow rapid clearance and for particularly large sites tractor mounted flails, swipes, sickle bar mowers and forage harvesters will be better.

Please Note

- **Due consideration should be given to Health & Safety when undertaking scrub clearance.**
- **Care should be taken when using large machinery on steep slopes or wet ground as this can be dangerous as well as damaging the valuable grassland.**

Follow up treatment

- Treat cut stumps with suitable herbicide (e.g. Glyphosate, which can be applied with a paint brush).
- An alternative is to cut re-growth each year until no new growth occurs but this could take a number of years to achieve.
- Grazing animals can also be beneficial as they will graze off new growth if it is green and kill young seedlings/saplings. Large stock such as ponies, horses and cattle will also push through scrub opening it up.
- Spraying foliage with a knapsack sprayer or hand-held weed wiper is useful for small scrub and saplings under 1.5m but care is needed not to damage grassland close-by (this can be undertaken in the summer).

Should you require any further advice regarding the management of your Local Wildlife Site please do not hesitate to contact your local Wildlife Trust:

Gwent Wildlife Trust

Tel: 01600 740600

e-mail: info@gwentwildlife.org

Wildlife Trust of South & West Wales

Tel: 01656 724100

e-mail: info@welshwildlife.org

Other toolkits available are:

No.1 Neutral Grassland (Hay Meadows)

No.2 Neutral Grassland (Pasture)

No.3 Acid Grassland

No.4 Calcareous Grassland

No.5 Marshy Grassland

No.6 Marsh Grassland (with Marsh Fritillary)

No.7 Heath

No.8 Hedgerows

No.9 Saltmarsh & Coastal Grazing Marsh

No.10 Ponds & Lakes

No.12 Bracken control

No.13 Invasive weed control (natives – thistle, dock etc.)

No.14 Invasive weed control (aliens – Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam etc.)

Further useful documents include:

- ❖ *The Scrub Management Handbook: Guidance on the management of scrub on nature conservation sites:* www.publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/114022
- ❖ *FWAG Factsheet – Scrub Management:* www.adlib.everysite.co.uk/adlib/defra/content.aspx?doc=90704&id

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