

# DRAFT STAGE

## **B. MANAGEMENT AND RECORDING PROCESSES**

**(A summary of how the objectives will be met and how the management actions will be carried out)**

# DRAFT STAGE

## B. Management and Recording Processes



**Figure 18. Bracken and Bramble being cut and collected on Swinyard Hill 2005 for the benefit of Adders and Butterflies.**

## 9.0 Introduction

There are many processes that are used on the Hills and Commons to improve or just maintain various different habitats and also recreation features like paths or urban green space. Many of the features previously described require the same management processes to manage them effectively. Rather than repeat these processes for each feature it is better to describe them together to demonstrate how they integrate across all the Malvern Hills Conservators' land.

Apart from the direct maintenance of the infrastructure of the land, much of the work is in the form of wildlife or conservation management. After all, the organisation is called the Malvern Hills **Conservators**. There are those who suggest that the best way to conserve the wildlife and habitats of the Hills would be to leave them alone to develop on their own without man's interference. However, this assumes that all the natural processes that are necessary to create the Habitats for these species are with us today. Unfortunately we do not have Wild Oxen, European Bison or the giant Irish Elk roaming on the Hills as they are all either globally or at least nationally extinct. The loss of these natural grazing animals and the impact of visitors on those that are still around, means that this very important natural process has been eradicated or distorted by the actions of mankind. For centuries this process has been re-created through sheep and cattle grazing the Hills and Commons for meat production. As this activity has declined we have seen a degradation of the habitats due to the near complete loss of a vital natural management process.

# DRAFT STAGE

The majority of the land management work that the Malvern Hills Conservators have carried out over the last 10 years has been focused on addressing this issue and returning the Hills and Commons to a balance between the different habitats and species. This has involved taking back the scrub line to previous levels, while maintaining plenty of scrub habitats for nesting birds (scrub related species are part of the management objective for this feature) and restoring the nationally important acid grassland to a favourable condition. Grazing and Machinery are used to achieve this but the long-term aim is to cut back on mechanical scrub control and let the natural process of grazing animals keep the balance between the different habitats.

Most of this work is about re-creating **natural processes** so if these management actions did not take place then it could be argued that this was just as “unnatural” as intervening.

## 10.0 Grazing

Figures 2, 3, 8 and 9 clearly show just how effective grazing can be in controlling scrub, bracken and grass growth on the Hills and Commons. Quite clearly the terrain of the Hills and Commons means that the scope for mowing the grass and scrub is very limited and would also be environmentally irresponsible considering the excessive use of fossil fuels needed for this kind of management.



The animals are far more likely to choose to graze an open lush grassy area than one thick with scrub and bramble. In some areas this is ideal as it ensures that the scrub and bramble are preserved where they are needed. On the higher slopes the grassland is the priority and areas where the livestock are unable or unwilling to graze are opened up by machinery to encourage them. Areas where sheep and cattle graze together also benefit. The cattle knock pathways through vegetation that the sheep would find impenetrable.

In some areas the Bracken is too strong for the annual actions of the livestock to keep it in check. In these areas the bracken is cut in the winter and bruised in the summer to weaken it enough so that the animals can keep it in balance.

**Figure 19.**  
**Sheep browsed thorn tree on Broad down**

# DRAFT STAGE

The Northern and Central Hills are grazed by livestock enclosed in temporary electric fences that are moved periodically so that as many areas as possible are grazed. There are some areas of acid grassland outside these fenced compartments (and therefore are not grazed) and they are characterised by thick tussocks with a “feg” or matt of dead grass under the green growth. There is considerable encroachment of scrub into these areas and where bracken is present it will start to dominate and create a litter layer reducing the grass and wild flower content. In some parts of the grazed compartment on the Northern Hills some coarse grasses are starting to dominate and are swamping the wild flowers in these areas.

On British Camp the sheep are hefted on the Hill, which means that they have learnt to stay on this part of the Hill, as this is where they spend time as lambs and are fed in the winter. The grassland is currently over grazed but much of the restoration has already been completed on this section with the “Feg” or Matt removed and the re-growth of the scrub kept down by the high grazing pressure. Although there are still areas of scrub to be restored to grassland the grazing pressure has been reduced to give the grassland a rest for a couple of years.

Where scrub clearance has taken place the trees and shrubs are quick to re-grow unless the stumps are grazed in the aftermath. Without grazing the field staff would be returning to the same areas to re-cut them, whereas with grazing the staff can keep moving on to new areas and cover a far greater area over the course of the management plan.

Apart from the impacts of the livestock on the vegetation they also have a beneficial impact in terms of their by-product, dung. The invertebrates that feed on dung are important food sources for birds, bats and other small mammals. One of the 10 largest colonies in Britain of the Lesser Horseshoe Bat occurs on the Hills and these bats rely on dung invertebrates to make up a large part of their diet.

While the Hills and Commons are all Common Land and therefore have grazing rights across them these are not always taken up for various reasons. Where this is the case the Malvern Hills Conservators take up these unused rights and carry out the grazing with their own “Conservation Flock/Herd”. Where graziers are still active they are encouraged and supported in their actions and financial help is sought from various countryside stewardship schemes. Ideally common graziers would be the only graziers on common land and the organisation will continue to work towards this goal but until this is the case the Conservators will intervene and deliver the grazing where necessary.

Encouraging commoners to graze is not an easy task because many of the properties with commoners’ rights have passed to individuals with little or no interest in exercising them. If this trend continues it is difficult to see how the tradition of a working common can be maintained. In the past the National Trust have bought farms/properties adjacent to Commons that they own with rights attached and let them with the condition that the common rights of grazing are exercised at an agreed level. This prevents the Trust from having to implement the grazing themselves while still maintaining their role as a landowner rather than a farmer. This option is something that will be considered by the Board.