

DRAFT STAGE

11.0 Mowing, Cutting and Rolling with machinery

The mechanical management of the Hills and Commons is for the purposes of maintaining the urban green spaces, maintaining the rights of way and enhancing the habitats on the Hills for wildlife.

The urban commons are usually treated as urban green spaces now and although they are still managed for the benefit of important individual species, as a rule they are kept short cropped for the benefit of the public. A combination of contracted out and in-house staff time is used to cut the grass in these urban areas. The rights of way are mowed to keep them open and every year only one side of the paths is cut to maintain their wildlife value.

The habitat enhancement work is far more varied. Where clearance of bracken and bramble is required it is far more time efficient to carry it out with a flail mower or cut and collect machine than by hand. Where possible, and especially on sensitive sites, the material is cut and collected to remove the arisings from the area. By removing the arisings it prevents the nutrient levels from rising too high, which favours the fine grasses and flowers over the scrub and bramble. However it is not possible to do this on every site, as suitable storage for the cut material is limited. Areas where there is a lower amount of debris to clear are more suitable for flailing, where the cut material is shredded to mulch on the floor. Follow up grazing is very important with flailing as the stock break up the mulch to allow grasses to tiller and compete with the regenerating scrub. Wherever this machinery is used there is a balance between what is taken and what is left. Often local experts on the species that may be threatened by the work are consulted on the best approach. Where appropriate low impact machinery is used to carry out the work.



Figures 20 & 21. Scrub and Bracken clearance in October 2006 showing a balanced approach with patches of habitat retained.

Bracken Rolling (or bruising) is also used as a method to control the strength of the bracken through the summer. It is carried out with a specially designed roller that pinches the bracken stems causing them to bleed and also breaks up the canopy of the bracken. The extra light that reaches the ground promotes grass growth, which encourages livestock in these areas to further break up the bracken layer.

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In many cases a site may be flailed/cut, grazed and rolled within one year. After a couple of years of this intensive management these sites can then be managed with low intensity grazing with very little disturbance from man made interventions.

12.0 Scrub Management

Malvern Hills Conservators Field Staff carry out most of the scrub management work that takes place with some smaller tasks contracted out or taken on by volunteer groups. In all cases of scrub management, whether it is clearance or maintenance, a balance is always sought between what is felled and what is left. Local experts on particular wildlife groups are regularly consulted to make sure our actions are not detrimental to wildlife species in the long-term. Depending on the size of the material to cut, this is carried out with flail/cut and collect mowers, chainsaws, brush cutters and by hand in difficult situations or where volunteers carry out the work.

On the higher slopes there is more of an objective to clear the scrub but on the lower slopes, within the lower end of the bracken zone and within the scrub zone, there is a genuine desire to maintain and enhance the scrub habitats. If scrub is left alone it will deteriorate into secondary woodland habitat that is of far less value and also tends to hamper the views enjoyed by people across the Hills. In order to have scrub in the long term it is necessary to cut down the oldest stands in rotation and then let it grow back. This ensures that there is always a succession of different ages of scrub habitat within a given area.



Figure 22. Field Staff Clearing scrub on Chase End Hill, February 2005.

The other main impact on scrub is obviously the grazing pressure. Without this follow up management it would be impossible to economically restore the important habitats and views on the Hills and Commons. The maintenance of cut areas by the

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livestock, allows the management work to move onto new areas and have a far greater positive impact. The only shrub/scrub species that is not affected by the grazing is Birch. Birch is mentioned as a Factor in the plan as it is by far the most invasive species on the Hills. The leaves of Birch taste bitter to livestock in the spring and so they will choose to browse other species of plants while the Birch continue to grow through the season. Stump treatment with suitable herbicide may be necessary in areas where Birch is present.

13.0 Special Management Areas and Volunteer Action

There are currently 15 regular special management areas on the Malvern Hills Conservators' land with many more sites (particularly ponds) visited less frequently. These are managed by volunteers, co-ordinated by the Warden team, taking part in the monthly conservation days and Voluntary Site Wardens donating their free time more regularly to specific sites. The sites are made up of the wet flushes, bogs and ponds that occur around the Hills where springs emerge from the hillside and small inaccessible sites that are difficult to regularly manage on a large scale. Much of the work that the volunteers do is scrub and bracken cutting. Opening up the ponds and flushes to let the water plants thrive on the wetland sites and clearing the scrub from hard to reach sites with particularly rare species present is important work. One of the sites is the only known location in England and Wales for the Club Moss *Diphasiastrum x. isleri*. The volunteers are an indispensable resource and really help us to look after these small sites. The Volunteer Site Wardens are in the process of drawing up individual site management plans alongside Conservators staff so that there is a clear objective for each site. Local experts are often drafted in to help with advice on management for rare species and also to give talks on the wildlife to the volunteer groups.



Figure 23. The conservation Volunteers take a well-earned break.