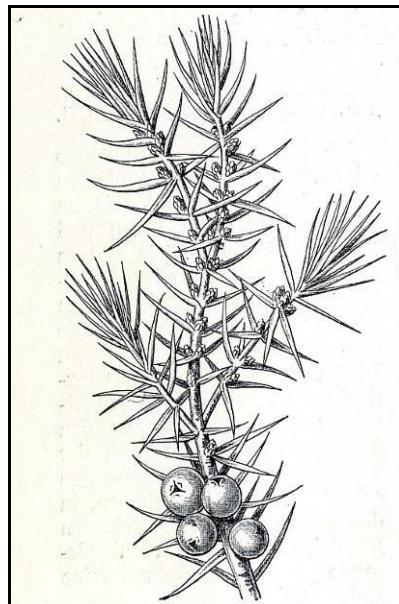


ROUGHDOWN COMMON, SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST, HERTFORDSHIRE

SITE MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE PERIOD 2018 - 2022



Juniperus communis (Juniper)

Name and address of owners/managers:

Box Moor Trust

London Road

Hemel Hempstead

HP1 2RE

1. Introduction

Roughdown Common Site of Special Scientific Interest is an important site for wildlife. This Management Statement is concerned with the area of SSSI owned and occupied by The Boxmoor Trust. This Site management Statement:

- Explains what is special about your land, and lists a number of objectives that need to be achieved if it is to remain of special interest.
- Identifies your objectives in managing the land.
- Summarises our common objectives.
- Lists those activities which it is agreed will be undertaken to manage the land to maintain and enhance its wildlife interest.
- Identifies a contact at Natural England should you need advice.
- States whether or not the agreed management activities are likely to achieve Natural England's conservation objectives.

Natural England hopes that it will help both parties to understand each other's objectives, and that it builds on the existing positive relationship in managing the site.

2. Nature Conservation Importance (of the SSSI and especially the land you manage)

Roughdown Common SSSI is a small area of calcareous grassland on the north-facing chalk escarpment in the clay-with-flints region of the county. The sward has a rich assemblage of plant species. Unimproved calcareous grassland has been greatly reduced in extent nationally and this Common comprises one of Hertfordshire's few remaining examples.

An old chalk quarry forms part of the site and a mosaic of chalk grassland exists amongst adjacent hawthorn scrub. Meadow fescue and meadow oat-grass are dominant with frequent crested hair-grass, quaking grass and common knapweed. Large thyme, common milkwort and eyebright are widespread on the site, whilst the steep slopes of the pit contain glaucous sedge, dwarf thistle, carline thistle and autumn gentian. Amongst the scattered scrub are found twayblade, common spotted orchids, a good colony of pyramidal orchids and the occasional fly orchid. Juniper is frequent and here is able to regenerate naturally, the only county locality where known to do so.

Faunal interest extends to a wide range of rare and local invertebrate species and a colony of bats that use the old mine.

3. Nature Conservation Objectives

- i. Maintain and enhance the species rich sward of calcareous grassland by appropriate cutting and grazing management (see conservation objectives for more details).
- ii. Maintain/increase the extent of calcareous grassland whilst retaining the appropriate balance between woodland, scrub, and grassland habitats. (see conservation objectives for more details)
- iii. Maintain and enhance the structure and composition of woodland and scrub habitats, where appropriate.
- iv. Maintain/enhance the populations of Locally Scarce plant species, including Juniper.
- v. Maintain/enhance the populations of Red Data Book, Notable and locally Scarce invertebrate species, and the colony of bats.
- vi. Monitor the effects of management on the floral and faunal communities, and modify management according to the results.
- vii. Monitor the establishment of wild flower seeding and juniper introduction on the upper slope of A41 cutting.

4. Objectives of the Boxmoor Trust

The Trust would like to manage Roughdown Common for nature conservation and to allow public access.

5. Agreed Objectives

All parties are interested in securing positive management of the site with a view to enhancing its nature conservation interest and there is strong commitment to these aims. Management of the Common is envisaged to include scrub clearance and the opening up of several of the grassland areas. Objectives include reducing scrub cover on the site, thinning around the junipers and other specimen trees to allow them to spread, and grazing the grassland areas with cattle and/or sheep in the spring and late summer. The grazing regime should be flexible, in relation to the many variables inherent in such an undertaking.

An explanation of the reasons for undertaking important nature conservation management is given in Annex 1.

6. Agreed Management Actions

Scrub Management

The extent of the areas described below will change as management progresses.

The aspiration is to progressively re-establish and extend the area covered by neutral/chalk grassland on the SSSI.

All scrub work should be carried out outside the breeding bird season and keep ground disturbance to the absolute minimum.

The cut brash should be either removed from the site or burnt on areas with little botanical interest. Ashes should be removed to reduce nutrient input and no burning should be carried out on any parts of the established or new grassland (either chalk or neutral grassland).

➤ Grassland areas: chalk and neutral grassland

In the areas which are known to have supported botanically significant grassland (shown as chalk grassland areas on Map attached), including the chalk face, it is desirable to clear the invading scrub.

This work will concentrate mainly on the overgrown Ash, Sycamore, Birch and Dogwood scrub but will leave the Junipers and, where levels of scrub cover are acceptable, also retain some species such as Rose, Buckthorn and Guelder Rose. A line of scrub should be left at the base of the slope to act as a natural barrier to discourage over use of the sensitive slope. This could be cut or layed to accommodate this feature.

At the North-west corner of the pit, work should target scrub / tree removal particularly on slopes whilst retaining a scrub barrier adjacent to the northern SSSI boundary track. At the eastern corner of the pit work should target scrub / tree removal particularly on the slopes whilst retaining a scrub barrier to the adjacent northern path / track.

The cut stumps can either be macerated, ring barked or treated appropriately with suitable herbicide to prevent new growth.

➤ Woodland / Scrub areas

The woodland and scrub areas will be progressively reduced to achieve a cover of 30-40% by Dec 2020/2022. The attached map illustrates what we are working towards.

Glades may be created in the existing woodland/scrub. The aspiration is to increase the extent of the glades, and eventually join them up, through selective clearance of tree, scrub and undergrowth and aftermath grazing (as per current grazing regime) in a carefully managed and opportunistic way that meets the following objectives:

- glades to be buffered initially at southern side and where appropriate on northern side to meet shelter objectives (sound & for stock during adverse weather) and manage public perceptions;
- glades to increasingly interlink and merge as larger grazing units;
- areas of remaining scrub can be scalloped to create edges facing various directions (this is beneficial to invertebrates);
- characteristic / desirable scrub / tree species to be retained (eg. Juniper, occasional Oaks, Crab Apple, Blackthorn, Hawthorn);
- regular liaison with Natural England to agree management specifics. It is recognized that robust undergrowth material, such as Bramble, may need to be mechanically cleared on average between 1-2 times a year.

Work to clear scrub /secondary woodland from north-eastern corner of site should aim to increase the extent of grazing unit and provide continuous link between chalk grassland areas.

The leaf litter present under the secondary woodland creates a nutrient rich humic layer. Scraping this layer off would help establish a more species diverse ground flora. This humus would need to be removed from the SSSI and used on a suitable receptor site. Due to the difficulty to source such a site, it will be generally left in situ. If the opportunity arises as part of glade creation to source such a site, the enriched soil layer within these secondary woodland areas could be removed to help develop a more species rich ground flora.

Grazing Regime

The objective is to maintain and enhance a species rich sward, with sufficient representation of a characteristic CG2/3 grassland (to meet SSSI Conservation Objectives).

The grazing regime should be revised before the end of this agreement, especially in regard to its impact on invertebrate populations, such as impact on food plant availability during larvae season, habitat mosaic, etc.

Grazing should take place with cattle and/or sheep.

Grazing times should be flexible enough to adapt to the climatic conditions and ground moisture a given year, to avoid any poaching and damage to the ground. We agreed on the following grazing regime:

- Cattle grazing (Belted Galloways)

Time: 6-8 weeks between mid-June and early September. The cattle should come on the site when most orchids have finished flowering.

Stocking densities: Maximum of 10

- Sheep grazing

Time: 2-3 weeks between end of September and end of October

Stocking densities: up to 30 sheep

For the duration of this management plan the grazing is aimed at knocking back the scrub and getting new areas of grassland established. Grazing might need to be relaxed at the end of this management plan in order to allow more plants to flower and set seed.

The NE Conservation Objectives set out target conditions. Stocking levels/grazing regime/management will need to achieve these conditions. It is recognised that a flexible stocking level is preferable to a fixed system and this will be largely at the discretion of the Trust, with Natural England providing advice as required.

The welfare of the stock should be taken into account when deciding exact grazing times, areas and densities.

There should be no cultivation and no chemicals or fertilizers used, except for the spot control treatment of weeds such as docks, ragwort, spear and creeping thistle in accordance with advice provided by Natural England in accordance with the Herbicide Handbook.

Bat Hibernaculum

Bat roost to be surveyed annually for wintering roost species.

The roost within ex-chalk mine at base of slope has a caged entrance and needs to be maintained with restricted access. Scrub around the entrance needs to provide adequate visual cover but be sufficiently sparse to allow for flightpaths and ventilation.

You have consent from Natural England for the management actions outlined in section 6 above. A separate consent form will be issued with this document. Should, in the future, you wish to carry out additional operations you are required to give written notice for consent to be given.

This statement will be renewed in 2022, but can be revised by agreement at any time prior to this as needed.

Should you have any queries about the SSSI please do not hesitate to contact:

Sonja Kaupe

Natural England – Hertfordshire Team
Eastbrook, Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge, CB2 8DR
Office 0208 028 5959 – Mobile 07584 617 824
Email: sonja.kaupe@naturalengland.org.uk

7. Management Records

It is helpful to keep a record of management on the SSSI; this can then be related to any recorded changes to habitats or species associated with the land.

You are not required to complete the form for your land holding, but it would be helpful if you could provide the information requested on the recording forms in Annex 2.

8. Effectiveness of the Agreed Management Actions

The agreed management actions should successfully maintain and enhance the wildlife interest of the land managed by the Boxmoor Trust.

Annex 1 Reasons for important nature conservation management

Grazing

Grazing is essential because it maintains a sward composed of a wide variety of grasses and wildflowers. In the absence of grazing a few competitive species do well and smother the less vigorous species, as a result of which the diversity of grasses and wildflowers is lost. Eventually the process would result in trees and scrub invading the grassland, which would thus turn into woodland.

In general, cattle are best suited to more level land than sheep and do a good job of browsing back scrub. They create a patchy sward of short and taller herbage at lighter densities which is beneficial to a number of invertebrate groups. Being heavier than sheep they also create more bare ground which provides basking site for invertebrates and germination niches for new plants to establish. Also, they are less affected by people and dogs which is particularly relevant to this site. On the other hand they often require more husbandry than sheep and in wet weather they can poach the ground which can destroy the sward which can lead to weed invasion.

Sheep grazing at the appropriate levels creates a short flower-rich sward and they are particular useful on steep slopes where cattle cannot reach. The best option for Roughdown Common SSSI is to combine the benefits of using both types of animals if this is possible, for example, calves could graze earlier in the season with sheep following later.

Use of fertilisers/manure

The use of artificial fertilisers stimulates the growth of competitive grasses at the expense of other, less vigorous, plants, notably broadleaved herbs. This is due to the advantage gained by these competitive species from the rapid release of nutrients at the time of fertiliser application. The consequence is a reduction in species richness in the grassland. Hence we do not wish to see artificial fertilisers applied to grassland of special interest.

Scrub control

Scrub tends to develop on grassland and other open habitats which are neither cut nor grazed and, left unmanaged, can develop into woodland. Scrub shades out grassland plants and attempts should be made to control it. Once scrub is cleared, regrowth will be suppressed and an open habitat will be maintained if grazing levels are sufficient. Some scrub made up of native species may be kept to provide habitat for scrubland birds and a range of invertebrates, provided that this does not significantly compromise the nature conservation objectives for the grassland. In the case of Roughdown Common SSSI maintenance of the important juniper scrub should be encouraged and where appropriate allowed to spread. This can be supplemented by additional planting of raised cuttings in the adjacent restored grassland area. The creation of open, scallop-shaped areas in the scrub will provide sheltered areas ideally suited to adult invertebrates, including many species of butterfly. This may also allow the spread of the characteristic chalkland plants and assist restoration of the downland habitat.

Annex 2 Management Recording Form on Roughdown Common SSSI (Boxmoor Trust)

This form might help you to keep track of past management on your site.

If you wish, you can return it to:

Sonja Kaupe (Natural England – Hertfordshire Team)

Eastbrook, Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge, CB2 8DR /or/ sonja.kaupe@naturalengland.org.uk

1. Management year:

2. Grazing

Cattle / number & type of animals :

Cattle / grazing dates:

Sheep / number & type of animals :

Sheep / grazing dates:

Other comments:

.....
.....
.....
.....

3. Scrub control

Work carried out this year (mark on a map if necessary):

.....
.....
.....
.....

4. Additional observations

The remaining space is left free for any additional comments you may wish to add:

.....
.....
.....
.....

Annex 3 Target map for scrub control



Roughdown Common SSSI

Map 3b: Illustrative map of target habitat mosaic (end Dec 2020)



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