



Case Study 10.2 Piddle Brook Meadows, Worcestershire – change from pasture to meadow management on a site with some floodplain-meadow indicator species present



About the site

Piddle Brook Meadows was purchased from the Naunton Court Estate in August 2009 by Worcestershire Wildlife Trust (WWT). The 7 ha site lies within the Forest of Feckenham Living Landscape area and is adjacent to Worcestershire Wildlife Trust’s Naunton Court Fields reserve.

The meadows have had a mixed-management regime in the past, including silage cuts in May, and spring horse grazing on the drier ground. There is a small area of ridge and furrow on the western boundary of the site, which has been designated as a Local Wildlife Site. It is not known whether artificial fertiliser has been applied in the past, but although there is a good diversity of grass species, herbs are lacking from large areas. The Piddle Brook has been deepened and several pollution incidents have occurred in the past. The site floods in winter and more recently summer flooding has occurred, but water drains from the site effectively. WWT wished to increase the floristic diversity within the sward.

Technique used

Since the project began in 2010, hay cuts have been taken in late June followed by aftermath grazing with cattle and sheep in late summer and autumn under an HLS agreement. If results proved poor after five years under this regime, the plan was to spread green hay from a similar nearby reserve.

Monitoring

- Fixed transects and NVC survey (2011 and 2014).
- Soil pH and nutrient status.





Results

The NVC survey showed a grassland strip that is a 'hybrid' of Cuckooflower grassland (MG15p) and the species-poor Creeping bent sub-community of Burnet floodplain meadow (MG4d), although one of the main community constants, great burnet, is missing and has not been previously recorded here.

These findings justify the restoration programme currently being put into operation as the management has maintained the cover of meadowsweet, a dropwort and other MG4 associates, but has not increased their abundance or extended their distribution across the site. The next phase should be to consider whether to bolster the diversity from year six (2016) onwards by spreading hay or seed from a nearby compatible donor site, at least on a small trial area.

Cost

After the initial cost of purchasing the site, erecting fencing and installing a water supply, site management costs are for 3–5 person days per year. Two volunteer work parties per year carry out pollarding and hedge/scrub management. These have on average, ten people per work party at £50 per day plus one day of staff time. Income is generated through renting the grazing, the HLS agreement and sale of the hay.

Partners

Worcestershire Wildlife Trust with Natural England through HLS agreement.

Benefits

- Increased offtake of nutrients from catchment through removal of hay crop.
- Increased public access to flower-rich meadow.
- Increased biodiversity.
- Enhancement of Piddle Brook corridor and Feckenham Forest Living Landscape (connectivity).

