



Case Study 11.1 Fancott Woods and Meadows, Bedfordshire – using a monitored management trial to determine an appropriate change in site management



Fancott Woods and Meadows SSSI comprises two grassland fields and a wooded area. The southern field has ridge-and furrow topography and a species-rich grassland intermediate between Burnet floodplain meadow (MG4) and Knapweed meadow (MG5) and has been managed as a hay meadow. The recent management of the northern field has been to turn cattle out in late June to graze the vegetation rather than cut it. Following wet summers in 2007–2009, meadowsweet has become dominant over parts of the site, suppressing less competitive species.

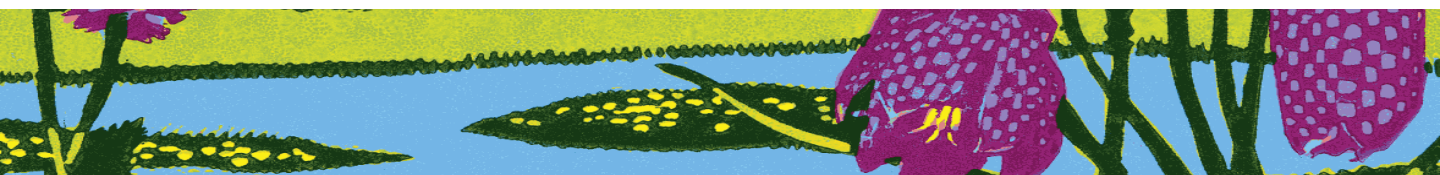


Meadowsweet is a typical component of a floodplain-meadow sward, but it can become dominant if not cut regularly and promptly. If it is coarse and bulky, it does not make good hay and will reduce the species diversity of the meadow. © Mike Dodd

In 2008 a trial was established to:

- assess the effectiveness of a June hay cut on promoting species-richness in a previously grazed pasture;
- assess whether a timely hay cut is effective in suppressing meadowsweet, which has become dominant in some areas of the site.

The plant community composition was monitored in three blocks within the northern field from 2011–2015. Each block was divided into two plots and the plots randomly assigned to a cutting or non-cutting (grazing only) treatment (Figure 11.12). The ‘cut’ plots were mown by the end of June each year and the cut material removed from the plot. The ‘uncut’ plots received the previous management practice of grazing from the end of June with no material being cut and removed.



Results

Figure 11.13 shows that the cutting regime significantly reduces the cover of meadowsweet over a number of years compared to grazing only. Cutting as soon as the hay is ready (June) is a useful management tool to control the spread of meadowsweet, where it has become coarse and dominant.

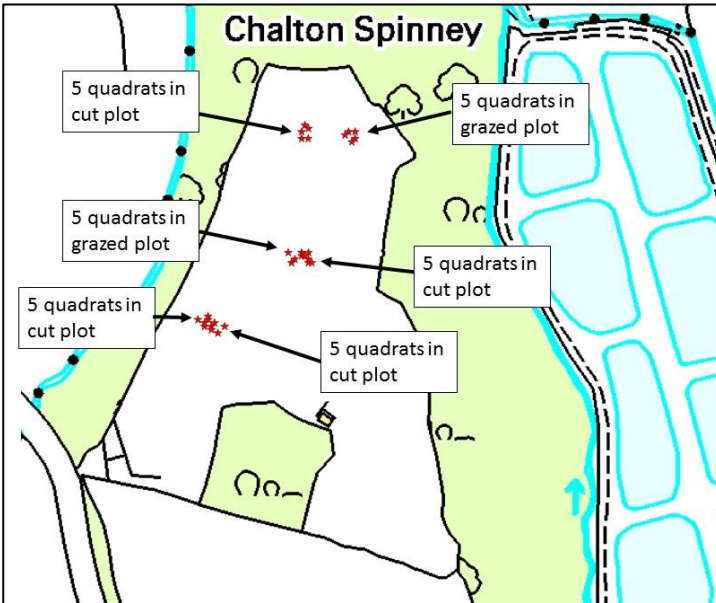


Figure 11.12 Map of northern field of Fancott Woods and Meadows SSSI showing arrangement of cut vs grazed treatments and the corresponding allocation of five 1 m x 1 m quadrats per plot as indicated by a red star. © Crown Copyright and Database Right [December 2015]. Ordnance Survey (Digimap Licence).

Figure 11.13 Results of Fancott Woods and Meadows management trial showing relative cover of meadowsweet in the different management regimes (cut annually in June) vs uncut (grazed only from late June onwards). No botanical recording was undertaken in 2014. © Crown Copyright and Database Right [December 2015]. Ordnance Survey (Digimap Licence).

