

Environmental Stewardship

Case study: Midland Gliding Club



Name:	Charles Carter
Region/County:	West Midland / Shropshire
Address:	Midland Gliding Club, Shrewsbury
Farm Size/Type:	133.5 hectares / Upland with low level sheep grazing
Stocking:	Welsh Mountain Ewes, grazing during summer at a maximum rate of 0.225 LUs/ha (1.5 ewes/ha)
Land features:	Heather moorland and an area of woodland that has been clear felled and being reinstated into heather moorland. The agreement area forms part of the Long Mynd Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
Key objectives	Upland dwarf shrub heath restoration.

The Midland Gliding Club has been in an Environmentally Sensitive Areas Scheme (ESA) since 2003 and is situated on moorland designated as part of the Long Mynd Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The Long Mynd is the largest of the Shropshire Hills (also the largest SSSI in the West Midlands) and only a short distance from the Stiperstones National Nature Reserve (NNR).

The heath here meets the criteria for BAP priority habitat upland heath and comprises an extensive upland plateau dominated by dwarf shrub heath with areas of acid grassland and grass-heath mosaic. The land is grazed by one farmer who is a tenant on part, and the sole commoner on another part. The option taken up in the agreement is the restoration of the extensive permanent grassland and moorland.

Before the agreement, the Club considered that the tenant/commoner was overgrazing the land with sheep which can cause environmental damage and destruction of the heather sward. Being in the agreement has meant that the commoner/tenant is now grazing fewer sheep, whilst retaining his income. There was tension at the time of drawing up the scheme, but all sides are now happy with the arrangements.

Charles Carter, ex-Chair of the club says "Our reason for joining the agreement was to improve the heather moorland and protect this valued environment. We are very happy with the operation of the scheme and delighted with the successful way the moorland has been restored, and we take pride in the improved appearance of the area."

Red grouse, curlew and ring ouzel have all been noted in the area. Heather moorland is important for these upland birds as it is their main habitat and as this has been whittled away for other land uses these birds have become rare and protected. Due to their rarity and rate of decline they are listed on the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) which sets out a programme for conserving biodiversity in the UK.



Sheep graze the moorland

Charles goes on to say “we know heather moorland has been in decline but thanks to the agreement we have taken back about 50 acres of what was Forestry Commission clear felled land and regenerated it by grazing the welsh mountain ewes in the summer. The benefits of this are the improved habitat for rare birds and enjoyment of the environment of our 160 members and the public who use the footpaths. The operation of the scheme fits closely with our business, although there have been days when heather cutting and gliding have been in conflict. However the additional regenerated land could now be used as a landing strip.”

Dave Cragg the Land Management Adviser for the club says “The Long Mynd is an inspiring place, an upland wilderness of undulating heather moorland and occasional sheltered valleys. For many, it is synonymous with the large area of common land managed by the neighbouring National Trust and its commons graziers under an HLS agreement, but in truth the hill and SSSI designation extends much further and is managed by many other private landowners.



Stone Curlew

The Midland Gliding Club is one such private landowner, unusual in that recreation is central to their business and they are required to balance the needs of their membership with the careful management of the environment, and their graziers own farming business needs. The Club manages this superbly well with assistance from the ESA scheme, not only managing existing SSSI habitat to great effect but also creating new areas of prime habitat from former forestry plantation. The aerial activities of Midland Gliding Club are easy to observe, but it is their environmental activities on the ground that should not be overlooked!”

The Midland Gliding Club is one such private landowner, unusual in that recreation is central to their business and they are required to balance the needs of their membership with the careful management of the environment, and their graziers own farming business needs. The Club manages this superbly well with assistance from the ESA scheme, not only managing existing SSSI habitat to great effect but also creating new areas of prime habitat from former forestry plantation. The aerial activities of Midland Gliding Club are easy to observe, but it is their environmental activities on the ground that should not be overlooked!”

Where can I find out more?

Please follow this [link](#) for the latest information on Environmental Stewardship.

