



Grazing

Improvement Programme for England's Natura 2000 Sites Theme Workshop Note

Introduction

A high percentage of Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) / Special Protection Area (SPA) sites are affected by grazing as an issue. In the latest round of Article 17 reporting inappropriate grazing was cited as the second most frequently reported pressure or threat to Natura 2000 habitats and species.

A technical workshop was held on 13 September 2013, attended by 16 experts from Natural England and other organisations. The attendees considered how to improve grazing outcomes for habitat conservation. This involved examining what constitutes good grazing by drawing on their experiences and knowledge to identify 'best practice'. Consideration was also given to understanding the most important elements of successful grazing schemes and how these might be put in place and sustained more widely across the Natura 2000 series.

The Improvement Programme for England's Natura 2000 Sites (IPENS) has hosted a series of workshops with key stakeholders in order to gather views and ideas on how to resolve some of the issues affecting Natura 2000 sites. The views in this note are those of the workshop participants and do not necessarily represent those of Natural England or the Environment Agency.



Key messages from the workshop

- Grazing management is essential to sustain a wide range of Natura 2000 habitats and species. In general, **under grazing** is the main problem in the lowlands where the availability of stock is an increasing problem, whereas for upland sites **excess grazing** remains a significant pressure. This is closely linked with trends in the agricultural economy and support payments under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).
- The **complexity of grazing management** required in achieving successful conservation grazing management on large mosaic Natura 2000 sites with multiple interest features needs greater recognition and support. Associated issues include the different grazing regimes required for different features in close proximity; the danger of convergence under agri-environment schemes towards homogenous grazing regimes giving rise to less diverse landscapes; and the threat from aerial nitrogen deposition and climate change leading to an extended growing seasons.
- Elements of successful grazing schemes include appropriate financial incentives; available stock of the right type; integration of grazing arrangements with the farm business; and motivated land managers supported by a clear vision for the conservation grazing backed by good evidence based and tailored advice and guidance. The Dartmoor Vision and Farming Futures initiative and Limestone Country LIFE Project were two of a number of best practice grazing projects identified.
- Developing and trialling a package of measures able to support grazing systems more holistically was prioritised as the main area for innovation and improvement with a view to it ideally being integrated as part of the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE). This holistic grazing system approach might, for example, include on and off-site infrastructure support; the acquisition of breeding stock; innovation of ownership and management models for land and livestock; training, support and creation of demonstration sites for graziers and conservation advisers, as well assistance with branding and marketing of grazing products support.
- Other areas prioritised for improvement relating to conservation grazing included objective setting, monitoring and better technical knowledge and decision-making by Natural England advisers.

Envisaged next steps

- Develop proposals to show how the 'holistic grazing system' approach related to Natura 2000 sites could be advanced.
- Consider the scope for additional landscape-scale 'best practice' grazing projects focused around Natura 2000 sites to be developed looking at the opportunities for external funding.
- Develop proposals to help improve grazing-related decision making by looking at skills and level of technical knowledge needed by effective conservation advisers and graziers.
- Engage with wider range of stakeholders and feed in messages and proposals where possible into the development of agri-environment measures.

Workshop participants

The following organisations and Natural England staff participated in the workshop:

Senior Adviser, IPENS	Natural England
Head of Profession, Land Management	Natural England
Senior Specialist, Grazing Management	Natural England
Senior Reserves Manager, North Pennines NNRs	Natural England
Lead Adviser, Lake District Land Management Team	Natural England
Senior Specialist, Grasslands	Natural England
Senior Adviser, Land Management	Natural England
Senior Adviser, Biodiversity 2020 Unit	Natural England
Senior Adviser, External Funding Unit	Natural England
Lead Adviser, Surrey Berkshire & London Land Management Team	Natural England
Reserve Manager Cumbria Land Management	Natural England
Senior Specialist, Heathlands	Natural England
Grazing and Reserves Officer	Natural Resources Wales
Livestock Adviser	Hampshire Wildlife Trust
	RSPB

Image: The New Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
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