



Beechcroft House
Vicarage Lane
Curdrige
Hampshire
SO32 2DP

e feedback@hiwwt.org.uk
t 01489 774400
www.hiwwt.org.uk

By email only:

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UPLANDS ESTATE

Dear Catherine,

Thank you very much for inviting me to The Uplands Estate and for giving me the opportunity to offer some advice.

There seem to be two main areas for which you require some management advice; the spinney and the meadow.

The Spinney

Considering the relatively small size of the spinney, there seem to be quite a wide variety of different species growing there. Obviously the main focal points are the impressive holm oaks (*Quercus ilex*) forming the bulk of the canopy. In addition, I noted a number of native tree and shrub species, including, English oak (*Quercus robur*), holly (*Ilex aquifolium*), dogwood (*Cornus sanguinea*), hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), sweet chestnut (*Castanea sativa*), hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and butcher's broom (*Ruscus aculeatus*), most of which, I understand from the management plan of 1989, were planted. Along with the native species, there were also a number of non-native species planted within the spinney, some of which are becoming quite invasive. Of these, I noted, laurel (possible *Prunus laurocerasus*), bay (*Laurus nobilis*), cotoneaster, a *leylandii* type fir and snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*).

I understand that you intend to cut back the hedgerow plants bordering the road in order to make this a safer crossing point. Other than that, I believe that you would like some advice on how to manage this spinney in order to create a more natural habitat, whilst retaining the footpath through the centre and discouraging young people from loitering there in the evenings.

I would suggest that you initially survey the site to list all the species present. I think that you would need to carry this out in the spring and summer to record any species that were not present when I visited but may appear in the warmer months. It's always important to know exactly what you have before carrying out any management. I read a note added to the bottom of the 1989 management plan that suggested that in 1992, 72 different plant species were recorded in the spinney! I would be very surprised if there are still that many species in there, but it would be very interesting to find out.

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If there are no unusual surprises in the survey (for example, any rarities requiring careful protection), my suggestion would be to remove the invasive, non-native species such as, the cotoneaster, the laurel, the fir and the snowberry. This would let in small pockets of light and may therefore encourage more ground flora to establish and in turn provide suitable habitat for invertebrates.

Once the non-natives have been removed, you can then reassess the situation and if we felt that it would be of benefit to let in a little more light in places (or perhaps to give the sweet chestnut and the English oak a little more room), it may then be appropriate to coppice a small number of the native shrubs such as the hazel. These species can be cut down to ground level and will then grow back over the following few years. This can be carried out in small pockets on a rotational basis. Nevertheless, I would suggest removing the non-natives first and then reassessing the situation.

Obviously the large holm oaks are going to be retained and I think that it is important to retain the native shrubs (but perhaps manage some by coppicing as mentioned above) as these are providing a habitat for birds, small mammals and invertebrates. You may consider placing one or two bird and bat boxes within the spinney. I was very pleased to learn that you have all three woodpecker species in the area. I'm sure that all of the trees on the estate with their wealth of fruits and nuts will be providing a great resource for the local bird population. Small mammals and invertebrates will also be taking advantage of this bounty.

I would also suggest that you have the tress checked for safety on a regular basis by a qualified tree surgeon. I noted in The Bell Cutter report that one or two of the holm oaks were infected with a fungus in the past. I assume that these were dealt with at the time but it is worth carrying out a regular safety check.

You mentioned that you would like to clear the bramble on one side of the spinney. I would suggest that you do indeed keep this under control but it would be of benefit to retain some of the bramble. This section is providing a typical "woodland edge" type habitat. A graded edge alongside a woodland, such as this, provides far more benefit to wildlife than a boundary that jumps from high tree canopy straight down to short grass. Bramble provides an important nectar source and fruit supply to our wildlife. Its dense growth habit also provides great cover for a number of different species. It could be kept under control however with selective cutting, using loppers and secateurs and good gloves of course!

Something else that you may wish to consider for the spinney is one or two log piles. I know that there are stag beetles in the area for example and species such as these need dead wood for their larval phase. Many species would make their home in a wood pile. These can be neatly placed off the path, out of people's way.

As I mentioned on my visit, it would be lovely to involve the community as far as is possible and perhaps to display some sort of interpretation board explaining how the site is being managed and which different species use the site.

Meadow

It was very interesting to look at the 1989 plan for the meadow. My suggestions for the meadow would be very similar to the suggestions made by The Wildlife Trust all those years ago. Looking at the meadow today, I think the main problem is the build up of fertility caused by lack of management and the annual leaf fall from the surrounding trees.

My initial suggestion would again be to survey the meadow in the spring and summer to find out what you already have growing there and to make a note of the wetter and drier areas within the meadow. I would use the 1989 plan as a basis for creating a new plan. I would suggest walking over the meadow and noting whether the wetter and drier areas are still as they were on the original plan.



From what you have said, I don't expect you will find many different species remaining in the meadow today. Consequently, I would suggest that you introduce some native plug plants. I would generally be looking to introduce native plants that thrive on damp meadows such as ragged robin (*Lychnis flos-cuculi*) and water avens (*Geum rivale*). However, if the meadow does still have drier parts, some of the species suggested on that original plan, including ox-eye daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*), may establish quite well in those areas. I would be happy to provide a more extensive plant list should you require it. In terms of plant suppliers, Flora locale (www.floralocale.org) can offer good advice.

Prior to planting, I would suggest mowing the meadow and cutting out small turves to provide some space free of competition for the plug plants. The grass would need to be kept cut around each of the plug plants until they are established.

The key to maintaining this meadow as a wildflower meadow is the management. It is important that the meadow is cut at least once each year in June/July (depending on which species you have in the meadow) and possibly twice. After each cutting, it is essential that the cuttings are removed to prevent them from smothering the wildflowers and to prevent the build up of nutrients.

As discussed, due to the sheer density of leaf fall, I would also suggest raking up the leaves at the end of the autumn once they have all fallen. This will also help to prevent nutrient build up.

The leaves (and indeed the grass cuttings) could be put in the compost area at the back of the spinney. A good compost heap can provide a perfect home for a number of species, including grass snakes which may lay their eggs there.

Stream & Pond

The stream provides an extra dimension to the habitat and I agree that the bottom corner of the meadow lends itself very well to re-establishing the pond that existed there in the past. A pond would certainly enhance this meadow, providing a habitat for a number of different species. It would be advisable however to check with The Environment Agency before recreating this pond due to the possible effect on the adjoining stream. I think it would be very interesting to see whether we could find any historical information about the pond that existed here in the past. We could then consider restoring it to its original form.

When considering stocking the pond, it's advisable not to transfer plants, water or spawn from other ponds due to the possibility of spreading ranavirus which kills amphibians. Invasive pond plants can also be spread in this way. Consequently, it's important to ensure that any plant suppliers used are providing native species grown from seed and not wild stock. You may prefer to take the approach of waiting to see what colonises naturally. As well as submerged water plants, it's important to encourage emergent plants for dragonfly/damselfly in the summer and for newts and predators to use.

As with the meadow, it may be necessary to clear leaves from the pond at the end of each autumn. Great quantities of leaves will add nutrients to the water and encourage algal blooms at the expense of other pond life.

A website which covers pond creation which you may find useful is www.pondconservation.org.uk.

I understand your concerns about the invasive nature of the pendulous sedge that you seem to have in abundance. It is a native plant but it also has a reputation as being somewhat invasive. I would suggest keeping it under control by removing small sections of it each year.

A pond, once established, will need to be managed each year in order to prevent it from becoming overgrown and ultimately reverting to dry land. It is suggested therefore that each autumn/winter, a small portion of plants are removed/thinned. Some plants will be more invasive than others, as you've discovered with the pendulous sedge.



Adjacent to the pond, it would be beneficial to create one or two log piles and perhaps a rock pile to provide hibernacula for newts, slow worms, grass snakes and other fauna. The long grass of the adjacent meadow would provide an ideal surrounding habitat for those species to use when they leave the pond.

It would be wise to survey the stream for invertebrates prior to creating the pond. It's a shame that the repairs to the stream have raised the bed so that part of it dries up in the summer. Ideally, if this stream hasn't always naturally dried up, it would be wonderful if this section could be lowered somehow. I appreciate that this may not be possible though. Unless a stream is part of a Bourne that naturally dries up in the summer, then generally there is more benefit to wildlife, if a stream flows all year round.

In addition it would be a shame to remove the alders next to the stream. These are native trees that provide food for several species including siskins. The root system also provides a habitat for some of the creatures living in the stream. These trees could perhaps be coppiced on a rotation in time.

The other interesting tree in this corner of the meadow with the large round fruits is The Dove Tree or handkerchief Tree (*Davidia involucrata*). This deciduous tree is an ornamental that originates from China.

Finally, I am still awaiting the identification of the plant in the centre of the spinney. I'll get back to you as soon as I hear about this.

Overall I think these areas have great potential and I hope that my suggestions have been useful. Please don't hesitate to come back to us if we can offer further assistance.

Yours sincerely

Susan Simmonds
Assistant Education Officer
Main Switchboard: 01489 774400
Email: susan.simmonds@hiwwt.org.uk

