

Habitat Management Elvetham Heath LNR 2009

The Countryside Service has carried out extensive heathland restoration work on the nature reserve this year. This work is an important part of the reserve's management plan and is helping to restore the open landscape of a lowland heathland.

Scrub Clearance



We have cleared several areas of scrub from the site. The removal of mainly birch, alder and willow will prevent this scrub from out-competing heather, delicate grasses and other plants associated with heathland and rush pasture. If left unmanaged certain areas of the site will quickly turn into secondary woodland and we will lose the valuable rare heathland habitat. Several distinct patches of scrub will be retained as this habitat type can provide cover for nesting birds and small mammals.

We have also carried out several turf scrapes with machinery. The pine trees, which have been removed to restore the heathland vegetation, have for several decades produced a thick layer of organic matter. This prevents the heathland plants from regenerating. It is therefore essential to remove this layer of organic matter to expose the old seedbank of plants such as heather. Heather seeds can survive for more than 50 years and can quickly germinate and re-establish themselves once exposed to favourable conditions. If the organic layer is not removed, the felled area may quickly revert back to invasive scrub.

Turf Scrapes



Open water habitats

Two more shallow pools were also created to provide food, shelter and a place to breed for invertebrates such as dragonflies and damselflies. Some dragonfly species have been seen still on the wing in late October and early November, late flying dragonflies include the Southern Hawker (pictured), this individual has just completed metamorphosis from its aquatic nymph stage.



Courtesy of Tony Mundell

Dragonflies and damselflies spend the majority of their lives as nymphs. Therefore creating aquatic microhabitats for these beautiful and enigmatic insects is essential for their long-term survival at the reserve. Some species such as the Small Red Damselfly will only breed in shallow boggy pools on poor heathland soils and will not breed in any of the drainage ponds found within the estate and adjacent to the reserve. Elvetham Heath, Ancells Farm and Fleet Pond have important populations of this national scarce species. These delicate little damselflies can be found in several areas at Elvetham Heath within the fenced reserve and appears to be responding well to the above management.

Tree Felling



Tree felling was undertaken at the nature reserve in March and October of this year to help restore the Heathland habitat that exists on the site and to reduce the habitat fragmentation of the Heathland areas that are showing such promise of recovering. All the large-scale pine tree removal work is now complete at the nature reserve.

Many wildlife species have poor mobility and benefit from larger areas without obstructions to colonise. This is particularly true of many invertebrates that are weak fliers, like the Silver Studded Blue butterfly (pictured). Some species are often unable to travel across largely wooded areas. The importance of linking up isolated blocks of habitat has been given long attention in scientific publications and is a fundamental principle of Heathland restoration.