

Knodishall Common Update

Since writing the management plan for Knodishall Common in 2013 to accompany the Natural England Environmental Stewardship (ES) agreement - I have visited the Common on a number of occasions and am pleased to say that a great deal of positive conservation management has and continues to take place.

The main aim of the management plan and ES agreement is to restore and enhance the range of heathland habitats of the Common. Heathland has suffered a dramatic decline in recent decades so opportunities to maintain and restore the remaining areas such as Knodishall Common are very valuable.

In previous years, the gorse on the Common had become rather dominant and overblown at the expense of other habitats. Practical work on the Common has therefore concentrated on rotationally coppicing gorse to rejuvenate its structure as well as cutting back and removing a proportion of the gorse to increase open areas and glades. Ongoing management is needed to keep these areas open once they have been created.

Walking around the Common now (most recently mid - January 2017), it is clear that the structural diversity has increased which in turn has increased the range of habitats which should help a wider range of species. The gorse is less overwhelming and where it has been coppiced is coming back to form much better nesting habitat. An intricate network of sheltered glades and edge habitat has been created and the Common is becoming a much more diverse network of gorse, heather, acid grassland and lichen heath.

Previously hidden areas of heather are being re- discovered and species such as adder and meadow saxifrage have been recorded again, having not been recorded for some years.

The Natural England Environmental Stewardship agreement and funding has been invaluable in helping to make the practical work possible and Matthew Ginn, the NE adviser for the agreement has provided great support and advice.

However, none of the work achieved would have been possible without the sterling commitment of 'Wiggy', parish volunteers and the Community Service team.

I look forward to seeing continuing great works on the Common and more interesting species records being made. Brilliant!

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