

Action for the Moorgreen Priority Area

Quick facts

Total area: 15 ha
(equivalent to about 27 full-size football pitches)
Designations: SSSI – 93%

Location

The Moorgreen Priority Area is located roughly in the centre of the Borough, along a small tributary of the River Hamble. Busy roads surround it on most sides including the M27 motorway as it curves around West End. The large retail complex of Hedge End is to its south and the built up area of West End is to its west. To the north is grazing land intersected by hedgerows. Much of the Priority Area is privately owned and designated as SSSI. Woodland along the southern and eastern edge of the Priority Area is mostly included within the SSSI and owned and managed by Eastleigh Borough Council with public access.

Description

The meadows within the Moorgreen Priority Area are amongst the richest grasslands for wildlife in the Borough, being agriculturally unimproved. They have a far greater variety of plants and animals compared to agriculturally improved grassland as they have not received any applications of artificial fertilisers, herbicides or pesticides or been re-seeded with only a few species of grass.

Across the UK, 97% of this habitat has been lost between 1930 and 1984, making it one of the most endangered in Britain today. Surviving pockets of unimproved grassland, like that at Moorgreen Meadows are therefore very important to wildlife at both a local and national scale and this is acknowledged with the designation of the site as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).



Peat

The grasslands within this Priority Area have formed on moist, organic-rich soil known as peat, which is composed of slowly decomposing plant and animal remains. The wetness of the soil all year round prevents bacteria from getting enough oxygen to break down the remains quickly and so the thickness of the peat layer tends to grow each year. The water in the soil comes from surrounding springs that issue from natural breaks in the rock nearby and flow through the site wetting the peat as they go.

Within the wet grasslands, plants whose names suggest their love of moisture can be found, often in great abundance and providing a colourful display of flowers throughout the spring and summer. These include marsh orchids with their deep pink flowering spikes, bog pimpernel with its small white flowers and low creeping habit and bog myrtle, a rare shrub outside of its strongholds in the New Forest and northeast Hampshire heathlands.



COMMON SPOTTED-ORCHID

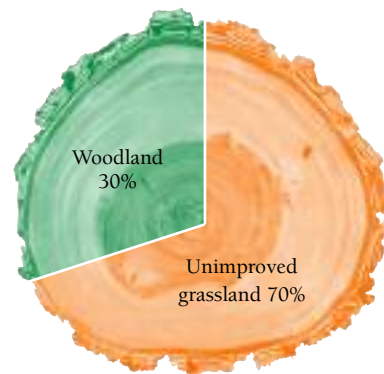


The variety of plants in turn, promotes a richness of animal life. Many more insects, birds and mammals occur in unimproved grasslands than in improved ones due to the increased variety in plants on which to feed, shelter and grow. Unfortunately the building of the motorway at the western end of the Priority Area has changed the underground patterns of water flow into the SSSI and the fields at the western end of the Priority Area have dried out. This has led to a decline in many of the species that were formerly common and characteristic of the damp peat. The once large population of orchids, including the most southerly population of the northern marsh-orchid, have declined considerably since the early 1990s. In addition to the motorway, small-scale features within the site itself also affect the water content of the peat. Numerous small drains criss-cross the site to provide drainage to surrounding ground, utilising the tendency of water to flow with gravity to the lowest areas. In the near past however, some channels have been deepened and the surrounding peat has dried out to a greater degree than other areas

Species-rich unimproved grasslands need to be managed to maintain their nature conservation interest and this is accomplished by grazing cattle on Moorgreen Meadows. Cattle prevent scrub from spreading into the grassland and shading out the lower growing plants and also maintain the diversity of plants within the meadows by removing dead plant matter that would otherwise choke out smaller, less quick-growing species of plant. Over-grazing however – allowing too many cattle to graze for too long a period – also suppresses the more interesting plant communities and if continued over a number of years can be damaging. Therefore, the right balance needs to be struck to achieve optimum conditions for the important plant communities.

The south and eastern side of the Priority Area is mostly wooded and owned by Eastleigh Borough Council who maintain the Rights of Way across the site. Much of the woodland has developed on former areas of grassland and has species such as alder and willow on the wettest peat, although some of the oak and ash woodland on the drier soils, away from the stream and drains has a longer history and has been coppiced in the past.

Area of habitats within the Moorgreen Priority Area



NB: 1 km of stream and 1.5 km of hedgerow also within the priority area



HOVERFLY

Action

Issue 1 Drying out peat

Current action

English Nature has special responsibility to monitor the condition of SSSIs throughout the whole of the UK. It can work alongside land managers and other government agencies to promote initiatives to restore sites that are being damaged by factors outside the control of any one individual or organisation.

Proposed action

Undertake hydro-geological studies to build up an accurate picture of the groundwater and surface water flows on the site throughout the year.* (EN/HRG)

Monitor any changes that occur to vegetation communities and their associated species and compare with hydrological changes, such as water chemistry and ground water.* (EN/HRG)

Explore ways in which the water flows within the reserve can be managed to ensure the long-term survival of a diverse vegetation community if monitoring indicates harmful effects are occurring.** (EN/HRG)

Issue 2 Inappropriate management

Current action

English Nature has statutory powers to formulate and if need be, impose on land owners and managers of SSSIs schemes of management to ensure the nature conservation interest of the SSSI does not diminish as a result of mis-management.

Proposed action

Review current grazing management on the SSSI and formulate a management scheme ideally suited to the maintenance of the important plant communities.** (EN)

Issue 3 Lack of management

Current action

Eastleigh Borough Council own and manage the southern and eastern side of the Moorgreen Priority Area, maintaining Rights of Way and carrying out tree safety work in the area. However, there has not been to date, the resources to implement any single scheme of management for the site.

Proposed action

Complete and implement management plans for the woodland and grassland owned by Eastleigh Borough Council and ensure compatibility with any adjacent plans.** (EBC)

Eastleigh Priority Species recorded within the Moorgreen Priority Area

Recorded in last five years

Bog pimpernel*
Bog myrtle*
Northern marsh-orchid*

Recorded 6-10 years ago

Early marsh-orchid*

* Priority species in Eastleigh Borough only

Relevant Hampshire species or habitat action plans for Moorgreen Priority Area are:

Pipestrelle bat
Birds of wet grassland
Hedgerow
Unimproved neutral grassland
Lowland wet grassland

ACTION TIMESCALE

* within next
2-3 years

** within next
5 years

*** within next
10 years

KEY TO ORGANISATIONS

EBC
Eastleigh Borough
Council

EN
English Nature

HRG
Hampshire
Research Group
(Comprises HWT / EA
/ EN / Southampton
University /
Farnborough College /
Sparsholt College)