



# Action for Wildlife

## Update Spring 2008

**Action for Wildlife**  
**The Dartmoor**  
**Biodiversity Project**

### Dartmoor Natural Networks (DNN) in the Walkham Valley

Just about the time that the last Update went to print, we launched a new initiative as part of the DNN Walkham Valley Dormouse Project. The *Action for Wildlife* Project (AFW) has made a small grant fund available to help farmers and landowners make a move away from annually trimming their hedgerows. Hedges which are annually 'box-trimmed' have low value for wildlife, compared with tall hedgerows. Areas with a lot of hard-trimmed hedgerows are a problem for species like dormice which need bushy growth to provide cover and protection when they move through the landscape. They rarely cross open areas. If restricted to fragmented areas of habitat, animals will be vulnerable to extinction in the area.

The difficulty has been where hedgerows must be kept reasonably in hand as trimming with a flail becomes difficult on growth that is more than a couple of years old. There is an alternative, however – the circular saw. These can cut growth up to 8" in diameter so even well grown hedgerows can be trimmed and reshaped. It is more expensive than flailing. Plus you have to clear up the cuttings, adding to the cost. However, if you only cut once every 3 years or more, you will make a saving in the long run. If you would like a copy of the costings, contact the AFW Project (details below).



Main circle:  
 Circular saw  
 demonstration  
 © AFW

The circular saw blades can also be angled to achieve a tall A-shape, which makes a more wildlife-friendly hedge. AFW organised a circular saw demonstration in November, to encourage farmers to give this new hedgerow management regime a go.

Alongside the Dormouse Project, a DNN Haymeadow Project will begin this summer in the Walkham Valley. Species-rich haymeadows have been declining in both extent and quality for many years. The Walkham Valley still has a few and it is hoped that some haymeadow restoration might increase them further.

### Greater Horseshoe Bat Project

AFW has now completed work on the Greater Horseshoe Bat Project which we began back in 2004. The project provided land managers in the crucial bat foraging areas with advice and support to encourage management that would enhance the quality of the foraging areas and provide bat-friendly flight routes for them to get there.

In all, detailed management advice was provided for 2,338 acres, and 108 km of hedgerows.  
 (cont.)

For more information, please contact:  
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Clockwise from top right circle of picture wheel on the front side: High brown fritillary © DNPA, Lichen © DNPA, Tree planting © DNPA, Bluebell © DNPA, Merlin © DNPA, Southern damselfly © DNPA, Bell heather © DNPA, Bonehill © Stephen Whitehorne, Bog hoverfly © DNPA, Working for Wildlife © DNPA

Most of the holdings were at least partially grazed by beef cattle or native ponies. Such pastures are a potential foraging habitat for greater horseshoes because their dung supports dung beetles, an important food source for adult and juvenile bats in late summer. AFW has found that most farmers do not routinely use wormers on their beef cattle, particularly the more harmful, slow-release avermectin formulations. This is great news for wildlife in general, and greater horseshoe bats and dung beetles in particular.

Some habitat enhancements have already been made to 9 km of hedgerows and 15 acres of grassland. Natural England are hoping to take up the baton and move the project to the next stage using the Environmental Stewardship Scheme to assist farmers in taking up more opportunities identified in our reports. It is hoped that many more habitat enhancements are ahead.

## Blanket Bog Restoration

Following our first pilot work, blocking 2 ditches on peat cuttings on Amicombe Hill, last autumn, we have undertaken some more extensive pilot work. More dams have been installed on the 2 ditches we began with. We have also selected 2 much larger ditches thought to be taking significant amounts of water off the blanket bog very quickly.

*Water builds up behind dams within minutes © AFW*



*After restoration: Water lying in a previously eroded channel © AFW*

We have combined different techniques for each and are monitoring the effects closely. Both ditches have been re-profiled, so that where there were formerly deep, narrow channels eroding into bare peat, there are now wide, shallow channels. Vegetation has been replaced and it is hoped that the disturbed areas recover so that no peat is left exposed over the summer. A series of dams has been built in each re-profiled channel. One has dams formed only from the peat. The other has a series of timber dams. In both cases, the dams function to stop water from eroding the base of the channel and reduce the rate at which it leaves the bog.

Our hope is that these techniques will be effective in lifting the watertable closer to the surface of the peat for more of the time. As areas of peat become wetter, it is hoped that purple moor grass growth will be reduced, and sphagnum and cotton grass growth will increase.

We are also beginning to investigate further areas of blanket bog in north Dartmoor, to increase our understanding of where damaged and eroding peat is present, so that we can consider where further restoration work might be possible in the future. It's a huge job and will take a very long time to happen so we are very excited to be making a start now.

## Woodland Restoration

Work to remove self-sown conifers from ancient woodland on the South Teign near Chagford, has now been completed. This work has been undertaken gradually over the last 2 years with thick, dark stands of close-growing conifers giving way to a more natural open broad-leaved woodland structure, of higher value for biodiversity.

More light can now reach the woodland floor, encouraging shrubs such as hazel to grow up and woodland flowers including sanicle, primroses and violets to spring up.

Thanks are due to BTCV's Millennium Volunteers who have helped us throughout this project and to Gary and Gordon, Dartmoor National Park Authority's woodland conservation team who cleared the last, larger conifers to complete the work.

*Conifer clearance begins © AFW*



*Below: A more natural woodland structure on completion © AFW*



This project achieves practical benefits for wildlife on Dartmoor. It is funded and co-ordinated by the Dartmoor National Park Authority, the Duchy of Cornwall, Environment Agency and Natural England.