

About Portchester Common



Site Management

The management of Portchester Common has varied over the last 18 years. Using livestock to graze the site has long been a key factor and thanks to a good working relationship with a local farmer on the Southwick Estate, it continues to be possible to graze the site during the winter for between four and six weeks. Cob ponies are currently used.

In 2013, the Countryside Service developed a management plan in association with Natural England and a five year Higher Level Stewardship scheme was agreed so that the following four objectives could be achieved:

1. To improve boundary hedging and maintain existing habitats and associated fauna and flora.
2. To improve, maintain and increase (to 70%) the area of species-rich calcareous grassland.
3. Safeguard all notable species.
4. To provide for public access and educational use of the site and to enhance public awareness and appreciation of downland habitat, except where it compromises objectives 1, 2 and 3.

The current agreement is coming to a close and Natural England and the Countryside Service are due to develop a new management plan shortly.

Over the last five years, it has been possible to achieve the management objectives and work continues on site to sustain and develop further what has been achieved.

It would not have been possible to achieve the goals without the dedicated team of six volunteers. The people who work on this site already help the Countryside Service with conservation work once a week on other sites across the Borough through much of the year.

This small group of local people agreed to work an extra three hours a week between September and March over the last five years and as a result of their hard work we can now enjoy the fruits of their labours.



About butterfly/ moth scrapes

What is a butterfly scrape?

A scrape is a simple and often effective way of providing the necessary habitat for butterflies and moths which need specific food plants and breeding conditions.

As the name suggests, the existing turf and top soil is removed to expose the substrate which, in this case, is chalk. Most scrapes measure 2.5m² with a trench running west to east which is between 20cm and 50cm deep.

The excavated soils are used to form a 'basking bank' at the rear and a low lip along the front.

Why create a butterfly scrape?

Many butterflies and moths depend on specific food plants which are quickly out-competed by vigorous vegetation like the dog wood and privet. These food plants are typically early colonisers of disturbed soils and need to germinate within patches of bare ground if they are to flourish. The creation of earth scrapes will produce a mosaic of sparsely vegetated patches. They then form a breeding area and a source of food for both the caterpillars and adult butterflies and moths specific to this type of landscape. They also offer warm basking areas that many butterflies and moths require.

In addition, scrapes will also help supply bare ground habitat that is needed by other insects such as beetles, solitary bees and wasps.

Why create a butterfly scrape on Portchester Common?

The numbers of the blue butterflies recorded over the last three has declined with only one small blue having been recorded each year. These species should be more common and following discussions with both Natural England and the Butterfly Conservation Trust it was agreed that the Council could help improve resident numbers by using this technique. This is a trial based on the model used on Magdalen Hill Down, Winchester.

The initial construction work took two days. However, the period of time needed to grow the appropriate food plants from seed, plant them and let them develop can take between twelve and fourteen months. During this time, the scrape will need to be kept free of any scrub regrowth.

Common Blue



Small Blue

