



Walcot: restoration of pasture woodland



Introduction & Location

- A small pasture woodland of 8.5ha (21 acres) in a remote valley, with veteran oaks supporting important communities of scarce lichens and wood-decay invertebrates.
- Patches of species-rich grassland supporting scarce insects such as the Wood White butterfly.
- Location: Walcot, Shropshire – Grid reference SO 343 839

Objectives:

To conserve and enhance the special interests of the site –old, open-grown trees and their associated lichen & invertebrate communities, also species-rich grassland- by restoring the historic land use of grazing with appropriate domestic stock.

Actions & Achievements:

- Install stock fencing to create internal grazing compartments, thereby facilitating easier management of stock and their separation from other stock which are driven through the site to access different land.
- Graze site with the National Trust's in-hand flock of hardy Hebridean sheep.
- Remove scrub from glades to conserve grassland habitat and enable more effective circulation of stock within the site.
- Site is being grazed again after a break of several years, with the help of physical scrub control this is restoring species-rich grassland and preventing from becoming too enclosed veteran trees which have grown up in open conditions.
- The nationally scarce Wood White has colonized the site, from the important populations of this butterfly at the Forestry Commission's Bury Ditches.

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Background:

- The National Trust acquired Walcot in 1994, primarily to conserve its nature conservation value. Its key significance lies in its veteran oaks and the rich communities of lichens and wood-decay invertebrates which they support, both of which are ranked as of regional significance.
- The site is a small fragment of a much larger area of ancient pasture woodland and parkland – the historic deer park of Walcot Park.
- When the National Trust acquired the site it was grazed by cattle, but due to a number of factors outside the Trust's control this grazing diminished before finishing altogether ca. 2004.
- As a consequence, the site became increasingly overgrown with scrub and bracken, putting at risk its special features.
- To counter and reverse these trends, the National Trust invested in fencing and scrub control before restoring grazing using its own 'flying flock' of Hebridean sheep, a hardy traditional breed well suited to conservation grazing.
- This remains 'work in progress' – there is more to be done before the site's special interests are restored fully.

Quotes:

"The Hebrideans love scrub and its great to see them doing a brilliant job at restoring the site – even if they are devils to catch when the time comes to move them to another site"

Dave Cowell, Area Warden, National Trust

WMRFF Objectives: Main Theme & Others

To meet the national targets for Sites of Special Scientific Interest and the priority habitats and species of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

To increase contributions and commitment to wildlife gain with regard to woodlands, urban trees, hedges, orchards, parkland & wood pasture.

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