

Grazing Regime Evaluation Case Study:

Site 8 - Powys

- 200 ha of wet heath, blanket bog and dry dwarf-shrub heath
- Restoration by summer-only cattle grazing and ponies

Background

The site is situated within the Berwyn Mountains in North Wales. The moorland area is managed by RSPB in conjunction with Severn Trent Water to encourage suitable heather and grassland breeding habitat for moorland birds. The area supports half of Wales' hen harrier population.

Previously, *Calluna* was badly suppressed by overgrazing by sheep. For a ten year period from the early 1990s, stocking was reduced to a summer only sheep regime at very low densities, which allowed some recovery of vegetation. The current grazing regime was introduced in 2003, where 28 cattle with some calves grazed in the summer, and 8 mountain ponies were also introduced. Cows have grazed over the whole area and had some notable effect on *Molinia*, during the first year.

Habitat condition assessment

The dry dwarf shrub heath is in favourable condition in terms of disturbance, browsing and invasive species. Dwarf shrub frequency is low at 50% of sample points although plant species composition, including lower plants, is otherwise favourable. There is also inadequate pioneer regrowth and bracken is present at 20% of sample points.

The wet heath is close to being in favourable condition with respect to plant species composition with the majority of sample points containing wet heath indicator species, including *Erica tetralix*. The wet heath is in favourable condition regarding invasive species, browsing, burning, drainage, erosion and disturbance.



The blanket bog has been degraded and is clearly in unfavourable condition due to impoverished species composition. Two or more indicator species are present at only half the sample points, and there is inadequate cover (<50%) of bog indicator species at 80% of sample points. The blanket bog is, however, in favourable condition regarding invasive species, burning, drainage, erosion and disturbance. Grasses (*Holcus lanatus*) were more than 1% vegetation cover at only one sample point. There are no signs of excessive burning or of burning in sensitive areas, to the moss, liverwort or lichen layer or exposure of peat surface due to burning. Similarly, no disturbed bare ground was recorded.

Farm business and livestock

Current grazing regime:

Cattle @ 0.14 lu ha⁻¹ (summer only)

Ponies @ 0.024 lu ha⁻¹

Cows are mainly cull cows, but some have calves. It is aimed to have all cull cows in future.

Ponies are Welsh Mountain ponies.

Other Management

Cutting, brashing and burning of *Calluna* is carried out to create habitat for moorland birds, particularly black grouse, and other wildlife.

Shooting, recreation and landscape

No shooting is carried out on the site. Landscape is heterogeneous in appearance. *Calluna* and *Eriophorum* spp. are flowering in some areas but both are very patchy.