

## Grazing Regime Evaluation Case Study:

### Site 10 - Exmoor

- 681 ha of mixed wet and dry heath
- Grazed at low stocking density by sheep, ponies and deer



#### Background

The site is part of a private estate within the Exmoor National Park and South Exmoor SSSI. The site entered into agreement under the Exmoor Environmentally Sensitive Area in 1993, since when grazing intensity has declined. Prior to this, the wet heath had *Molinia* dominant or co-dominant with *Calluna*, resulting in a lack of dwarf shrub regeneration. More recently, the site has been undergrazed. In 2001 it became a Heather Trust Demonstration Site.

Stocking densities have declined from 0.12 lu ha<sup>-1</sup> in 1992 to 0.04 lu ha<sup>-1</sup> in 2003 (excluding deer), and around 0.07 lu ha<sup>-1</sup> including deer, although this does vary throughout the year. Stocking density is highest in August and September at 0.12 lu ha<sup>-1</sup> and decreases in October to 0.05 lu ha<sup>-1</sup> and to 0.02 lu ha<sup>-1</sup> in November as ewes are taken off for tugging. This density is maintained in April, May and early June, and then increased to 0.06 lu ha<sup>-1</sup> with the addition of hogs.

Stocking is primarily sheep, with twelve ponies also on the site all year. Five heifers grazed the site from Mid-May onwards in 2002, but there were no cattle in 2003. Wild red deer also graze the site and therefore the figures above would increase when taking deer into account.

The site has been subjected to a number of vegetation surveys since 1991 and is currently being monitored under the Heather Trust project.

#### Habitat condition assessment

The wet heath (200 ha) is in unfavourable condition with respect to plant species composition, due to dominance of *Molinia* at the expense of characteristic wet heath species. In addition, *Erica tetralix* is only present at 30% of the sample sites.

Bracken cover is also high at 10% of the sample sites. The wet heath is, however, in favourable condition regarding invasive species, browsing, burning, drainage, erosion and any other disturbance.

The dry dwarf shrub heath (450 ha) is in favourable condition regarding plant species composition (including dwarf shrubs), current browsing levels, disturbance and invasive species. However, there is inadequate pioneer regrowth at 90% of sample points. Bracken is also abundant, having greater than 10% vegetation cover at all sample points. *Ulex europaeus* has greater than 20% vegetation cover at one sample point.

#### Farm business and livestock

Current grazing regime:

0.13 lu ha<sup>-1</sup> August-September (sheep)

0.02 lu ha<sup>-1</sup> winter (ponies)

Current area-based payments are Exmoor ESA Tier 1(5). Eligible headage payments to January 2005 are Sheep Annual Premium Scheme, Suckler Cow Premium, Beef Special Premium, Extensification Premium and Slaughter Premium.

#### Other Management

Heather burning and gorse and bracken management are carried out for habitat conservation.

#### Shooting, recreation and landscape

There is no shooting on the site. There is public access, which is used in moderation.

Landscape is heterogeneous in appearance, with intact walls and boundaries, mainly beech hedges. Flowering heather is visually striking.