



THE HEATHER TRUST

Promoting Integrated Moorland Management

**The Graze the Moor Project
Molland Moor, Exmoor**

Annual Report – October 2017



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INTRODUCTION

1 Project description

- 1.1 The *Graze the Moor* project is a five-year project that is being supported by the Exmoor National Park Authority's Partnership Fund and a range of partners. The project is based on the whole of Molland Moor, which has an area of 681ha (1,680acres). The project started in April 2014 and runs until March 2019.
- 1.2 The starting point for the project is to introduce changes to the grazing management of Molland Moor and to monitor the impact of these changes.
- 1.3 More detail about the background to the project is provided in Appendix 1.
- 1.4 This information included in this report includes the issues discussed at the project meeting on 31st October 2017.

2 Objectives for the project

- 2.1 Monitor the impact of changes to the grazing regime on Molland Moor:
 - 2.1.1 To draw conclusions from this information; and
 - 2.1.2 Make recommendations for the future grazing management.
- 2.2 Provide a focus to implement other best practice moorland management in support of the project.
- 2.3 Evaluate and further develop the role of the Moorkeeper.
- 2.4 Carry out a farm economic study.
- 2.5 Continue to monitor animal health issues and coordinate tick control measures.
- 2.6 Link to other relevant activity, which is taking place on Molland Moor and across Exmoor.
- 2.7 Disseminate information from the project across Exmoor and to the other moors in the south-west.

3 Project Partners

- Molland Estate (& the Moorkeeper) (Landowner, management of the moor)
- Exmoor National Park Authority (Project development, ranger input)
- Natural England (Designated site issues, ecological monitoring)
- Dave Boyce (Ecological Monitoring)
- The Heather Trust (Project Manager)
- The Elms Estate Office (Farm Economic Study – until November 2016)
- University of Gloucestershire & Royal Agricultural University (Farm Economic Study - from November 2016, External Evaluation)
- The Malcolm McEwan Trust (Funding support)

ACTIVITY REPORT

4 Habitat

4.1 Poor weather conditions prevented any swaling in the season to 31st March 2017.

4.2 Molinia Control Trial

4.2.1 The monitoring of these plots is continuing; the plots received different treatments to control the Purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*.

4.2.2 It is too early to draw conclusions from this work, as the monitoring will continue until summer 2018.

4.2.3 It has been suggested that the monitoring should continue to establish the longer-term changes as the vegetation recovers post-treatment.

- Stock are likely to graze the new vegetation that emerges after treatment but, as the vegetation recovers, the stock are likely to move to other areas that have been cut / burnt.
- The change in grazing pressure is likely to affect the vegetation mix.
- The results of longer-term monitoring may be different to those obtained soon after treatment.

4.3 Bog Burst at Star Pool

4.3.1 Very heavy rain on 11th July 2017 caused a ‘bog burst’ below Star Pool.

4.3.2 This caused extensive damage that has made the ford almost impassable. This increases the time required for the farm to check stock across the moor.

4.3.3 Natural England has issued a Consent to Rectify, which will allow restoration work to take place.



Figure 1 – ‘Bog burst’ below Star Pool

5 Grazing – Cattle & Sheep

- 5.1 Cattle grazing throughout the year has continued at the agreed stocking levels: 100 in summer and 60 in winter.
- 5.2 Over the summer period, grazing by between 400 and 700 sheep has been agreed; over winter, numbers are restricted to 200 with no minimum.
- 5.3 TB was identified in the cattle in October 2017, and this will have major implications for the sale of stock.
- 5.4 In March 2017, three calves died after contracting septicaemia and this is thought to be connected to sheep tick bites.
- 5.5 Road traffic accidents have resulted in some deaths of cattle and sheep.



Figure 2 - Cattle Grazing above Star Pool

6 Grazing – Ponies & Deer

- 6.1 The size of the herd of ponies is steady at about 30.
- 6.2 Red Deer are present and move around the local moors. Numbers are stable and a resident herd of 150 has been assumed when calculating the number of livestock units on the moor.

7 Grazing exclosures.

- 7.1 Two 10 x 10 m exclosures have been constructed on the moor. The first was completed in September 2016, and the second in January 2017.
- 7.2 The aim of these is to establish the impact of deer on the vegetation during the winter.

- 7.2.1 The size of the plots has been selected to be large enough for deer to jump into the enclosures.
- 7.2.2 If deer graze the enclosures, a comparison with the adjoining vegetation, outside the enclosure, will allow the impact of deer grazing alone to be assessed.
- 7.2.3 These were intended as short-term enclosures, but it has been agreed that they should remain in place, until at least until March 2018.

8 Monitoring

8.1 Annual Habitat Survey

- 8.1.1 Natural England (NE) carried out the annual survey of 28 points spread across the moor in March.
- 8.1.2 This survey is being written up but early indications are that the number of points assessed to be overgrazed was 9. Compare 7 in 2015, and 11 in 2016. Some of the 9 overgrazed points in 2017 have not been assessed as overgrazed previously.

9 Further Activity

- 9.1 Some ideas for further investigation came out of the discussion that took place during the year.
- 9.2 The interface between cattle and sheep.
 - 9.2.1 Is it possible to quantify the benefits of sheep and cattle grazing the moor?
 - 9.2.2 Particularly in the presence of Purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* it is believed that cattle keep the sward short enough, and fresh enough, for the sheep to continue grazing longer than if cattle were not present.
- 9.3 The impact of Red deer and ponies.
 - 9.3.1 Is enough consideration being given to the impact of grazing by deer and ponies on the moor?
- 9.4 Sheep Ticks
 - 9.4.1 Three calves had been lost on the moor in early 2017 due to septicaemia from tick bites.
 - 9.4.2 There are concerns that tick numbers are increasing and that this is increasing the risk to stock from tick borne diseases.
 - 9.4.3 The potential for sheep ticks to spread Lyme disease in humans should not be forgotten.
 - 9.4.4 It has been suggested that a tick survey should be carried out to establish if there are hotspots and where these are located.
- 9.5 Interpretation
 - 9.5.1 The Moorkeeper is receiving regular calls from members of the public about stock on the moor.
 - 9.5.2 Is there scope for providing some interpretation about the Graze the Moor project so that members of the public can be made aware of what the project is trying to achieve?

- 9.5.3 To avoid the cost of developing and producing interpretation signs, and the associated vandalism risk, this could be as simple as providing a notice that provides a link to a website.

10 Workshops / Events

10.1 Retired Farmers meeting

- 10.1.1 As part of the External Evaluation of the project, a meeting was organised with retired farmers who had grazed the moor in the past.
- 10.1.2 The aim was to establish what management regimes had produced the moor as it is known today.
- 10.1.3 The meeting provided a fascinating insight into the management of the moor and the history of Molland over the last 70+ years.

10.2 Defra / National Parks England / Natural England visit - 11th July 2017

- 10.2.1 32 people met on a very wet July afternoon to hear about the Graze the Moor Project. Joining representatives from Defra, Natural England and nearly all of the English National Parks, were colleagues from the RSPB, FWAG South West, The Exmoor Hill Farming Network, The Exmoor Society, local farmers and the 'Graze the Moor' project team.



Figure 3 - Defra / National Parks Visit - 11 July 2017

10.3 Workshops / Events in 2018

- 10.3.1 A series of workshops / events is proposed for 2018.
- 10.3.2 A date of 9th May 2018 is being considered for the first workshop.
- 10.3.3 The aim will be to target different audiences with a view to engaging with as many different interest groups as possible.

11 Publicity

11.1 In February 2017, Luckworthy Farm was the focus of an article by Rebecca Jordan in the Farmers Guardian and this was also published in the Galloway Journal.

11.1.1 The article included interviews with Steve and Richard Langdon.

11.1.2 Information about Luckworthy Farm and the Graze the Moor project was provided.

11.1.3 Copies of the article can be provided on request.

12 Project Focus

12.1 In the build up to the completion of the project at the end of March 2019, three key areas of activity have been proposed:

12.1.1 Ensuring that maximum impact is achieved during the remainder of the project,

12.1.2 Identifying opportunities to promote the findings of the project after completion, and

12.1.3 Investigating the options for continuing the work beyond 31st March 2019, including seeking an extension of the existing funding or support from new sources.

13 Extension of Activity

13.1 Even after the five years of this project and the 2-year case study that preceded it, the information collected will still be incomplete. Consideration is being given to how the work of the project, can be continued after March 2019, to allow a longer-term dataset to be established.

13.2 The report from the project will include the output from the economic comparison and the external evaluation report. The promotion of the findings to local, regional and national audiences will be important.

14 Additional Funding

14.1 If the project is to continue, additional funding will be required.

14.2 There is no budget for the promotion of the findings of the project and this will restrict the amount of work that can be carried out and the value that can come from this project.

14.2.1 Holding several workshops could be an effective way to communicate the findings of the project and generate discussion of the issues.

14.2.2 Presentations to other audiences has been considered, such as: Defra and Natural England, National Parks England, SW Uplands Federation, Commoners Associations.

14.3 If it is agreed that the project should aim to develop a long-term dataset, it will be important to maintain the continuity of the data collection.

- 14.3.1 If there is a gap in funding at the end of the project, there is a risk that this will result in a break in the collection of data.
- 14.3.2 To address this, the availability of bridge funding is being investigated.

15 Conclusions

- 15.1 The project is developing robust data that will allow the impact of reintroducing winter grazing onto moorland to be assessed.
- 15.2 The information that the project is collating will also be invaluable in quantifying the level of support uplands in the south west of England require now and post-Brexit.

Simon Thorp
Director

Appendix

- 1. Background to the Graze the Moor Project

BACKGROUND

- 1 For many years, the Molland Estate has been concerned about the difficulty of managing the moor to a high standard. Grazing is the main management input to the Moor and there is an obligation under a management plan agreed with Natural England to graze the moor with cattle during the summer.
- 2 It has become increasingly difficult to find graziers with good quality hill stock for a range of reasons and these include:
 - 2.1 The restrictions on income potential resulting from the high labour costs associated with extensive grazing and a perceived lack of adequate public support for hill farming now that support is no longer on a headage basis;
 - 2.2 The drop in feed value of the grazing following the spread of gorse, Purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* and bracken.
 - 2.3 The threat to animal health from tick borne diseases and tuberculosis;
- 3 The overall impact of these difficulties is that farmers have moved away from hill stock and the moor has suffered from a lack of management. The vegetation has become rank, coarse grasses have invaded, and invasive species, such as bracken, gorse and scrub woodland, have expanded onto the moor. The result of these changes is that the vegetation has lower food value and this in turn makes it less attractive to graziers.
- 4 In an effort to justify change to the current management of the moor, and reverse the downward spiral of its condition, the Graze the Moor project will gather information that will allow management decisions to be made that are based on local evidence.
- 5 Much of the guidance that is available from Natural England for moorland and upland areas has been developed from evidence gathered in the north of England¹. This was discussed with the Chairman of Natural England, Poul Christensen, during a visit to Exmoor in October 2011, and this work developed from that discussion. The Graze the Moor project offers the opportunity to collect evidence from Exmoor that can be used to develop guidance of relevance on Molland Moor, and the other moors in the south-west.
- 6 The shortcomings of the existing management regime have been highlighted by the report from the Molland Moor Vegetation Survey 2013 that was commissioned from David Boyce by the Molland Estate. This [report](#) is available to download from the project's online folder.
- 7 Molland Moor is an ideal location for this work: it has a long history of testing novel management techniques and it has a detailed vegetation monitoring record that spans 20 years. This dataset will allow the impact of changes implemented through the project to be fully assessed.

¹ MARTIN, D., FRASER, M.D., PAKEMAN, R.J. & MOFFAT, A.M. 2013. Natural England Review of Upland Evidence 2012 - Impact of moorland grazing and stocking rates. Natural England Evidence Review, [Number 006](#)