THE HEATHER TRUST
Promoting Integrated Moorland Management

GRAZE THE MOOR PROJECT

ANNUAL REPORT TO 31 MARCH 2015

LIVESTOCK

1 Grazing

1.1 Stock Numbers

1.1.1 The stock numbers agreed by Natural England are:

- Winter – 60 cattle; 200 sheep; 30 ponies.
- Summer – 100 cattle; 400-700 sheep; 30 ponies.

1.1.2 In 2015, the aim is to make full use the stocking levels to provide management control of the vegetation. The Higher Level Stewardship agreement allows the summer levels to be adopted as soon as the Purple moor-grass shoots appear.

1.1.3 Chris Raffe will be invited to contribute to the grazing levels using his flock of Exmoor Horn sheep. **Action: Moorkeeper.**

1.2 Cattle management

1.2.1 The intention is for all cows to calve on the moor, ideally in the summer.

1.2.2 A Beef Shorthorn bull was used, and had left the moor in good condition. A TB test had been clear

- The calves from a Beef Shorthorn bull would have a higher value, but while the herd was being expanded, a Galloway bull would also be used to breed for replacements.

1.2.3 It has been suggested that it might be useful to refer to work on different cattle crosses carried out at The Institute of Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences (IBERS) at Aberystwyth.

1.3 Grazing Management

1.3.1 In 2015, stock will be managed when necessary to place the grazing pressure on the areas treated as part of other management work on the moor. For example, all the areas burnt in the winter 2014-15 will benefit from grazing. The benefits of grazing to control Purple moor-grass regrowth after burning on Moorhouse Ridge are very evident.

1.3.2 Active movement of stock may be necessary to make sure that all burnt areas get some grazing management early in the season. The target areas should include the three areas where prescribed burning took place, the area covered by the runaway fire in Poulthouse Combe, and the areas of Molinia burned as part of the Molinia Control study.

1.4 Stock disease

1.4.1 Sheep tick numbers are thought to be high and therefore stock are at risk from tick borne diseases.

1.4.2 To check for the presence of Louping Ill, blood tests on 10 sheep were carried out in late summer 2014. The results indicated that all stock were healthy. The results will be circulated. **Action: Steve Langdon.**

1.4.3 The blood tests will be repeated in 2015. **Action: Moorkeeper, Steve Langdon**.

1.4.4 In spite of the sheep being dipped against scab in November, there was an outbreak in November 2014. The sheep were injected with Dectomax to cure the problem.

1.5 Cattle - winter feeding

1.5.1 Natural England has agreed that it is not necessary to move stock onto the in-bye land each evening. Therefore, the gateways are not in regular use and the plans to monitor them have been dropped.

1.5.2 A snacker-feeder is being used to feed the cattle on the moor in a different area each day to spread the grazing pressure.

1.5.3 In 2015, the stock will be moved around the moor to as many locations as possible. **Action: Moorkeeper, Steve Langdon**

2 Stock health

2.1 The Exmoor Moorland Landscape Partnership had offered support with the cost of the stock treatments carried out on stock turned out onto the moor from Luckworthy Farm during 2014. EMLP were thanked for this support.

2.2 Luckworthy Farm had provided details of expenditure in 2014 and proposals for 2015. These would be reviewed and passed to EMLP to allow the support funding to be released. **Action: Project Manager**

HABITAT MANAGEMENT

3 Swaling

3.1 Natural England had agreed four areas for swaling in the winter 2014-15 (total area 30.6ha).

3.2 A runaway fire occurred at Poulthouse Combe while burning one of the agreed areas. The resulting fire covered 15-18 ha rather than the planned 7.6 ha area.

3.3 As a result of this, the plan to burn the fourth area (6.7ha), to the east of Smallacombe Combe was abandoned. This area will be carried forward to the swaling programme in winter 2015-16.

4 Vegetation Monitoring

4.1 This is completed annually by Mike Pearce at Natural England, and the 2015 Survey was carried out in completed in March. A written report will be provided and made available in the Project Folder. **Action: Mike Pearce**

4.2 Summary of the 2015 survey.

4.2.1 In the first year after burning, Purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* re-establishes quickly.

4.2.2 The grazing level on the southern side of the moor has tended to be too high. This emphasises the need to move stock to all parts of the moor.

4.2.3 On Brimblecombe Hill, there is good heather growth after burning.

4.2.4 As the burning programme gets established, there is more young heather available and the grazing pressure gets spread. The situation is likely to improve further in the second rotation of fires.

4.2.5 There has been some heavy grazing close to Lyshwell and this has had an impact on the heather, producing a 'cushion effect' on heather bushes.

5 Gateway Monitoring

5.1 The access gateways used by stock were monitored during the case study that preceded the project. As stock are no longer being moved in and out of the in-bye regularly this monitoring is no longer required.

5.2 The Molinia Control Study (see Section 7) has been substituted for this monitoring and the study will use the funding allocated for the gateway monitoring.

6 Gorse Management

6.1 Some gorse control by cutting was carried out during 2014, either side of Moor Lane.

6.2 One area was cut by hand and the stumps were then treated with Glyphosate. The other area was cut by a machine driven flail and no further treatment was carried out.

6.3 Stump treatment with Glyphosate has not proved to be successful and an alternative approach will be tried. Use of a product, such as Timbrel, with a treatment gun, might be a better option. **Action: Molland Estate**

6.4 The area that had been flailed, without additional treatment, was giving better results.

6.5 Consideration has been given to whether the stock on the moor could control gorse regeneration, especially over the winter.

6.5.1 After discussion, the view taken is that stock are not likely to have a significant impact at the current stocking densities.

6.5.2 As a result of this, the cost of establishing a monitoring regime is not deemed to be justified.

6.6 Natural England explained that gorse and scrub are an integral part of moorland habitat and that coverage of up to 20% of the moor area is acceptable without impact on eligibility for payments.

7 Molinia Control Study

7.1 This study has been introduced to replace the Gateway Monitoring work that is no longer required. The aim of the Study is to test different control methods to establish which works best on Molland Moor.

7.2 Three treatment plots will be used in two separate areas, with a fourth, no-treatment plot as a control. The different treatments will be: burn, cut, and spray-burn-reseed. The burning was carried out in March 2015, the cutting will take place in June / July 2015, and the spray-burn-reseed will start in July, and complete in September / October.

7.3 The next activity will be to cut the two treatment plots in late June / early July. **Action: Molland Estate**

7.4 The best time to carry to the burning after spraying is in August or early September. To do this an out of season burning licence will need to be obtained. If this cannot be obtained, burning will need to wait until the start of the burning season on 1st October. **Action: Project Manager**

7.5 Consideration will be given to reviewing other spray-burn-reseed work that has taken place in the south-west. For example, similar work is taking place on Dartmoor, and the work carried out by Andrew Hawkins at Warren Farm, in about 2005, was also successful. **Action: Dave Boyce**

7.6 All the treatment will take place in 2015 and the recovery will then be monitored in the summer of each year until summer 2018. The Study will then be written up and include din the final report from the Graze the Moor project.

8 Bracken Control

8.1 A horse drawn bracken bruiser will be used on the bracken stands in 2015. **Action: Molland Estate**

OTHER PROJECT ISSUES

9 Economic comparison

9.1 The Elms Estate Office is developing a protocol for this work.

9.2 Part of the work will consider the cattle enterprise in the winter only and develop a partial budget to show the difference in costs between hill cattle using the moor and a housed herd.

9.2.1 Early indications are that the savings will amount to £365 per cow.

9.2.2 This is an estimated saving from book figures; data to support this have not been collected for a full winter yet. This estimate will be refined with input from Luckworthy Farm to provide the best possible baseline position.

9.2.3 Data collected over several years will be used to refine the figures.

9.3 As this approach only takes into account the situation in winter, it does not make any allowance for the benefit arising from the ability to close up in-bye ground after the stock have been turned out. It is clear that the carrying capacity of the farm will be higher with the use of the moor. A way to value this benefit will be considered. **Action: Elms Estate Office**

9.4 In addition, the whole farm situation will be considered to compare all indoor and outdoor enterprises, including sheep.

9.5 Opportunities will be sought to promote this work to other people with an interest in the economics of upland farming. **Action: NFU, All.**

10 Aerial Photograph Analysis

10.1 Photographic and map based records for the period 1947-2014 have been reviewed by the Devon Biodiversity Records Centre to provide a summary of the changes to the habitat on Molland Moor during this period.

10.2 This work was completed in March 2015 and the Molland Estate and the Malcolm MacEwen Trust cost have funded the work equally.

10.3 The Report is available in the Project Folder.

11 Defra: Upland Outcomes Framework

11.1 Natural England held a workshop at Molland on 24th March that was facilitated by The Heather Trust. The workshop promoted the approach that has been adopted by Natural England to introduce the Framework.

11.2 In summary, the Outcomes Approach seeks closer integration between Natural England and the owners and managers of land. The Approach will help to deliver an integrated approach, which takes account of the range of outcomes (environmental, social and economic) that may be delivered in any upland area. It will help translate policy for delivering integrated outcomes into practical action on the ground

11.3 More detail can be seen in the Framework Document.

11.4 The introduction of the Outcomes Approach creates an opportunity for the oenrs and managers to have a greater say in the management of the land.

11.5 The Molland Estate has volunteered the moor as a pilot site for the Outcomes Approach. If this offer is taken up it will:

11.5.1 Provide greater recognition for output from the Graze the Moor project;

11.5.2 Possibly extend the duration of the work being carried out under the Graze the Moor project beyond the current end of the project in march 2019;

11.5.3 Provide an opportunity to expand the area included in the project to take in Anstey & Cussacombe Commons.

12 RSPB Bird Survey report

12.1 The RSPB will be asked to provide an extract from the latest survey to cover Molland Moor. **Action: Dave Boyce**

13 Molland Ponies

13.1 The numbers of ponies has been reduced and the herd is now registered.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

14 Moorkeeper

14.1 The Moorkeeper provides a report at the end of every month. This records details of stocking and other points of interest that have occurred during the month. These reports will be made available in the Project Folder to members of the Project Group. **Action: Project Manager**

15 External Evaluation

15.1 Dr Matt Lobley from the University of Exeter has been approached to provide an independent evaluation of the project, during the latter stages.

15.2 Christina Williams met Matt Lobley in November 2014 and it was agreed that some proposals would be provided early in 2015. The involvement of a colleague from the Farm Business Survey was proposed to advise on data collection. The proposals have not yet been provided and are being chased. **Action: Project Manager.**

15.1 If a satisfactory arrangement cannot be set up with the University of Exeter, and alternative will be sought. Professor Janet Dwyer could be approach; she is the Professor of Rural Policy and Director of the Countryside and Community Research Institute (CCRI) at the University of Gloucestershire

16 Meetings

16.1 Project meetings have been held on 23 April 2014 and 25 March 2015.

16.2 A workshop was held on 24th September 2014 for an Exmoor audience.

16.3 Another workshop will be held on 16th September 2015 and options for this are under consideration and include:

- 16.3.1 A presentation to Natural England in the south-west;
- 16.3.2 A workshop with members of the Exmoor hill farming project;
- 16.3.3 An invitation to the commoners on Bodmin Moor;
- 16.3.4 Involvement of the NFU uplands committee, the National Beef Association and / or the National Sheep Association;

16.4 As before, the best format is likely to be a 'talk & walk' event, starting in the Village Hall and moving onto the moor in the afternoon.

17 Communications

17.1 A newsletter, based on this Annual Report will be circulated to the network of contacts established for the Project. **Action: Project Manager**.

17.2 The names of people on the network will be circulated around the Project Group and details of errors or omissions requested. **Action: Project Manager**.

18 Additional Funding

18.1 Malcolm McEwan Trust have confirmed their 50% contribution to the cost of the Aerial Photographic Analysis. Molland Estate is paying the other half.

18.2 Prince's Countryside Fund

- 18.2.1 The Project Manager attended a workshop about this fund in Warwick on 5 March 2015.

- 18.2.2 Reflecting on the Eligibility Criteria following the workshop, the decision was reached that there was no justification for an application to this Fund.