

Habitat management for the Wood White

Woodland rides

Aim to maintain a continuity of open sunny rides, with grass or scrub margins that are lightly shaded by surrounding trees and have abundant vetches.

Ride Management

Rotational cutting of clearings and rides is most beneficial. The time of year and frequency of cutting plays a key role in determining the composition and structure of ride vegetation, but this is also affected by soil type so the effect will vary between sites. Cutting at any time of year, whatever method is used to cut and remove material, is very likely to affect or destroy some life stages so it is important to only cut part of the verge in any one year and to monitor the impact. Length of rotation will depend on the individual site, but edges can be mown every 2 to 4 years and scrub margins cut every 4 to 8 years. Cutting in autumn and winter months is preferable.

Periodic cutting of scrub margins is beneficial to keep rides as sunny as possible and to provide suitable conditions for the growth of larval foodplants and nectar plants. Connectivity between existing breeding habitat can be improved by widening overgrown, shaded rides. Scallops and box junctions can also be created to make the breeding habitat more open and to create refuge habitat away from the verge edges. Management should be planned in sections to avoid disrupting large areas at any time.

Combining Conservation Management with Forestry Operations

Forestry operations may have significant impacts on breeding areas along rides. The road/verge edge tends to receive regular disturbance as all operational forest roads undergo periodic maintenance (grading) during which this zone is scraped back to bare ground. This ground disturbance eventually

creates good breeding habitat but will destroy it in the short term. Wherever possible, grading should be carried out in sections or on one ride margin at a time.

Features such as turning circles and loading bays can also provide good breeding habitat, but again this habitat will be damaged or destroyed at intervals. This is also the case for most roadside ditches, created to take the run-off from the surfaced roads. These ditches, their banks and associated vegetation provide habitat for Wood White, but they will be regularly re-dug, with spoil removed to the ditch banks or verge edge.

Other activities such as timber removal will affect the verge habitats. Vehicles, including forestry machinery, will often need to use the verge and timber is regularly stacked on ride edges for considerable periods of time.

A range of possible solutions include: -

- Ensuring that the entire ride network is not managed uniformly in any one year.
- Providing refuge breeding areas.
- Monitoring key breeding areas so that potential problems can be avoided or mitigated.
- Putting in place temporary protection of some habitats (such as temporary fencing around a particularly sensitive patch during forestry work)

High Forest Rotation and Coppicing

Suitable conditions can be provided by ensuring a sequence of felling and replanting to create an uneven-aged forest, combined with the maintenance of a network of sunny rides and glades. Re-introduction of coppicing can also improve woodland structure and provide suitable semi-shaded habitat. As with other woodlands, a wide ride network is also needed in coppiced woods.

Hedgerows and grass/scrub mosaics

Maintain open but sheltered habitat containing abundant vetches in and around scrub patches and along adjacent hedgerows.

Grazing

Heavy grazing by either sheep or cattle is generally unsuitable as this removes the tall grass/scrub margins to field edges. Extensive cattle grazing is probably the most suitable regime, but should be combined with periodic cutting of scrub/hedge margins or rotational scrub or hedge management (c. 10 to 20 years). Domestic livestock grazing regimes should also take account of deer and rabbit populations which can have a significant deleterious impact.

Cutting

On sites with no grazing, periodic grass cutting can be beneficial, although this should be done on a long rotation without cutting all suitable areas in any one year. As with grazing, scrub/hedge margins should be cut periodically, preferably on rotation, to create abundant young scrub where vetches and grass can grow through.

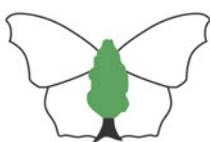
On coastal undercliffs, the optimum balance of scrub/grass interface with abundant vetches is largely maintained by continual cliff falls and soil slippage. However, periodic scrub clearance may also be beneficial at these sites if it is safe to do so.



Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil on ride edge



Breeding habitat in woodland with differently mown ride edges



Butterfly Conservation

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment

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