

Habitat management for the Silver-spotted Skipper

The overall aim is to maintain a short turf (1-5cm), ideally with small patches of bare ground or broken turf.

Grazing

Best results are achieved by a rotational grazing regime, for example by sheep grazing in spring/early summer (but not after June) and cattle grazing in autumn/winter. However, simpler systems can still be effective. Some sites are currently maintained purely by rabbit grazing, but livestock grazing should be reintroduced wherever possible as rabbit numbers are unpredictable and may be reduced by disease outbreak in future.

Sheep Grazing

Grazing by sheep alone can create suitable conditions, providing there is little or no grazing in late summer (to prevent overgrazing of the foodplant) and high enough stocking levels at other times to break up the sward and create bare patches. Where there are steep slopes or high rabbit numbers the stocking density required to break up the turf will not be so high.

Cattle Grazing

Because of their larger size, cattle naturally break up the turf to create suitable bare patches, and unlike sheep do not need to be taken off in late summer. Reasonably high grazing levels are required to achieve the short turf, though lighter levels can be suitable on steep, low productivity sites. Little is known about best times of year for cattle grazing, though autumn/winter regimes are known to be good at creating the light poaching that provides suitable breeding conditions.

Grazing levels

The exact grazing levels needed to create suitable conditions for the butterfly will depend on local rabbit numbers. With high rabbit numbers there is some leeway in the stocking density and a reduced need for heavy grazing, but where rabbits are absent or present in low numbers the level of grazing by livestock is very important.

Scrub control

The presence of scattered patches of scrub may be beneficial to the Silver-spotted Skipper as it provides shelter and slightly warmer conditions for breeding on adjacent downland. However, scrub removal may be needed on some sites, especially where periods of light grazing have allowed scrub invasion. A proportion of the scrub should be removed leaving some strategically placed small patches for shelter. Stumps should be treated with herbicide to prevent regrowth where necessary and all cut material removed.

below Position of eggs on foodplant



below Ideal habitat in short grazed turf, with bare patches and paths used for egg-laying



**Butterfly
Conservation**

Saving butterflies, moths and their habitats

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