

Legislation

- Legislation does not permit disturbance to nesting birds. To avoid disturbance scrub management should not occur between 1 March - 31 August. Other protected species may be also be present and advice should be sought before embarking on major works.
- When burning arisings a Waste Exemption Form must be completed. Visit the Environment Agency website www.environment-agency.gov.uk or tel 0845 603 3113.
- Legislation applies to the safe use of pesticides especially near to watercourses and wetlands. Visit www.environment-agency.gov.uk for further information.
- Pesticide use is not permitted in holdings registered as organic or undergoing conversion.
- Ensure you have Natural England consent if your land is supported by Environmental Stewardship or is a designated site (eg SSSI).
- If large volumes of scrub and trees are being removed a felling licence may be required. Visit www.forestry.gov.uk for further information.

Sources of funding

- Scrub management payments may be available to land managers under the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme administered by Natural England (see Advice note 10 - Where to find out more information). There are no capital works options available under Entry Level Stewardship.
- The Working Wetlands Small Grant Award may be able to support scrub management works where HLS is unavailable (see advice note 9) – for more details contact the Working Wetlands team. tel 01409 221823 email working.wetlands@devonwildlifetrust.org

Sources of information

- The Scrub Management Handbook (IN124) and Herbicide Handbook (IN125) are both available as downloads from the publications pages of the Natural England website www.naturalengland.org.uk
- Working Wetlands can offer detailed advice on scrub management and can create a scrub management plan for your Culm grassland site. For more details contact the Working Wetlands team.

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Advice note | Scrub management



Devon



The main threat to Culm grasslands is no longer agricultural improvement but abandonment. If left unmanaged grasslands are at risk of scrub encroachment. The first colonisers will be species such as willow and thorns. The best defence against scrub encroachment is appropriate cattle or pony grazing.

Scrub encroachment often starts at field edges, where seeds from boundary hedge shrubs and trees fall and become established. Willow and gorse are particularly troublesome as their seeds are easily dispersed into the field. Both species will establish quickly where mechanised management or burning (see Advice note 6 - Swaling) is difficult. As scrub thickens and matures it deters livestock grazing, further increasing the rate of encroachment.

However, scrub can be very important for wildlife. Many species of insects and birds use scrub for food and shelter. There is a delicate balance to be struck between clearing scrub to maintain important open grassland habitats, and leaving some scrub for wildlife. It is important to manage scrub on a routine basis and not wait until large areas have matured and become difficult to cut, graze or burn. This limits the management options available resulting in greater cost to the land manager and increased disturbance to wildlife.

Scrub management best practice

- Aim for approximately 10% scrub in Culm grasslands – do not remove scrub completely.
- It is important to retain a range of ages and types of scrub.
- Scrub management should occur in late autumn and winter (September - end of February) to avoid disturbing nesting birds and wildlife (see Legislation).
- Some mature trees may be retained, and are valuable for wildlife. Avoid leaving large numbers of mature birch trees as these will readily set seed. Leaving too many trees will impede management and shade the valuable grasslands below.
- Many native scrub species will rapidly re-grow from cut stumps. Paint or spot-spray freshly cut stumps with a suitable herbicide such as *Glyphosate*. Re-growth can be spot-sprayed in summer, but this technique risks damaging adjacent grassland (see Legislation).
- Tall stands of common gorse should be managed as a priority. Western gorse is smaller and less invasive. Both species are important features in Culm grasslands if routinely managed.
- Keep a watchful eye on scrub encroachment and prioritise areas that require management. The Working Wetlands team can help you create your own scrub and burning management plan.
- A flail-mower can be effective for managing young scrub. For difficult sites Working Wetlands may be able to loan a low ground pressure tractor and flail-mower.
- Targeted grazing with cattle and ponies is an effective way of managing young scrub and re-growth.
- Avoid burning large volumes of scrub cuttings on sensitive areas, near to a watercourse or near an archaeological feature.
- Periodic, controlled burning (swaling) in the late winter months on suitable Culm grassland habitats can be an effective way of managing young scrub (see Advice note 6 – Swaling).



Limited areas of mature dense scrub are good for insects and nesting birds.

Young scrub can be managed by flail-mowing on rotation. This should not occur in the spring or summer months.

Livestock grazing can help to control young scrub growth.

Periodic winter swaling will control young scrub.

Burn scrub arisings in newly cleared sites away from sensitive areas.

Good quality patches of Culm grassland should be kept open and ideally increased in area.

Common gorse can quickly take over and smother desirable plants.

Extensive bramble growth can restrict access and livestock grazing, so it needs to be restricted to small clumps or field margins.

Cut stumps should be treated to prevent re-growth.

Stumps left too high can seriously restrict future management operations.