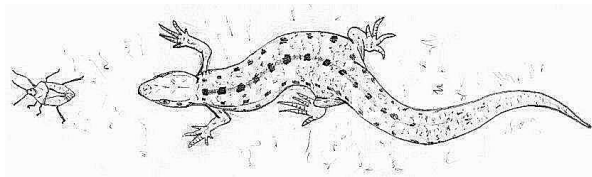


GRASSLAND HABITAT PROJECT

Shotover Wildlife is coordinating an important new project to convert areas of bracken at Shotover Country Park to 'acidic grassland' (see Box 1). This habitat is characterised by short grass, locally rare flowers and patches of bare soil. The bare soil is particularly important for Shotover's rare insects and tiny rare plants (see Box 2). Compared to the areas of bracken, the improvement to wildlife diversity will be considerable.

An integral part of this project is to create tranquil new places to sit, or areas to look at while walking on Horspath Common.



Both *Natural England* and *Oxford City Council* support the project for two reasons. Firstly, the area is within *Brasenose Wood and Shotover Hill Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)*, and secondly, much of the wildlife that will benefit from the project has declined in the UK through loss of habitat. Although most of these species are already on Shotover, many are in decline here too. This is because the acidic grassland of the past has been gradually replaced by bracken and scrub.

The new areas are undoubtedly helping to secure some of Shotover's special plants and animals, for many years to come.

Box 1

'Lowland dry acidic grassland' is a nationally recognised habitat and is closely linked with heather-covered heathland. It is a protected habitat under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

Many of these areas are historic habitats associated with hundreds of years of animal grazing, and wherever grazing has ceased they eventually become overtaken with bracken, gorse and scrubby woodland. At sites where it is not possible to graze animals, it is generally considered necessary to intervene occasionally to manage the succession in other ways, and allow the special wildlife diversity to flourish.

Shotover Hill still has small areas of very good quality acidic grassland and it is a natural habitat on the hill linked to the sandy geology.

The habitat is rare in Oxfordshire, which is why some of the associated plants and insects are also rare in the County.

Over recent years, and particularly in 2008, members of *Shotover Wildlife* have surveyed and recorded wildlife over the whole project area to make sure that the work will not harm existing plants or animals. We are fortunate that the natural

history of Shotover Hill has been studied for more than 300 years. By comparing our work with that of previous naturalists we can see which species have declined or been lost over time, and investigate the reasons for these changes.

The Project Work

Most of the heavy project work will be done by mechanical excavator, and will remove the bracken and topsoil. This material will be used to create special new habitats for a variety of animals. The excavator will be on site 2 or 3 times, each for a few days, during 2008 and 2009. Then in addition to this, the detailed structuring of the habitat will be completed by *Shotover Wildlife* during some of our regular Conservation Work Days (held on the 2nd Sunday each month). You are very welcome to come and join us.



We hope you will enjoy the new habitat.

If you have any comments or concerns please get in touch with *Shotover Wildlife* on 01865 874423 or Oxford City Council on 01865 715830.

Box 2

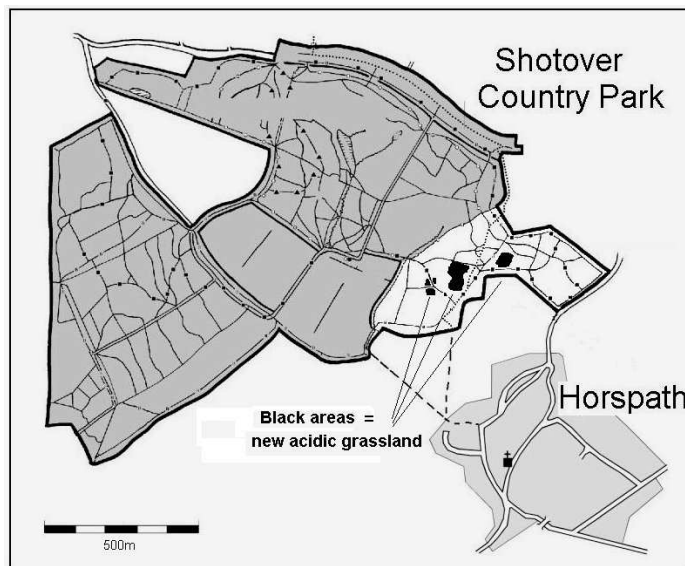
Rare species to benefit

Rare flowers on Shotover include Sand Spurrey, Bird's-foot and Trailing St. John's-wort: all of which would be significantly reduced in the County if lost from Shotover (see SW's leaflet *Heathland Flowers on Shotover*).

The unusual dry and sandy soils of Shotover are host to many specially adapted insects as well as the acidic grassland plants. Over recent years much effort has gone into establishing whether Shotover is still important for the groups of insects that were studied by Oxford University over 80 years ago.

Shotover Wildlife has found that Shotover remains a nationally important reserve for bees and wasps, with nearly 200 different species recorded over recent years (see SW's leaflet *Bees and Wasps on Shotover*). Studies of other insect groups are still in progress, but already there have been recent records of nationally scarce beetles and flies.

Apart from sandy features such as the well-known sandpit, it is only the worn paths of the Country Park that provide some species with the bare soil that they require. This is why the Grassland Habitat Project will be leaving areas of bare soil that will only very gradually become covered with vegetation.



Visit
www.shotover-wildlife.org.uk/ghp

The Shotover Grassland Habitat Project

Contact

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Shotover Wildlife is a voluntary organisation founded to research and communicate the importance of Shotover Hill for wildlife

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Pictures: Panel 1 - Common Lizard with Shield Bug
Panel 3 - Harebell Logo - Bloody-nose Beetle

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GRASSLAND HABITAT PROJECT on SHOTOVER

