NATURAL ENGLAND
LEVEL 9
RENSLADE HOUSE
BONHAY ROAD
EXETER
DEVON EX4 3AW

Ian and Maggie Ripper
Wheatland Farm
Winkleigh
Devon
EX19 8DJ

Your reference: AG00351177

Our reference:

Date: 23rd May 2016

Dear Ian and Maggie,

Popehouse Moor SSSI – AG00351177

Thank you for allowing us to visit Wheatland Farm last week and for taking the time to meet us on site. I was pleased with how the Higher Level Stewardship is progressing and the condition of the SSSI which continues to provide wonderful wildlife habitat under your management.

I was pleased to see that you have completed all your capital works with hedges laid, fencing and water supply installed, all to a good standard.

Laid and fenced hedge on Popehouse Moor SSSI

The SSSI culm grassland and continues to be in a favourable condition and is showing a diversity of flowering plants. My notes and management recommendations for each field are listed below:-

Field 6377 – Popehouse Moor SSSI
The scrub has been cleared to an excellent standard and regrowth is minimal. However, it is important to keep a careful watch for any regrowth and deal with it as soon as possible by cutting and treating. It is also important to keep an eye on remaining wood piles that are left in the more inaccessible areas as these can also re-sprout or become overgrown with bramble causing management issues in the future. There was some bramble encroachment to the west of the SSSI and I would recommend clearing this area before it get bigger and harder to tackle. It was nice to see some Culm species re-cololonise from where scrub was cleared.

An area of scrub clearance on Popehouse Moor SSSI

The level of grazing across the SSSI is good with a diverse range of sward height and flora. However it may be suitable to introduce some pony grazing as they are more likely to graze on the soft rush and open up areas for flowering species where the rush is more dominant. If you do go down this route two ponies should be sufficient but as always keep an eye on grazing levels and amend as necessary. I will amend your agreement to reflect this.

Popehouse Moor SSSI looking to the west

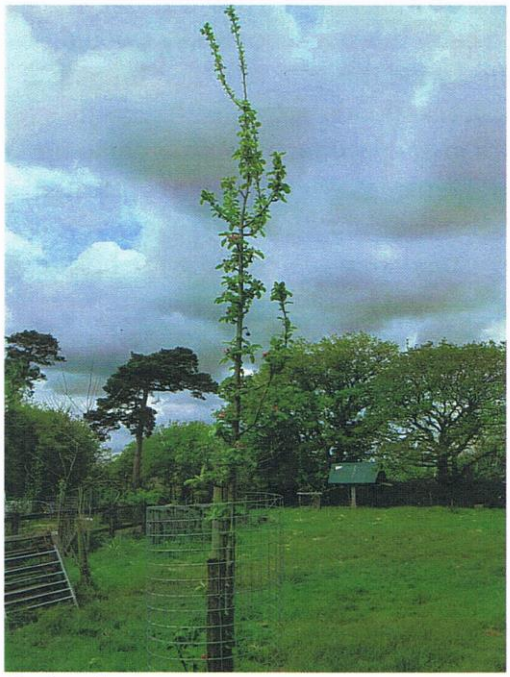
Field 5090

It was very pleasing to see an increase in species diversity in this field; in particular the greater bird's foot trefoil was doing very well. Other species observed included sorrel, ragged robin and bog stitchwort. However the soft rush has become much more dominant and this could reduce species diversity in the future. Previously you have managed the soft rush through cutting however I think the level is such that it would be worthwhile considering a harder approach such as weed-wiping. To carry this out successfully I would recommend grazing hard towards the end of the grazing period this year and then topping the rushes late September. Weed wiping is much more successful on young fresh growth. This would hopefully leave the field in a condition where in early spring the rushes come up first leaving a height differential between the grass and the rushes. Weed wiping could then commence once the rushes are at approximately six inches in height. However, every year is different and if the grass height is keeping up with the rushes you may need to graze before weed-wiping. The height difference is required so that the grass is not affecting by the weed wiping. The best chemical for weed wiping is Round up pro biactive. As the use of herbicide is not permitted under this field option I will provide you with a derogation for this work. Please keep me informed of progress.

Soft rush across field 5090

Field 6706 - Orchard

It was great to see the orchard planted up and tree guards in. The trees are doing well although you are right to be concerned by the trees growing straight up with little or no branches. Whilst I am sure its not a major concern I would consider contacting the nursey you purchased the trees from to see if they can offer guidance on pruning.



Orchard

Fields 6377 and 7173 – Woodland

The areas of woodland are looking great with a good structure of ground, understorey and dead wood. It would be nice to see a few more glades opened up here to let in more light and aid tree age diversity by enabling saplings to grow.

Woodland, Field

Overall I am very happy with the management of the Higher Level Stewardship and pleased to find the SSSI remaining in favourable condition and so diverse. I am really pleased that your capital works are complete. Should you have any queries regarding the above or any other aspect of the management of your Environmental Stewardship agreement and SSSI please contact me on the number below.

Yours sincerely,

Becky Aston
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