

Sea Buckthorn on Dunes and Grazing

Extracts from Nibblers online discussion group

I am grappling with the thorny issue of sea buckthorn *Hippophae rhamnoides* as designated interest feature on a Lincolnshire coast Special Area of Conservation (SAC). This means managing sea buckthorn scrub rather than simply trying to eliminate it.

I have been asked by a colleague negotiating an HLS agreement whether the traditional breeds supplement is necessary in order to manage the scrub - he is inclined to refuse it, I suspect that commercial breeds are unlikely to find it very palatable.

Does anyone have experience of breeds (commercial, rare or Traditional) that browse sea buckthorn and would be suitable for controlling young suckers in dune grassland or (and here I'm just thinking cattle) browsing mature scrub and trampling a way through thickets. I know that Hebridean sheep happily browse every leaf off suckers in the late autumn/early winter but wonder if commercial breeds (Suffolks or mules) would do the same.

Claire

Claire Weaver
(Lincolnshire Land Management Team)

I assume you have spoken to Kev Wilson at Gibraltar Point? If not, he's your man. They have Hebridean sheep there and are also just in the process of introducing some Dexter cattle.

My concern with cattle on dunes would be possible physical damage to the dune structure?

I do not have experience with commercial sheep breeds on Sea Buckthorn, but I can verify that Suffolks and Mules are not effective browsers of blackthorn, hawthorn or bramble - they are simply not interested - and are also likely to lose condition rapidly if faced with limited or poor quality grazing.

Cathy

Cathy Wainwright

Grazing Manager, The Wildlife Trust BCNP

Claire

Hebrideans were used to great effect on sea buckthorn in Humberside (see Braithwaite report c.1990). I'm not clear why a traditional breeds supplement would be refused under HLS. Thick-coated cattle - Highland or Belties - would seem the answer for your thickets, although we have used White Park in woodland with heavy undergrowth.

Lawrence Alderson

It seems to me there is growing anecdotal evidence that TBI options in HLS are getting the squeeze in order to save money. As we know this will be a false economy - putting the wrong stock in place can jeopardise conservation work, making it harder to put right in the long run.

Still, now that I understand the squeeze on HLS funds is to make sure that the interruption to Bernard Matthews' internationally significant business operation is kept to less than a week, I am more comfortable with why the conservation of the nation's environmental assets is compromised.

D Hodd

Hi Claire,

I hesitate to offer an alternative to Hebrideans when I could sell you some, but on the Sefton coast Herdwick have been used for scrub control since 1990. Sea buckthorn is one of the problem species but I don't know how well it is controlled by sheep grazing - try Mike Downey at Ainsdale NNR (I can give you contact details if needed).

Cathy is right about cattle causing damage to dune structure, but on the Sefton coast over-stabilisation is now seen as the problem, so if that is the case in Lincolnshire cattle may be the answer. I am old enough to have seen (and show students) the objectives of dune management change from stabilisation with fences, sand trapping with ex-Christmas trees, marram planting etc. to the current policy of encouraging a proportion of bare sand for sand lizards, dune tiger beetles and some dune annuals. What comes round...

Richard

Dr. R. W. Small,

Programme Leader, Wildlife Conservation,
School of Biological and Earth Sciences,
Liverpool John Moores University,

Dear Richard,

nice to hear from you, the contact details for Mike Downey would be useful. I have contacted a Natural England colleague there but the more the merrier to gain soundings from.

Thanks for the offer of some Hebrideans, they already have some at Gibraltar Point and it is these same woolly fur-balls that I'd like to secure the Traditional Breed supplement over.

They also have some cattle - 5 or 6 Dexters were used last winter - but I have yet to see the full impact of these as the grazing area was large and the beasts were small. The

dunes are very fixed and some bare sand communities would be welcomed - although large scale Hippophae removal may well help to achieve this one!

We took custody of 10 Portland sheep last autumn and have been presented by 2 lambs so far, both of which chose to arrive during the only cold/wet/windy periods of this so called winter. They are both doing well, despite my concerns that a southern 'downland' breed lamb might catch chill. Call me a daft 'apeth but I put the Jack Russell's waterproof jacket on the lamb that arrived the day before a sleet storm and it wobbled around for a couple of days in fluorescent yellow. The things we do for our livestock. Hope lambing goes smoothly with your Heb.s and that sales are hearty.

All best wishes

Claire

Claire Weaver

(Lincolnshire Land Management Team) Natural England
