**CONSERVATION ADVISOR REPORT – Baker's Mill Community Association -Great Cornard**

Advisors Name: Cathy Smith, Conservation Adviser

Tel. 01473 890089
Date of site visit: 09/05/2023

Name of Project leader: Mike Fitzmaurice, Bakers Mill Community Association

Attendee: Nicole Gay, resident

Location: Dove House Meadow, Great Cornard CO10 0GG

Grid Reference: TL882401

**Enquiry**
The community association would like advice on the extent and timing of undergrowth around the mill race in order to minimise disturbance to wildlife whilst also maintaining the appearance of the estate.

## Contents

Summary of the woodland creation field ..... 1
Species ..... 2
Management proposals ..... 2
Hedge base ..... 3
Mill pond ..... 3
Log piles and stag beetles ..... 4
Hedgehogs ..... 5
Wildlife recording ..... 5
Further support ..... 5
Resources: ..... 6

## Summary of the woodland creation field

**Soilscape 20:** Loamy and clayey floodplain soils with naturally high groundwater

**Approximate area:** 0.1 ha

**Designations:** Some of the land managed by the residents committee is within 8m of a main river so certain activities will be subject to Environment Agency regulations.

**Habitat Connectivity:** Bakers Mill race is approximately 25m east of the river Stour. The river, together with fringing green spaces creates a wildlife corridor. To the east gardens and amenity green spaces also contribute towards habitat availability.

**Recent history and management:** A gardener is employed to look after the green spaces around Baker's Mill.

## Species

A full ecological survey was not carried out and for mobile species consideration of a greater area would be required for planning purposes. Also note that an absence of records doesn't not mean that a species is not present as demonstrated by reported sightings of bats.

**National Biological Atlas records within 1km include:**

**Protected Species:**
Stag beetle, otter.

**Birds of Conservation Concern, red listed**
Swift, greenfinch, cuckoo, house martin, yellow hammer, linnet, spotted flycatcher, house sparrow, skylark, starling, mistle thrush, fieldfare.

**Additional species of Principal Importance Section 41 NERC Act 2006** (known as priority species) Hedgehog, song thrush, bullfinch, dunnock.



## Management proposals

A report was prepared by SWT in 2016 to help direct management for wildlife whilst balancing the needs of residents. Reference has been sort from this report as much of the advice is still relevant. Be aware that some of the land managed by the community association may fall under Environment Agency regulations.

## Hedge base

The base of the hedge has been sown with wildflowers which appear to have successfully germinated. In the first year allow the plants to flower and set seed then cut in late summer and remove cuttings (known as arisings) to prevent them swamping out newly established wildflowers. Ongoing management involves cutting on a two – three rotation, in other words, cut half to a third in one year, whilst leaving the remainder to stand over winter which will provide habitat for creatures such as overwintering bumblebees. In subsequent years cut a different section.

## Mill pond



The pond itself is cleared of debris every three years. To minimise the impact to pond life and to avoid the bird breeding season, this work is best done from September – January (or from November-January if great crested newts are present) As is currently the case, ensure silt is removed from the pond edge so not to enrich bankside soils. When de-silting aim to leave a minimum of 25% of the pond plants and marginal vegetation.

Bankside scrub can be a valuable refuge for wildlife. Brambles provide forage for pollinating insects then later berries to be enjoyed by birdlife. The network of bramble stems is an ideal place for hedgehogs to make a temporary or breeding nest. Try and retain some but cut back on a three rotational basis to thicken up the base and prevent it encroaching. This work should be timed to avoid the bird breeding season, for guidance the bird breeding season is considered February – end of August. If bramble wands advance and cause a trip hazard, cut back as necessary.

Nettles are an important food plant for the caterpillars of some butterflies such as red admiral and peacock. For egg laying butterflies tend to select larger clumps (of approximately $2m^2$) of fresh nettle growth particularly where it is in a sunny location. Try and retain some nettles on site, but if unacceptable on the bank of the mill pond, this could be in blocks along the

riverbank. Nettles can be cut in June-July to encourage new growth favourable to egg laying and at the same time reduces nettle height which can be more acceptable to people.

Where you wish to reduce nettle cover, cut and rake 3-4 times during the growing season. Removing cut top growth should gradually reduce soil fertility and allow other plant species to thrive. Ensure any management does not cause the moorhens we saw to abandon their nests, all breeding birds are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

## Log piles and stag beetles

Although soils in the immediate area are not ideal, there are records for stag beetle *Lucanus cervus* within 1Km. Stag beetles are a priority species of conservation concern in Suffolk. They lay their eggs in decaying broadleaved wood in contact with the ground or below ground level found in a semi-shaded location and prefer free draining soils. It is important that the logs or tree stumps are undisturbed as it can take between three to seven years for larvae to pupate into adults. Females do not travel far, and sometimes lay their eggs where they have emerged, so continuity of deadwood habitat is important.

The log pile by the pond is potential habitat for them and could also be used by hedgehogs for breeding or hibernation. The log pile is however a little overlarge and includes some planed timber, most likely from a previous fence. Carefully reducing the size of the log pile could make it more aesthetically acceptable whilst retaining habitat functionality.

There are local records of otter and there is the potential for otters to use bankside vegetation, the mill race or log piles. Otters are strictly protected from disturbance or harm; it is an offence to damage or destroy their breeding sites and resting places - even if otters are not present. Otters are active all year round so use due diligence when managing habitats.



An additional log pile along the river walk was where we spotted a cardinal beetle and oyster mushroom and demonstrates the value of this habitat to wildlife.

Other things you can do to help stag beetles includes retaining tree stumps in situ, creating new log piles or stag beetle pyramids (in the latter logs are placed vertically and two part-buried) and avoiding mowing close to log piles whilst adults are emerging. Along with our website, the Great Stag beetle hunt website is a great resource, you can submit a stag beetle feature or record sightings.

### Hedgehogs

Due to steep declines hedgehogs are a species of principal importance. There are numerous hedgehog records in the area and Baker's Mill provides good foraging opportunities for them. The hedgerow base, log piles and occasion scrub offer nesting and overwintering potential. Habitat connectivity is important for hedgehogs, it is estimated that hedgehogs require 1km$^2$ for a viable population of 32 individuals so encourage gardeners to leave small gaps of 13cm x 13cm under fences so hedgehogs can enter and move through the landscape.

Hedgehogs eat a wide range of invertebrates including beetles, caterpillars, earthworms and slugs. Discuss with residents' alternative methods of pest control to minimise or avoid pesticide use as chemical controls will have a detrimental effect on the food supply for hedgehogs, reptiles as well as bird species. Our reports 'Insect declines and why they matter' and 'Reversing the decline of insects' may help you communicate the importance.

## Wildlife recording

Wildlife recording is a tool for monitoring management and can help with public engagement. There are species recording sites for swifts, hedgehogs and stag beetles but otherwise we recommend lodging with Suffolk Biological Records either directly or through i-Record. The i-record platform allows for groups to set up their own space for collective records and has a process for verification. There is also an app-based platform i-naturalist.

## Further support

- In addition to our existing programme of wildlife and nature courses for adults, this year we will be running workshops for Parish Councils and community groups. These will give groups opportunity to learn new skills and share experience with others. Check the events listings for further details and bookings.
- Our TeamWilder webpage includes further information about habitat management. It also has a map where individuals and groups can share their action for wildlife. It would be great if Baker's Mill would add their pin to the map to help inspire others.
- At a local level, working more closely with other wildlife and environment community groups locally could bring benefits through meeting like-minded people, sharing of expertise and experience. As you are aware there is a newly formed wildlife and environment group in Great Cornard.

It was a pleasure to meet you, do keep in touch and let us know how you get on.

Yours sincerely

Cathy Smith
Conservation Adviser

## Resources:

MAGIC Maps DEFRA
Magic Map Application (defra.gov.uk)

Soilscapes
Soilscapes soil types viewer - National Soil Resources Institute. Cranfield University (landis.org.uk)

Flood risk activities: environmental permits
Flood risk activities: environmental permits - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Stag Beetles
Stag Beetle | Suffolk Wildlife Trust
Stag Beetles - record your sightings for the Great Stag Hunt - PTES

Hedgehogs
Hedgehogs | Suffolk Wildlife Trust

Records of hedgehog friendly gardening and sightings
Home - Hedgehog Street

Wildlife recording
Suffolk Biological Recording Online | Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service (suffolkbis.org.uk)

iRecord | Manage and share your wildlife records (brc.ac.uk)

Setting up an iRecord activities for local groups - YouTube

iNaturalist
A Community for Naturalists · iNaturalist United Kingdom

Community Wildlife Surveying booklet
https://www.suffolkwildlifetrust.org/communitygreenspaces

SWT TeamWilder
Team Wilder | Suffolk Wildlife Trust

Great Cornard Environment and Wildlife Group contact: cornardewg@gmail.com
About Us | Cornard Environment & Wildlife Group (wordpress.com)

SWT Wild learning courses and workshops for community groups
Courses | Suffolk Wildlife Trust

Gardening for Wildlife Guides
Wildlife gardening guides | Suffolk Wildlife Trust

Action for Insects
Action for insects | Suffolk Wildlife Trust

Additional information can be found on our website
Habitat & species advice | Suffolk Wildlife Trust