

Clearance of Scots pine *Pinus sylvestris* to restore heathland at Hurn, Dorset, England

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SUMMARY

In January 2002, with the aim being to reinstate heathland vegetation, an area of 0.75 ha was cleared of Scots pine *Pinus sylvestris* and some maritime pine *P. pinaster* trees. Prior to clearance the area supported little heathland vegetation, predominantly comprising bare ground with some bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*. Three and a half years after clearance, the area supported a range of common generalist, non-heathland plant species, and was being invaded by silver birch *Betula pendula* saplings.

BACKGROUND

Encroachment of trees and scrub onto heathland areas poses a major problem for heathland managers. Without removal, tree species such as birch *Betula* and pine *Pinus* can dominate, shading out the dwarf shrub community and resulting in a loss of many of the species associated with that community. Removal of mature trees can be time consuming and controversial.

Clearance of Scots pine *Pinus sylvestris* and maritime pine *P. pinaster* by the RSPB Heathland Project part of St Leonards Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) southern England, is described here. The work was carried out as part of a wider programme of heathland management conducted across the nationally important Dorset Heaths.

ACTION

Locality: The pine clearance was undertaken on privately owned land at Hurn within St Leonards SSSI (National Grid ref: SU 125025), Dorset, southern England.

Pine clearance: The area cleared was 0.75 ha of mature, dense (approx. 75% cover) Scots pine and some maritime pine woodland. The trees were cleared in January 2002 using chainsaws. Cut material was chipped (and some burnt) on site.

Vegetation prior to clearance: Prior to

clearance the area supported little heathland vegetation and was predominantly bare ground, with some bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*, underneath a thick pine canopy.

CONSEQUENCES

The area was revisited in August 2005, three and a half years after the clearance. The area supported a range of generalist, non-heathland plant species. Much of the cleared area was being invaded by silver birch saplings. Percentage cover estimates of vegetation within the cleared area in August 2005 were:

- 40% silver birch *Betula pendula* (saplings all around 1 m tall)
- 20% spear thistle *Cirsium vulgare*
- 10% common fleabane *Pulicaria dysenterica*
- 10% bare ground
- <5% sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina*
- <5% dog rose *Rosa canina*
- <5% common centuary *Centaureum erythraea*
- <5% bramble *Rubus fruticosus*
- <5% common cat's ear *Hypochaeris radicata*
- <5% common ragwort *Senecio jacobae*

No further management work had been conducted since the original clearance, but cattle-grazing in the area is planned for 2005-6.

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