



**CARAVAN CLUB ECOLOGICAL
SITE APPRAISAL**



Top Lodge
Caravan Club Site
Fineshade
Corby
Lincolnshire NN17 3BB



General Information

Site Name and County: Top Lodge, Fineshade, Corby, Lincolnshire NN17 3BB

Grid Reference: SP9798

Date: 28 July 2006

Recorder: Rodney West , JUST ECOLOGY

Weather Conditions: Bright, cool, light winds, 21°C

Site Description

The site is on the top of a ridge and completely surrounded by the mixed broadleaved and coniferous woodland that is Fineshade Wood.

About half of the site's 83 pitches are on hard standings surrounded by mown amenity grassland (on which the remaining standings are situated). All are arranged on either side of the main metalled track, which runs as a circuit around the site. Two woodland dog walks extend out from the site's eastern boundary. The site is in effect a large woodland glade with nearly a kilometre of woodland edge – a prime habitat for many species.

Context

The site is within the area designated by English Nature as Rockingham Forest (Natural Area 45). This includes a wide range of habitats including; arable and agriculturally improved pasture, ancient semi-natural broadleaved woodland, unimproved calcareous grassland, unimproved mesotrophic grasslands, spring, marshes and swamps on wet ground and beside rivers. Man-made lakes such as Eyebrook Reservoir and Rutland Water, both within 10km, are part of the local landscape.

The close proximity of the site to the woodland and grassland habitats of Rockingham Forest gives the site potential to be colonised or used by plant and animal species typical of these habitats.

Broad Habitats Present: Improved Grassland, Coniferous and Broadleaved woodland.

BAP Priority Habitats Present: Remnant features of ancient semi-natural woodland.

Subsidiary Habitats Present: Mature 'veteran' pollarded trees.

Plant Communities Present:

Grassland Communities:

Grassland between pitches is species poor. Perennial Rye Grass *Lolium perenne* is the dominant species. In some areas a slightly more diverse sward is present including; Annual Meadow Grass *Poa annua*, Common Bent *Agrostis capillaris*, Daisy *Bellis perennis*, Creeping Cinqufoil *Potentilla reptans*, Greater Plantain *Plantago major*, and Selfheal *Prunella vulgaris*.

On the boundary between the grass sward and the gravel-based hard standings a ruderal-based habitat is developing and this includes species such as; Scarlet Pimpernel *Anagallis arvensis* and Perennial Sow-thistle *Sonchus arvensis*.

Woodland:

The site is surrounded by woodland – and lies in a large clearing within the extensive woodland known as Fineshade Wood. Groups of pitches are divided with linear areas of planting using mixed hardwood species. These were surveyed individually but contained similar groups of species which comprised; Bird Cherry *Prunus padus*, Sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*, Sweet Chestnut *Castanea sativa*, Rowan *Sorbus aucuparia*, Norway Maple *A. platanoides* and Silver Birch *Betula pendula*.

Of note are three mature pollarded White Willows *Salix alba* (Figure 1), these are nearly of 'veteran' status (5.2m girth) and are of great age, probably 250 to 300 years old; they also are a remnant of the site's previous land use as pasture. A single Primrose *Primula vulgaris* plant was found which also could be a vestige of the previous land-use.

Figure 1. Two of three willow pollards probably two to three hundred years old.



Mature woodland surrounds the site, and is part of Fineshade Wood. The areas that directly abut the site consisted either of mature Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris* with a Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* understorey, or a more diverse community of hardwoods indicative of ancient semi-natural woodland, the latter included mature examples of Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, Field Maple *Acer campestre*, Oak *Quercus robur* Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, Hazel *Corylus avellana*, Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* and Elder *Sambucus nigra*.

Woodland edge:

This site was effectively a large woodland glade. The boundary between the mown sward and the surrounding woodland is very abrupt and just beyond the mown regime area, for about one or two metres, several species of ruderals are common including; Common Nettle *Urtica dioica*, Wood Dock *Rumex sanguineus*, Creeping Buttercup *Ranunculus repens*, White Clover *Trifolium repens*, Creeping Thistle *Cirsium arvense*, Greater Burdock *Arctium lappa* and Hop *Humulus lupulus*.

Also of note and interest, but not technically ecological, is a boundary ditch and bank that extends along the entire north-west boundary of the site and is the division between the site and the adjacent Far Markham's Wood. The ditch is also evident

along the north-east side of the site and extends below the more southerly 'Dog Walk' path.

This ditch is probably medieval in date and might have marked the boundary between the existing woodland and the then pasture area that is now the site. Present today on the remaining 'bank' areas are fine examples of trees like Field Maple and Ash that are also, probably, as old as the three pollarded willows. The bank south of the 'Dog Walk', also contained coppiced examples of Hawthorn and Hazel; the bank is very slight here but can still be seen. The ground flora around the ditch contains species such as Dog's Mercury *Mercurialis perennis* and Lords and Ladies *Arum maculatum*; species seen as indicative (on some soils) of the site's origin being 'ancient woodland.'

Hedgerow

There is one section of hedgerow along part of the site's perimeter (Figure 2). It runs from the entrance for several hundred metres from the entrance and along behind the amenity block. The hedge is in very good condition and is about five metres high and three metres wide. Species make-up includes Hazel, Blackthorn, Hawthorn and Elder.

Figure 2. Hedge running along part of the site's western boundary



Wetland:

There were no wetland habitats on site.



Habitat Evaluation

The woodland surrounding the site forms an extensive tract of woodland known as Fineshade Wood, much of which is ancient semi-natural woodland with a rich flora and fauna. This woodland provides feeding and breeding habitat for a wide variety of birds and most likely other mammals such as bats, grey squirrels and badgers although, only the grey squirrel was recorded on the day of the survey.

The grassland between the pitches is of limited botanical value, being very closely mown. However it is of value to thrushes, woodpeckers and ground-burrowing invertebrates.

The length of hedgerow along the south-west boundary of the site, was in good condition and provides both feeding and breeding site potential for many species of invertebrate, birds and mammals.

Two of the mature pollarded White Willows are in height and girth close to 'veteran tree' status (girth over 5.2m) and are one of the most valuable wildlife assets of the Top Lodge site. All should be retained wherever safety is not an issue. They provide roosting and feeding sites for bats, birds and many species of invertebrates.



Species Information

BAP Species Seen: None

BAP Species Potential: Pipistrelle and other bat species are priority species listed in the UK and Lincolnshire Biodiversity Action Plan. Woodland surrounding the site had good potential for bat roosts.

Other Notable Species: Veteran pollarded willows, Adder, Dunnock, House Sparrow.

Flora:

The grassland areas have species indicative of improved and re-seeded grassland such as perennial rye-grass, white clover and dandelion. There is little opportunity to increase habitat diversity (for example with areas of longer grass) except possibly at the south-east corner of the site. Woodland surrounding the site has great biodiversity potential, particularly as it is mature, has a good shrub layer and is largely undisturbed.

Shrub planting within the site, is beneficial to birds and flying insects. There is the potential to increase the nectar sources with further inter-planting or management (coppicing).

Anecdotal evidence records that a woodland specialist plant - Yellow Star of Bethlehem *Gagea lutea* (Figure 3) was once found between the site and the adjoining farm buildings that are the Forest Enterprise offices. Liaison with FE and an agreement of common management practices in this area may bring back this unusual plant.

Figure 3. Yellow Star of Bethlehem - a woodland specialist



Avifauna:

In total 18 species of birds were recorded on the site during the survey period but this is undoubtedly augmented by other woodland species including owls, though these were not recorded on the day of the survey. During winter the short turf areas would probably attract winter visitors such as Scandinavian Redwing, Fieldfare and Blackbirds.

Birds recorded using the site during the survey visit included:

Blackbird *Turdus merula*
Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus*
Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*
Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*
Coal Tit *Parus ater*
Dunnock *Prunella modularis*
Great Tit *Parus major*
Great spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*
Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*
House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*
Jay *Garrulus glandarius*)
Magpie *Pica pica*
Nuthatch *Sitta europea*
Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba yarrelli*
Robin *Erithacus rubecula*
Swallow (breeding) *Hirundo rustica*
Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*
Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Invertebrates:

Several species of butterfly were recorded along the woodland edge of the site. Pollen and nectar bearing plants were generally scarce within the site due to the fairly

intensive mowing regime. However insects were attracted to the hardwood plantings within the site and this is an area which could possibly be expanded upon. The dead wood under the woodland areas (outside of the site proper) provide suitable habitat for invertebrates, particularly detritivores and other litter dwellers.

Invertebrates recorded using the site during the survey visit included:

Meadow Brown Butterfly *Maniola jurtina*
Speckled Wood Butterfly *Pararge aegeria*
Red Admiral Butterfly *Vanessa atalanta*
Orange Tip Butterfly *Anthocharis cardamines*
Banded Demoiselle Damselfly *Calopteryx splendens*

Herptofauna:

No species of amphibian or reptile were seen during survey though anecdotal evidence records Adders *Viperus berus* being seen on the site.

Mammals:

Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*, mole *Talpa europaea* and Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis* were recorded during the survey but other small mammals such as Long-tailed Fieldmouse *Apodemus sylvatica* and Field Vole *Microtus agrestis* probably use the site as will Stoat *Mustela erminea* and Weasel *Mustela nivalis*. Badger *Meles meles* is also present nearby.

Certain species of bats use the site, anecdotal evidence suggest they hawk for moths around the electric lights on site. These will probably be Pipistrelle Bats *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*, which are priority species in both the UK and the Lincolnshire Biodiversity Action Plans. Although it remains the most abundant and widespread bat species in the UK, the Pipistrelle is thought to have undergone a significant decline in numbers this century. Estimates from the National Bat Colony Survey suggest a population decline of approximately 70% between 1978 and 1993. The current pre-breeding population estimate for the UK stands at approximately 2,000,000 (see Appendix 1). Other woodland specialists like Natterer's Bat *Myotis natterii* may use the woodland edge. This slightly less common species is also a priority species in the UK and Lincolnshire Biodiversity Action Plans.



Species Evaluation

The grassland around the pitches is species-poor and is kept short by frequent mowing, thus it is of somewhat limited value in biodiversity terms. Grassland around the perimeter of the site bordering the woodland, has a slightly higher floral diversity, providing a nectar source for butterflies, bees and other flying insects. All grassland is used by grazing rabbits.

The gravel-based hard stand areas between the mown grass are valuable basking areas for reptiles such as the common lizard and also important for ground-dwelling and burrowing invertebrates including beetles and ants. These areas are of particularly important if south-facing, as they will provide a warm micro-climate.

A good variety of bird species was recorded during the visit and it is very likely that many other species, not recorded on the day also use the site. The areas of linear small tree/shrub planting will be of value at blossom time as a resource for pollen and nectar feeding invertebrates and will also provide useful food source for birds during the winter months when food is scarce. Species such as Rowan, Cherry and Ivy are particularly valuable in this respect. The addition of several feeding and watering stations around the site would undoubtedly enhance the site's bird interest. Bird species identified as using the site and of particular note including:

Duncock: on the Amber List of Birds of Conservation Concern and is a species whose status is of some conservation concern.

House Sparrow: on the Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern and is therefore a species of high conservation importance in the UK.).

The number of butterflies and flying insects were generally low. This was most likely due to a lack of suitable grassland habitat and associated wildflowers to provide a nectar resource. Around the site's perimeter beyond the mown sward an increase in flying insects was noted. Diversity could be improved by management of the planted tree species using coppicing and some diversification of grassland habitats wherever possible (one metre wide taller grass margins).

Mammal use of the site is low, though mammals such as foxes have access to the site and badgers are known to be present locally. Although bats were not recorded during the survey, it is highly likely that one or two species are present within the surrounding woodland.

Management Recommendations

Linear areas of planting – These have already been created using mixed hardwood species, mainly native. The intention here is presumably to create screens between the parked caravans. As the trees mature and grow only the trunks will be acting as a visual barrier for the first 2/3 metres of height. We therefore propose a rolling programme of coppicing some of these trees. By cutting a few each year, they will soon bush up and can be cut again in around seven years. The following year cut a few more trees so eventually there is a five year cycle of trees regenerating from the base (stool). This way the first two or three metres will be full of leaf and branch and will provide a good screen. Adding honeysuckle and native climbing rose will also provide nectar for feeding butterflies and moths and an evening fragrance for the visitor!

Diversification of grassland - Less frequent mowing of some areas of the site would be beneficial for a range of insect, mammal and bird species, and would help to diversify the grass sward near the pitches. This could be done at a 1 metre width around the south-east of the site and elsewhere where feasible, and if left to grow longer, should be mown once a year in late August. All cuttings should be removed to prevent nutrient build up, which will encourage competitive grass species to dominate at the expense of flowers which provide important nectar sources.

Such margins of long grass will provide a valuable habitat for wildlife. Invertebrates, including the caterpillars of butterflies and moths, feed on grasses. Long grass is also favoured by many small mammals, reptiles and amphibians which in turn will attract kestrels, owls and other predators. Bats frequently hunt for insects over long grass. A variety of lengths will produce a range of habitats and species assemblages. Keeping areas of longer grass also creates an important transition zone between the mature woodland and the short grass, creating a greater range of habitats and thus a greater diversity of plants, birds, small mammals and insects.

Nectar sources for butterflies and flying insects - Amongst the more formal planting around the fences and borders on site, species such as buddleia and honeysuckle could be added. These will attract butterflies and moths and also smell pleasant in the evenings whilst people are sitting outside. Stonecrop (*Sedum telephium*) is an attractive plant that provides excellent cover, and is a favourite of butterflies such as small tortoiseshell, red admiral, painted lady, and peacock

Habitat piles - When cutting grass or hardwood, cut and stack in 'habitat piles' in out of the way places – in sunny areas if possible. Try not to burn material.

Bats and Trees - If any mature trees are marked for cutting down it is advisable to get them checked by a bat expert.

Medieval ditch and bank - This is a unique feature of this site and should be protected. Although only a ditch, it was perhaps dug five hundred years ago and is still working as a boundary feature. It has semi-natural woodland species associated with it, such as, mature Field Maple and Ash and ground flora including Dog's Mercury and Lords and Ladies. The ditch has been cut off from natural light by the modern planting which presumably went with the creation of the caravan site. If more light could be allowed back onto the ditch and bank then other plant species might benefit, like Primrose. Clearing some of the ditch would also enhance the biodiversity.

Veteran trees should be retained wherever it is safe to do so. The general principle is that veteran trees are identified, recorded and checked at regular intervals. Ideally a management plan will be drawn up, which involves assessing the site, deciding on priorities, implementation, monitoring and review. Active management should only be carried out if necessary for public safety.

Note that veteran trees are exceptionally hazardous to work on, and pollarding, removal of overhanging branches or other practical work should only be undertaken by trained and experienced operators. When assessing a veteran tree, both the individual tree and its surroundings need consideration.

Veteran trees may be cut back or removed altogether where there are worries about safety or tidiness. Old hollow trees with reduced crowns are in fact often safer than mature ones with a full crown.

The key threats to veteran trees are as follows:

- Compaction from car parking or trampling around the tree can damage the root system.
- Inappropriate management such as filling cavities with concrete, or unskilled tree surgery. Pulling away ivy, removing dead wood and other 'tidying up' is misdirected management.
- Changes in the water table can cause stress to the tree.
- Changes in the surrounding vegetation. Lack of grazing or new planting can cause the veteran to become shaded by other tree growth. Conversely, opening up a previously shaded veteran by removal of surrounding trees can also be damaging.
- As the number of veteran trees reduces, the remainder become more isolated, and the ability of organisms to spread to other veterans is therefore lessened.

Nestboxes – both open-fronted and conventional single hole (32mm diameter) boxes could be added to selective trees in the secluded areas of the site. Nestboxes need cleaning out each autumn.

Bird feeding stations – the warden already has a feeding station by the reception area and this was much in use by young, inexperienced birds during the survey visit. Further feeding stations could be added at two or three additional locations. Two or three feeders at each station could hold a variety of food. One with niger seed; one with husked sunflower seed and a third with general purpose food plus fat balls. Large plastic dishes are available to place beneath feeders to catch most of the fallen debris, these can be cleaned periodically.

Further surveys or Information Requirements

Bats –there is anecdotal evidence of bats using the site

Appendix 1 - Pipistrelle Bats

Certain species of bats may use the site for foraging (flying insects) and some may roost in convenient trees on the site or nearby. These will probably be Pipistrelle Bats (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*).

The common pipistrelle is the smallest British bat with a wingspan of about 20cms and weighing around six grams. It is the most abundant and widespread bat throughout the UK and have suffered large losses in numbers over the last twenty years.

Although it remains the most abundant and widespread bat species in the UK, the pipistrelle is thought to have undergone a significant decline in numbers this century. Estimates from the National Bat Colony Survey suggest a population decline of approximately 70% between 1978 and 1993. The current pre-breeding population estimate for the UK stands at approximately 2,000,000.

Females form maternity roosts of up to several hundred adults from May, often in house roofs but also in woodland. They give birth to a single live young in July. Males are much more solitary. Hibernation takes place from November to March. Pipistrelles forage for small insects in varied habitats but woodland edges, hedgerows and waterways are particularly important.

The pipistrelle bat is listed on Appendix III of the Bern Convention, Annex IV of the EC Habitats Directive and Appendix II of the Bonn Convention (and is included under the Agreement on the Conservation of Bats in Europe). It is protected under Schedule 2 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations, 1994 (Regulation 38) and Schedules 5 and 6 of the WCA 1981. It is also a priority species listed in the UK and Lincolnshire Biodiversity Action Plans.

Current threats to bats:

- Exclusion from roosts by human intervention
- Destruction or damage to roosts as a result of building work/development
- Barn conversions and modifications to buildings such as security lights
- Toxic effects of remedial timber treatment in roofs and other parts of buildings
- Loss and damage to natural habitats such as woodlands and older trees with crevices and cavities.

Other bat species like Natterer's Bat (*Myotis natterii*) may use the woodland edge habitat surrounding the Top Lodge site.



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2006

