



**CARAVAN CLUB ECOLOGICAL  
SITE APPRAISAL**



Cheddar  
Caravan Club Site  
Gas House Lane  
Draycott Road  
Cheddar  
BS27 3RL



**General Information**

**Site Name and County:** Cheddar Caravan Club Site, Somerset

**Grid Reference:** ST 459 527

**Area:** 1.4 hectares

**Date:** 06/07/07

**Recorder:** David Plant, JUST ECOLOGY

**Weather Conditions:** Sunny and breezy with 40% cloud cover

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### **Site Description**

This trapezium shaped site comprises a very small flat parcel of land, most areas have been filled with caravan pitches leaving little room on the site for semi-natural habitat. There are hedges around the four sides of the site; there has also been new planting in several areas on site. The site's 64 pitches are divided between hard standing and grass, surrounded by mown amenity grassland.

### **Context**

The site lies on the southern scarp of the Mendip Hills close to the town of Cheddar and its famous gorge. The site is adjacent to the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The site is on the very edge, but contained within the Natural Area of Somerset Levels and Moors, this is typified by lowland areas of wet grassland, flood plains of several rivers and criss-crossed by rhynes, ditches and drains. The closest priority habitat to the site is coastal floodplain and grazing marsh, this occurs 250m to south (it used to occur closer but a housing estate has recently been built here).



### **Habitat Information**

**Broad Habitats Present:** Hedgerows

**National BAP Priority Habitats Present:** Ancient and/or species rich hedge

**Caravan Club cBAP features:** Species rich hedgerow

### **Amenity Grassland:**

All the grassland occurring on this Caravan Club site is short mown amenity grassland (see Figure 1). This is dominated by grasses with only a few broad-leaved species. The most frequent grass is Perennial Rye Grass *Lolium perenne*; other grasses that occur include Red Fescue *Festuca rubra*, Yorkshire Fog *Holcus lanatus*, Cocksfoot *Dactylis glomerata* and Annual Meadow-Grass *Poa annua*. Common broad leaved species include White Clover *Trifolium repens*, Creeping Buttercup *Ranunculus repens* and Dandelion *Taraxacum officinalis*. Other species recorded were Broad-leaved dock *Rumex obtusifolia*, Spear Thistle *Cirsium vulgare*, Knotgrass *Polygonum aviculare*, Greater Plantain *Plantago major*, Shepherd's Purse *Capsella bursa-pastoris*, White Dead-nettle *Lamium album* and Common Nettle *Urtica dioica*.



Figure 1: View of typical short mown amenity grassland on site

### **Hedges:**

There were a number of hedges surrounding, and within, the site. Some of these were *Leylandii* (see Figure 2), including the hedge running north-south in the middle of the site and parts of the hedge on the south-west of the site. These hedges contained only this species and no ground flora was present below them as a result of the dense canopy. In comparison, the hedge on the western side was of broken structure with mainly individual trees. There were a number of tree species present including Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, Silver Birch *Betula pendula*, Sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* and Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur*. The most interesting hedgerow was along the eastern side of the site (see Figure 3). This hedge included the woody species Ash, Hazel *Corylus avellana*, Field Maple *Acer campestre*, Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, Elder *Sambucus nigra* and English Elm *Ulmus minor*. The ground flora included the ancient woodland indicator Dog's Mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, other ground flora included Enchanter's Nightshade *Circaea lutetiana*, Ivy *Hedera helix*, Hedge Bindweed *Calystegia sepium*, Bramble *Rubus fruticosus*, Meadow Sweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, Male Fern *Dryopteris filix-mas* and Hartstongue *Asplenium scolopendrium*. Some of the trees also showed signs of old management such as laying and pollarding (see Figure 4).



Figure 2: *Leylandii* hedge in centre of site.



Figure 3: Hedge along eastern side of site looking south.



Figure 4: Hazel with many large steps where previously it had been cut several time around the same point.



### Habitat Evaluation

The short mown amenity grassland has a very low diversity of species and is very improved in nature. Thus the primary value of this habitat is for birds feeding on soil invertebrates.

The hedge along the eastern side of the site has seven woody species within it and has ground flora associated with a woodland environment. Both of these establish the hedge as an ancient and/or species-rich hedge which is included in the UKBAP and in the Action for biodiversity in the South-West, which contains a series of habitat and species plans. This habitat has also been included with in the Caravan Club cBAP for its importance on many sites. This is the most important habitat within this small and otherwise limited Caravan Club site. Hedges have suffered a decline over the recent years especially since the Second World War, between 1984 and 1990 the net loss of hedgerows in England was 21%, this was a combination of removal and neglect.



### Species Information

**BAP Species Seen:** None

**BAP Species Potential:** Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos* has been recorded on the site. Bats could also be using the area for foraging or commuting

**Other Noteworthy Species:** Dog's Mercury *Mercurialis*

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**Flora:**

The site's flora was most interesting along the eastern hedge the rest of the site was uninteresting floristically. Probably the most interesting plants seen were those of Dog's Mercury (see Figure 5) because this is a woodland species only occurring in the ground flora of hedges when they are very old and have been established for many hundreds of years. This was also indicated by another woodland plant Enchanter's Nightshade and the ferns Hartstongue and Male Fern also indicating the longevity of this particular hedge.

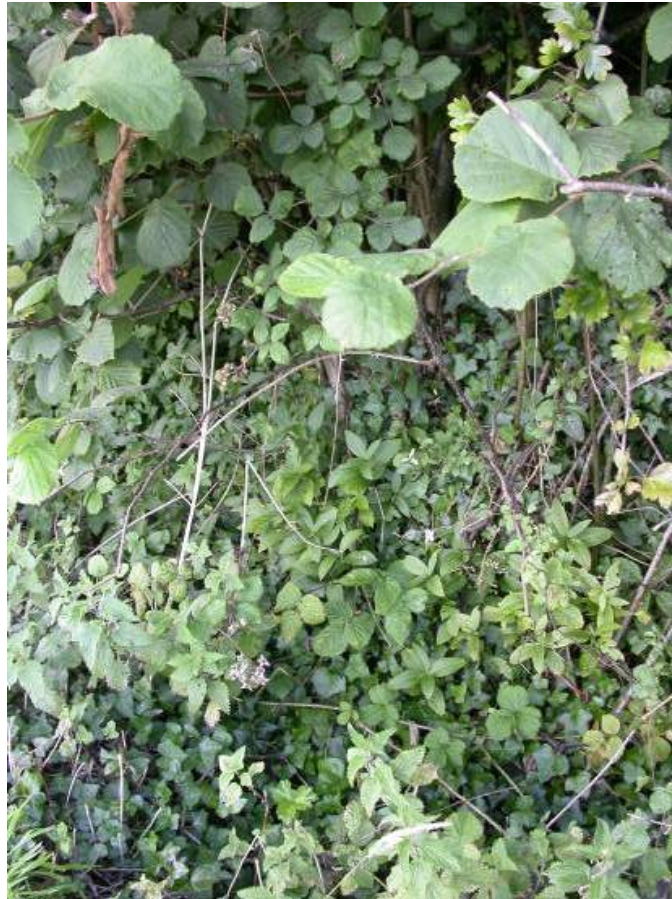


Figure 5: Dog's Mercury can be seen in the centre of the picture, with its oval pointed leaves.

**Avifauna:**

The hedges on site are the most likely to be used by birds for both feeding and nesting. The *Leylandii* hedges would probably be used only for nesting. Species looking for worms and leather jackets will use the amenity grassland especially after rain when these prey items are closer to the surface. During the survey only a few bird species were seen these included Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus*, Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus* and Robin *Erithacus rubecula*. Many common British species have been recorded by the wardens on site, including Great Tit *Parus major*, Coal Tit *Parus ater*, Blackbird *Turdus merula* and Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*. They have also recorded Song Thrush as a regular visitor. The hedges contain a good resource of invertebrates and seeds for birds to feed on, this means that many species should

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occur on sites from warblers, tits feeding on insects to the finches feeding more on the seeds.

### **Invertebrates:**

The site has excellent potential to support invertebrates because the habitat resource within the hedges is so good. There is likely to support a diversity of species as there are many niches on site for invertebrate species to fill.

Two butterfly species were observed on site these were Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria*, a species of woodland and woodland edge habitats, and Gatekeeper *Pyronia tithonus*, a species of hedgerows and woodland edge habitats. The only nectar resources for invertebrates are within the hedges, particularly the blossom of trees and Bramble is also important. Species which use these include flies including hoverflies, wasps, many species of beetle, bumblebees and bees both social and solitary. The mown grassland offered little in the way of nectaring resource

### **Herptofauna:**

No species of reptile or amphibian was recorded on the site at the time of survey. There have also been none observed by the wardens on site. The most likely reptile to occur is the Slow Worm *Anguis fragilis* though the habitats on site are sub-optimal for this species. However, if there is suitable habitat nearby Slow Worms may perhaps use areas in the hedges for hibernation. No amphibians have been recorded on site, though again they may use areas within the hedgerows for hibernation.

### **Mammals:**

The only mammal recorded during the survey was Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*. Other mammals frequently recorded by wardens on the site include Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis*, Fox *Vulpes vulpes* and Bank Vole/Field Vole *Microtus agrestis/Clethrionomys glareolus*. Though no bats have been recorded on site, their nocturnal behaviour makes them more difficult to see. The hedges would provide a feeding resource for bats because of the invertebrates present. The hedges on site may also act as flight lines for bats especially the greater horseshoe bat *Rhinolophus ferrumequinum* and the lesser horseshoe bat *Rhinolophus hipposideros* both of which occur in the general area of the Caravan Club site.



### **Species Evaluation**

Though not many insects were recorded on site there is the potential for many to be occurring in the more species-rich hedges on the eastern side and the trees on the western side of the site.

The most interesting bird species that has been recorded on site is Song Thrush. As well as being a UK BAP species, the Song Thrush is also included within the Caravan Club cBAP.

There are many other common bird species occurring on site. The placing of bird feeding stations will undoubtedly encourage many more species onto site than would

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normally occur. Other important species which could occur on the site in future include the BAP species Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* and Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*.

Although no bats have been recorded on the site, it is probably that they may occur. The most likely species would be the BAP species Common Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*. The potential of the site for bats could easily be enhanced by erecting bat boxes on trees over the site.

### **Management Recommendations**

- The western hedgerow which now mostly consists of individual trees could be inter-planted with native species to bring back a full hedgerow. Planting in-between the trees to form a hedge would not only add more habitat for animals in feeding resource and connectivity but would also help to screen adjacent land from the Caravan Club site giving a more secluded feel for the patrons of the site.
- Where possible, create and maintain wide margins of longer sward at the currently mowed hedgerow edges. This will promote a greater diversity of habitat structure and enable flowering hedgerow plants to flourish, providing a vital nectar resource for bees, butterflies and other insects. This could be done especially in the corners of the site which are not being used for caravan pitches.
- Leave at least some fallen and standing deadwood *in situ*. This provides habitat for dead wood invertebrates, which, in turn provides a valuable food resource for insectivorous woodland birds such as woodpeckers and warblers. Outside of the breeding season in spring, fallen dead wood also provides shelter for amphibians such as Great-crested Newts *Triturus cristatus* and Common Toad.

### **Further Suggestions to Enhance the Wildlife Value of the Site**

- **Nest boxes** – Both open-fronted and conventional single hole (32mm diam.) could be added to trees along the hedgerows and mature trees on site. Nestboxes need cleaning out once each autumn.
- **Bird feeding stations** – Feeding stations could be added at two or three places throughout the site. 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, which attract birds unable to use hanging feeders, these can be cleaned periodically.

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- **Bats and trees** – If any mature or dead trees are marked for surgery or felling it is advisable to get them checked by a bat expert. Similarly if any lighting is to be installed on site regard should be made in to the activity of bats on site and the impacts the lighting may have (See Appendix 1). Bat boxes could be erected on site on hedgerow trees or other mature trees.
  - **Bug Boxes** - Consider positioning bug boxes (boxes containing short lengths of bamboo. Insects such as solitary bees and wasps can use the bamboo tubes for nesting) these can be fixed onto trees in sheltered locations at the edge of hedges.
  - **Shrub, hedgerow & tree planting** – New planting on site should use native species, ideally of a local provenance. This has already occurred in several areas. Generally the commonest tree and shrub species are most beneficial to invertebrates and many produce autumn nuts and berries such as rowan, hawthorn, holly and hazel. Ash, birch, blackthorn, field maple and oak are also desirable species. In the case of any new hedgerow planting a mix the above should be used with occasional standards to increase structural diversity. Limited inter-planting with species such as honeysuckle that is attractive and highly scented will provide a nectar source for moths. Invasive shrubs giving dense ground cover should be avoided in any new planting. Hedges are currently trimmed every year. This should be reduced to every other year at most to allow greater fruiting of shrubs for animals and invertebrates.
  - **Edges** – Buffer zones of longer grass adjacent to hedgerows should be to 2m or greater where possible. This would provide additional invertebrate habitat and also provide greater cover for small mammals, reptiles and amphibians. These ‘buffer’ zones should be cut once or twice per year, ideally in late July/Early August and in the autumn to allow wildflowers and favourable grasses time to set seed. Species such as Foxglove, Red Campion, Wood Avens, Common Dog Violet and vetches are suited to the woodland edge and may well come in naturally to buffer zones if a suitable cutting regime is adopted. Cut vegetation should be removed from the buffer zone to avoid die back and swamping by ruderal species. Buffer zones can be further enhanced by the introduction of wild meadow or flower seed mix. Again seed mixes should be native and of local provenance if possible.
  - **Tree stumps, log piles and mounds** – If any trees are need to be cut down the logs can be left *in-situ* or consolidated in to hibernacula, these will provide excellent invertebrate, reptile and amphibian habitat, particularly if left in a sunny spot. Increased insect diversity will in turn attract more bird species to the area. Coarse stone, rubble or deadwood could be placed in discrete piles around the site to create hibernation sites for a range of wildlife including reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates. These would be ideally located in area of scrub and longer grassland.
  - **Wildlife recording** – Hold a wildlife records book and/or board for casual observations and sightings. This will aid monitoring of wildlife on site and promote the role of the Caravan Club members in building biodiversity on site.

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Important sightings of rare flora and fauna should be passed on to the Somerset Environmental Records Centre.

- **Wildlife pond** - Consider creating a wildlife pond on the site. An ideal location for this may be in an out of the way corner. Ecological advice should be sought regarding the pond's location, construction and stocking of wetland plants. A wildlife pond should be stocked only with native aquatic plant species, ideally of local provenance and ponds should not be stocked with ornamental fish. This is quite a small Caravan club site and so may not be able to have a pond; this also could be a problem due to Health and Safety concerns.

### **Further Survey or Information Requirements**

- Further invertebrate surveys, particularly to record species associated with the eastern hedgerow, covering most invertebrate groups.
- Specialist bat surveys to establish the species of bat using the site and the activities such as commuting or foraging that they are using the site for.
- Providing a book and encouraging visitors to record incidental wildlife sightings would help to monitor the wildlife on the site, and would highlight the interest features on the site.

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## Species List

### Birds:

<u>Common name</u>	<u>Scientific name</u>
Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>
Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>
Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>

### Invertebrates:

<u>Common name</u>	<u>Scientific name</u>
Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>
Gatekeeper	<i>Pyronia tithonus</i>

### Plants:

<u>Common name</u>	<u>Scientific name</u>
Annual Meadow-grass	<i>Poa annua</i>
Ash	<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>
Blackthorn	<i>Prunus spinosa</i>
Bramble	<i>Rubus fruticosus</i>
Broad-leaved Dock	<i>Rumex obtusifolia</i>
Cleavers	<i>Galium aparine</i>
Cocksfoot	<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>
Common Nettle	<i>Urtica dioica</i>
Creeping Buttercup	<i>Ranunculus repens</i>
Dandelion	<i>Taraxacum officinalis</i>
Dog's Mercury	<i>Mercurialis perennis</i>
Dogwood	<i>Cornus sanguinea</i>
Elder	<i>Sambucus nigra</i>
Enchanter's Nightshade	<i>Circaea lutetiana</i>
English Elm	<i>Ulmus minor</i>
Field Forget-me-not	<i>Myosotis arvensis</i>
Field Horsetail	<i>Equisetum arvensis</i>
Field Maple	<i>Acer campestre</i>
Great Willowherb	<i>Epilobium hirsutum</i>
Greater Plantain	<i>Plantago major</i>
Guelder Rose	<i>Viburnum opulus</i>
Hartstongue	<i>Asplenium scolopendrium</i>
Hazel	<i>Corylus avellana</i>
Hedge Bindweed	<i>Calystegia sepium</i>
Hogweed	<i>Heracleum sphondylium</i>
Ivy	<i>Hedera helix</i>
Knotgrass	<i>Polygonum aviculare</i>
Male Fern	<i>Dryopteris filix-mas</i>
Meadowsweet	<i>Filipendula ulmaria</i>
Pedunculate Oak	<i>Quercus robur</i>
Perennial Rye-grass	<i>Lolium perenne</i>
Red Fescue	<i>Festuca rubra</i>
Shepherd's Purse	<i>Capsella bursa-pastoris</i>

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Common name

Silver Birch

Sitka Spruce

Spear Thistle

Sycamore

Wayfaring Tree

White Clover

White Dead-nettle

Yorkshire Fog

Scientific name

*Betula pendula*

*Picea sitchensis*

*Cirsium vulgare*

*Acer pseudoplatanus*

*Viburnum lantana*

*Trifolium repens*

*Lamium album*

*Holcus lanatus*

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## **Appendix 1 - 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 sp.*

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.

## **Appendix 2 - Birds**

In Britain all wild birds are granted legal protection under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, the Bern Convention and the EC Birds Directive. This legislation protects the birds, their eggs and nests whilst being built or in use. Such protection makes it an offence to intentionally kill, injure, take or have in possession any wild bird or egg. It is also an offence to intentionally damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird whilst it is being built or in use. Any vegetation clearance and tree works should preferably take place outside of the bird-nesting season to minimise disturbance. The nesting season varies from year to year, according to the weather conditions but generally begins in March, peaks during May and June and continues until August.