



***CARAVAN CLUB ECOLOGICAL
SITE APPRAISAL***

Seacroft Caravan Site
Runton Road
Cromer
Norfolk
NR27 9NH



General Information

Site Name and County: Grid Reference: TG 203426

Date: 2007

Recorder: Rodney West, JUST ECOLOGY Environmental Consultancy

Weather Conditions: Dull, overcast, showery 16°C, light wind

Site Description

The site is about 300 metres from the cliff edge and is surrounded by a mixture of other amenity features including further caravan sites and some farmland.

Only 12 of the sites 101 pitches are on hard standing, the remainder are based on mown amenity grassland. All are arranged on either side of the main metalled track, which runs as a circuit around the site.

Context

The site is adjacent to the main coastal road from Cromer to Hunstanton. The East Runton area has many caravan sites set back from the cliff edge. Both the East and West Runton cliff formations are designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and are some of the finest places in England to collect Pleistocene fossils.

The countryside surrounding the site is a mix of farmland and amenity facilities and is part of the North Norfolk Natural Area which occupies the northern part of East Anglia. This part of Norfolk has an open aspect where the gravels, sands/chalk erratics and boulder clays still determine the natural vegetation patterns.

The Natural Area has diverse habitats with heaths and mires in the north-west, a number of ancient woodlands and heaths with valley mires in the centre, and a disparate area of highly fertile soils ending in slumping coastal cliffs. The North Norfolk natural Area is closely linked to the constantly changing pattern of coastal habitats of the Old Hunstanton to Sheringham Natural Area.



Habitat Information

Broad Habitats Present: Amenity grassland and broad-leaved woodland

BAP Priority Habitats Present: None

Caravan Club cBAP features: None

Subsidiary Habitats Present: Hedgerow

Plant Communities Present:

Grassland Communities:

The mown grassland on which the majority of the pitches are located is species-poor. The soil is sand-based on which the dominant grass species appear to be Perennial Rye Grass *Lolium repens*, Annual Meadow Grass *Poa annua* and Common Bent *Agrostis capillaris*. These species are interspersed throughout the site with species that are locally abundant, these include Daisy *Bellis perennis*, Dandelion *Taraxacum officinale*, Greater Plantain *Plantago major*, Selfheal *Prunella vulgaris*, Yarrow *Achillea millefolium* and White Clover *Trifolium repens*.

On the boundary between the grass sward and the metalled circuit track a ruderal-based habitat (weedy) is developing in some areas and it includes species such as Scarlet Pimpernel *Anagallis arvensis* and Perennial Sow-thistle *Sonchus arvensis*

At the boundaries beyond the present mowing regime other plant species are present including Cleavers *Galium aparine*, Fat Hen *Chenopodium album*, Bramble *Rubus* sp., Cow Parsley *Anthriscus sylvestris*, Common Nettle *Urtica dioica*, Spear Thistle *Cirsium vulgare* and White Campion *Silene alba*.

Hedgerow:

The majority of the boundary around the site is lined by either conventional hedgerow or lines of mature trees. In the sections that are hedgerow, woody species are few and are generally a mixture of Elm *Ulmus* sp.(sucker), Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, and Elderberry *Sambucus nigra*. There is some tree planting in the 'gappy' parts of the hedge, such species as Rowan *Sorbus aucuparia* and Willow *Salix* sp. have been used and are probably about ten years old.

On the eastern boundary a line of mature trees exist (on the neighbouring property but overhanging the mutual boundary). These trees are upwards of 12/15 metres in height and include; Sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*, White Poplar *Salix alba* sp., Horse Chestnut *Aesculus hippocastanum*, Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris* and *Leylandii* sp. (Figure 1).

Some pitches are separated from their neighbour by small lengths of linear planting which is kept trimmed. These small sections are either *Leylandii* sp. or Beech *Fagus sylvatica*.



Figure 1: Where the site borders the next property a mature row of poplars and other species provide a rich wildlife resource.



Habitat Evaluation

The grassland between the pitches is of little biodiversity value, being very closely mown. Nonetheless, it may still be of value to thrushes, woodpeckers and ground-burrowing invertebrates.

The hedgerow sections that border the site were mature and generally in good condition and this will provide both a feeding and breeding site potential for many species of invertebrates, birds and mammals. The tall, well grown standard trees that grew along the site boundary are valuable to many kinds of wildlife as a food resource and nesting/roosting places.

The planted small groups of mixed hardwood trees within the site have grown to early maturity and will provide both a feeding resource and a breeding habitat for a wide variety of birds and invertebrates.



Figure 2: Mature plantings like these that border that dog walk area are of considerable value to wildlife.



Species Information

BAP Species Seen: Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

Caravan Club cBAP species: Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

BAP Species Potential: Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus* and other bat species are priority species listed in the UK and Norfolk Biodiversity Action Plans. Bats have been seen on the site

Other Notable Species: None

Flora:

The amenity grass areas on the site contain species indicative of improved or re-seeded grassland such as Perennial Rye-grass, Dandelion and White Clover. Some additional biodiversity value could be added in strategic areas.

Shrub planting found within the site is undoubtedly beneficial to flying insects and some bird species. There is the potential to increase the nectar sources with further inter-planting or management.

Avifauna:

On the day of the survey a total of 13 bird species were recorded, other species will also use the site such as woodpeckers and owls. During the winter months when the

site is very quiet the short turf areas would probably attract winter visitors such as; Scandinavian Redwing *Turdus iliacus*, Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris* and Blackbird *Turdus merula* and other thrushes.

Birds recorded using the site during the survey visit included:

Blackbird *Turdus merula* (breeding)
Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*
Dunnock *Prunella modularis*
Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*
Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*
House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*
Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*
Robin *Erithacus rubecula* - (probably breeding)
Rook *Corvus frugilegus*
Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos* – UK and Norfolk BAP species
Swallow *Hirundo rustica*- (probably breeding)
Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*
Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*

Species identified as using the site and are of particular note:

The **Song Thrush** is protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as all birds, their nests and eggs are protected by law. It is also listed on the Birds of conservation Concern (BoCC) Red List, which holds species whose breeding population has decreased and/or whose breeding range has contracted by 50% or more in the preceding 25 years. Norfolk has a relatively high density of Song Thrushes with particular concentrations in north-west Norfolk, Mid Norfolk and south Norfolk. There is no population estimate for the county. The Action Plan objectives, nationally, are to halt the UK decline by 2000 and the Norfolk BAP priority is to maintain numbers and distribution of song thrush in Norfolk, and where possible restore them to previous levels.

House Sparrow populations have fluctuated greatly over the centuries, with a gradual decline over the last 100 years. A change from horse-drawn vehicles to motorised ones caused the sparrow population in many cities to drop by two thirds, with the removal of an important food supply - the cereal fed to horses. Recent declines have been caused by a combination of reduced plant food in winter, reduced insect availability for chicks, and reduction in available nest sites. On farmland, these are attributed to changes in agricultural practices.

Housing of livestock in inaccessible buildings, mechanisation of grain harvest and more effective storage of grain and animal feeds all reduced sparrows access to food. Recent cereal hygiene regulations mean that farm buildings are sealed, and therefore offer fewer nesting sites. In towns lack of food and nest sites are contributing to the decline, but we do not yet fully understand the decline.

In the 1950s, the UK house sparrow population was estimated at 9.5 million. They increased to 12 million by the early 1970s, then declined. The population crashed during the 1990s. Over 25 years the population has declined by 62%. Because of this

decline in numbers, the house sparrow is now Red Listed as a species of high conservation concern.

Invertebrates:

The weather during the survey day was not the best to observe flying insects. However, several species were recorded and undoubtedly more species use the site, though pollen and nectar bearing plants were generally scarce within the site due to the mowing regime. Insects were attracted to the hardwood plantings within the site and this is an area which could possibly be expanded upon.

Invertebrates recorded using the site during the survey visit included:

Large White Butterfly *Pieris brassicae*
Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina*

Rufus-tailed Bumblebee *Bombus lapidarius*
Buff-tailed Bumblebee *Bombus terrestris*

Herptofauna:

No species seen during survey though anecdotal evidence records Adders *Viperus berus* being seen on the site.

Mammals:

Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*, and Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis* were recorded during the survey but other small mammals like Long-tailed Fieldmouse *Apodemus sylvatica* and Field Vole *Microtus agrestis* probably use the site as will Stoat *Mustela erminea*, Weasel *Mustela nivalis* and Fox *Vulpes vulpes*.

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 the UK and Norfolk 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).



Species Evaluation

The grassland around the pitches is species-poor and is kept short by frequent mowing, thus it is of restricted value in biodiversity terms. Grassland around the perimeter of the site and along the linear planting of mature shrub species, has a slightly higher floral diversity, providing a nectar source for butterflies, bees and other flying insects.

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 such as 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 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 and Cherry 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.

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. 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

- **Nestboxes** – both open-fronted and conventional single hole (32mm diam.) 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 sites. 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.
- **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. At present the grass cuttings are heaped beyond the most northerly boundary and in this instance would seem to be a good practice as it catches the sun and is near water which might encourage grass snakes. Tree stumps, log piles and mounds 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.

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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. Bat boxes could be erected on site on hedge row trees or within the woodland.
 - **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.
 - **Edges** – Buffer zones of longer grass adjacent to woodland edges or hedgerows should be extended beyond the 0.5-1m currently in place 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. 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. If possible seed mixes should be native and of local provenance.
 - **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.



Figure 3: This area at the entrance to the site could be planted up with nectar-bearing perennial shrubs attractive to the visitor and to wildlife alike.

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- **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. Important sightings of rare flora and fauna should be passed on to the Norfolk Biodiversity Records Centre.
 - Consider creating a wildlife pond on the site. An ideal location for this may be within the mowed amenity grassland of the playing field. 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.

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.

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 Norfolk 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.

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.