

Steward Community Wood
Moretonhampstead
Newton Abbot
Devon
TQ13 8SD

20 June 2014

Dear Steward Community

Steward Wood Wildlife Advisory Visit

Thank you for asking Devon Wildlife Trust to advise you further regarding the management of Steward Wood. I met with Fern and Ollie when I visited the wood on 16 April.

My former colleague, David Leach, had visited you several years ago. I used to share an office with David and remembered him talking about you and your aspirations for the land. I feel very pleased to be finally visiting Steward Wood for myself.

We discussed both your woodland and settlement management; which has biodiversity at its heart. The site as a whole is a haven for a wide range of species, both the common and less so, most notably nesting sparrowhawk, dormouse and numerous bats. You also report regular sightings of badger, roe and fallow deer, stoat and shrew whilst the site is also rich in insect life.

Your woodland management has been guided by a 5 year management plan that is now due for review. To date works have included tree planting, both broad-leaves and fruit trees, (the latter around the settlement area) with appropriate protection, together with gradual thinning of conifers and coppicing.

At its south-eastern boundary the wood adjoins Wray Cleave. These woods are a designated County Wildlife Site (SX 78/030 Wray Valley Woods); comprising just over 40ha of ancient semi-natural woodland. From looking at the map I have, it appears that a small area of similar habitat extends onto your holding. This is identified in your management plan as the "wildlife area".

When we walked around here, it was evident that the trackways supported a wide range of herb species including moschatel, (town hall clock), violets, bluebells and alkanet. Moschatel and bluebell are ancient woodland indicator species. This area is worthy of further investigation/botanical survey to assess floristic diversity and potential for expansion.

Your management within this section has been one of non-intervention. I would recommend that this be reviewed, with priority given to selective thinning of sycamore to prevent its spread.

In terms of landscape scale conservation, Steward Wood has a very valuable contribution to make to biodiversity within the local area, not least as it forms the northern end of the Bovey woodland ridge; much of which is ancient in origin. As such your land provides something of a transition zone between the adjoining farmed environment to the north and woodland to the south. Your phased and sustainable approach to management, as well as construction of your settlement area, has created an interesting array of niche habitats providing much structural diversity for wildlife.



Devon

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Research shows that coniferous plantations per se are generally less beneficial for biodiversity than broad-leaved woodlands. However, they are useful for nesting birds of prey and as cover for smaller birds, especially along the woodland edge.

Your policy of conifer removal should continue with consideration given to creating/increasing the areas of open space, (through rides and glades). See if you can link these up to provide an additional “edge network” across your holding.

Further enhancements can be made by adopting the following:

- Diversify existing woodland edges - creating scalloped bays instead of straight lines
- Allowing scrub to develop along the woodland edges & actively managing scrub species, (i.e. bramble, hawthorn, blackthorn, gorse), across the holding
- Develop & implement a dead wood policy across the site – leaving a good percentage of both standing and fallen deadwood
- Selectively thin sycamore and encourage other broad-leaved species such as oak and hazel
- Continue to actively push back the conifers (thinning) replacing with native broad-leaved woodlands incorporating an inter-connected network of open space, (rides/glades/tracks)
- Review and renew Woodland Management Plan
- Review management in non intervention area; survey ground flora & selectively thin sycamore to prevent spread and dominance.
- Commission a bat survey (Devon Bat Group would be able to help)
- Restore pond
- Position log piles both within sunny and more shaded areas within the woods, this will cater for creatures with varying preferences
- Share your data with us! Devon Biodiversity Records Centre (DBRC) would love to receive your records!

Overall we consider that your management is having a very positive impact on your local biodiversity. We would be delighted to work with you to review your Management Plan and to provide any other habitat management advice you require.

I look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Yours faithfully

Lynne Kenderdine
Land Management Advisory Officer