

Coastal Grasslands

Coastal grasslands project is about maximising the potential of the mag lime grasslands in Co Durham, not just for the wildlife but for the people who live here as well. The grasslands round here for instance , round Blackhall up till the 60's was natural grassland and then it was ploughed out for arable and up to 1997 when the turning the tide project took over . they bought the land and from then we've been trying to get the condition of the grasslands start to approach a more bio diversity rich scenario.

The part the National Trust is playing is by getting the farm here, Whitelea, involved with the HLS, high level stewardship which means sorting out all the grassland management in terms of grazing and also scrub management. The gorse that you can see on the hillside behind me is basically taken over and could be a really good mag lime grassland site, so we've got to take out 1.1hectares of the gorse out over 3 years and that's part of our HLS agreement. Gorse brushing is basically gorse clearance, so what we do is were cutting the gorse as close to the ground as we can and then were treating it with a herbicide to stop any regrowth and then we're very carefully, because it burns quite easily and the stuff that's still growing is very dry underneath, so we're burning it in small bits at a time so it doesn't get out of control. Because we're cutting by hand its actually quite along and arduous task so we couldn't have done what we've achieved this year without the help of local volunteers. Well I got involved with the project through volunteering for the national trust which I have been doing for about a year now and this is one of the tasks that we've been spending a lot of time on recently.

The British Isles has a great diverse landscape and habitat and I think it's very important we support that, and it's very rewarding to be part of the team that's helping that.

The limestone landscapes project is to try and bring some seed in from the really good quality grasslands we have around here and from good donor sites. The cattle will much down all of the tall stuff that's left after the years growth and then all of the good seed that's come off, they will trample it down so it will come back even better year after year after year.

Some of the wildflower species we're hoping to see coming back onto this hillside are bloody cranesbill, birds foot trefoil, ladies bedstraw and, field scabious: really beautiful diverse collection of wildflowers which in turn is really great for invertebrates.

One particular butterfly which is quite unique to the area is the Durham argos butterfly which its food plant is the rock rose which the cliff tops do have a good covering of.

Wee we've still got 2 more years managing the gorse on Beacon Hill but we're also looking because it's such an interesting area. We'd like to move into doing some education about the area so we pass on the message about the special features of the Durham coast.