

Bakethin Grazing Project

Four Exmoor ponies; a rare English breed, are grazing a valuable calcareous flush site on the north shore of Bakethin Reservoir. The encroachment of purple moor grass (*Molinia caerulea*) and common reed (*Phragmites communis*) as well as shrubs and trees were crowding out the more desirable botanical species such as fragrant orchid (*Gymnadenia conopsea*) and Marsh lousewort (*Pedicularis palustris*) that thrive in the damp lime rich conditions. Exmoor ponies have a proven track record for tackling tussocky and scrubby grasslands and are recognised by major environmental bodies as excellent selective grazers, this has been revealed by the grazing project at Bakethin.

We are now into our fifth year of monitoring (since 2005) the effects of grazing and there are positive signs that the site is responding well. The UK standard National Vegetation Classification (NVC) community is now mire habitat, with no NVC woodland or grassland communities. The number of higher plant species has increased from 78 in 2005 to 94 in 2007. There has been a slight dip down to 90 species in 2008 which may be due to only one survey visit compared to two in previous years. The list of sedges has also increased.

List of species that have reappeared in the botanical surveys:

| Higher plants | Sedges |
|---|---|
| <i>Alisma plantago-aquatica</i> – common water plantain | <i>Carex echinata</i> – Star sedge |
| <i>Crepis mollis</i> – Northern hawks beard | <i>Carex nigra</i> – Black sedge |
| <i>Crepis paludosa</i> – Marsh hawks beard | <i>Carex rostrata</i> – Bottle sedge |
| <i>Dryopteris dilatata</i> – Broad buckler fern | <i>Carex laevigata</i> - smooth-stalked sedge |
| <i>Dryopteris filix-mas</i> – Male fern | |
| <i>Equisetum arvense</i> – Field horsetail | |
| <i>Galeopsis bifida</i> – Hemp nettle sp | |
| <i>Ranunculus acris</i> – meadow buttercup | |
| <i>Leontodon hispidus</i> – Rough hawkbit | |
| <i>Lychnis flos-cuculi</i> – Ragged-robin | |
| <i>Mentha</i> sp – mint | |
| <i>Pedicularis palustris</i> – Marsh lousewort | |
| <i>Rhinanthus minor</i> - Yellow Rattle | |
| <i>Senecio aquaticus</i> – Marsh ragwort | |
| <i>Trichophorum cespitosum</i> – Deer Grass | |
| <i>Valeriana dioica</i> – Marsh valerian | |

Species not recorded before at the site

| Higher plants | Sedges |
|---------------|--------------------------------------|
| | <i>Carex flacca</i> – Glaucous sedge |
| | <i>Carex ovalis</i> – Oval sedge |
| | <i>Carex pallescens</i> – Pale sedge |



Two of the ponies grazing at Bakethin Reservoir