

Habitat management for the Large Blue

The overall aim is to produce a short turf 2-5cm in height, with an abundance of Wild Thyme and the host red ant, *Myrmica sabuleti*. Shelter is also probably a key factor on many sites and some scrub patches should be retained.

Grazing

Grazing is essential to producing suitable short turf conditions on most sites. The best type of grazing animal varies according to habitat; heavily scrubbed over and rough coastal grasslands are best grazed by hardy ponies or cattle while calcareous grassland can be grazed by either sheep or cattle. The most important factor is to produce short turf during spring and early summer but to reduce or remove grazing in late June and July to allow good flowering of Wild Thyme. Autumn and spring grazing are therefore generally best. Some sites are maintained by rabbit grazing but livestock are desirable on most sites as rabbit populations vary unpredictably and could be suddenly reduced by disease outbreak.

Scrub control

Some scrub control is often essential to restore neglected sites but needs to be done carefully to retain shelter, especially on exposed sites. Scattered Gorse scrub is also important on some rough grassland sites as *Myrmica* ants often form their nests around the roots. A scrub management plan therefore needs to be drawn up on a site-specific basis. The target on most sites should be to reduce or maintain scrub cover at 10-20%. During restoration, dense scrub should be cleared and stumps treated with herbicide to prevent regrowth. Once broken into manageable patches, scrub can either be coppiced or burnt on a rotation of 5-10 years.

Thyme planting

Wild Thyme does not survive long as buried seed and may not regenerate when restoring long-neglected or heavily scrubbed sites. It may be necessary to plant Thyme to speed up the restoration of suitable breeding conditions. Plants of local provenance should be planted out as small plugs during autumn when they will be less susceptible to desiccation.



above Ideal habitat on short-grazed calcareous grassland

below Coastal valley in Cornwall being restored by scrub clearance and grazing



**Butterfly
Conservation**

Saving butterflies, moths and their habitats

Head Office Manor Yard East Lulworth Wareham Dorset BH20 5QP
Telephone: 0870 774 4309 Email: info@butterfly-conservation.org

www.butterfly-conservation.org

Compiled by Martin Warren and Tom Wigglesworth. Photographs by Martin Warren.

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