

# Hutchinson's Bank and Chapel Bank Nature Reserves

Management Brief

2012-17



Protecting London's wildlife for the future

# Hutchinson's Bank and Chapel Bank Nature Reserves

Hutchinson's Bank Nature Reserve is one of the largest areas of chalk grassland remaining in the Greater London area. Managed as a nature reserve since London Wildlife Trust acquired a licence to manage the site in 1986, it has been subject to a more significant spate of restoration work over the last decade. Situated on the eastern flank of a dry valley in the southern part of the London Borough of Croydon, the site is gradually restored under the management of London Wildlife Trust in partnership with the Downlands Countryside Management project. It supports important populations of rare plant and invertebrate species, most notably the nationally rare greater yellow rattle, the scarce man orchid and the small blue butterfly.



Similar habitats occur at the nearby Chapel Bank Nature Reserve, which is managed as part of the same unit by the Trust (since 1987). The area of chalk grassland here is smaller and restricted to glades within a predominantly woodland cover. Chapel Bank is especially noted for the presence of mat-grass fescue, a nationally scarce species, as well as impressive displays of common spotted and other orchids. Woodland cover at Chapel Bank consists of recent secondary woodland developed on former open downland, as well as areas of ancient woodland.

Two adjacent areas are also managed by the Trust within the reserve complex. These are an area of neutral grassland and hedgerows along the roadside to the north of Hutchinson's Bank, known as the Featherbed Lane Verge, and Threecorner Grove, a small triangular shaped stand of woodland to the immediate south of Hutchinson's Bank and almost linking with Chapel Bank but separated by Featherbed Lane. These add to the overall diversity of habitats within the reserve complex.

## Flora

The largest area of chalk grassland at Hutchinson's Bank occupies upright brome grassland (CG3). Other frequent grass species are red fescue and quaking grass, whilst herbs include common knapweed, rough hawkbit, wild marjoram and common bird's-foot trefoil. Particularly interesting species are kidney vetch, wild thyme, dwarf thistle and notable orchids in the Greater London area: bee and pyramidal orchid.





Small scabious

The second type of calcareous grassland found at Hutchinson's and Chapel Banks is sheep's fescue – meadow oat-grass (CG2) grassland. It is dominated by sheep's fescue grass and is most abundant at Chapel Bank in glades amongst the scrub and woodland. Frequent species are also glaucous sedge, salad burnet, small scabious, autumn gentian, agrimony and wild basil. Man orchid can also be seen there.

The 'Orchid Avenue' is a small ride at Chapel Bank that supports an interesting flora which includes common spotted orchid, common twayblade, bee orchid, white helleborine, broadleaved helleborine and greater butterfly orchid. Downy birch is frequent here and the mycorrhizal fungi associated with birch roots are thought to contribute to the abundance of orchids.

Neutral grassland along the valley bottom at Hutchinson's Bank is dominated by false oat-grass, with frequent cock's-foot, red fescue and Yorkshire fog. The most widespread species are meadow buttercup, common vetch, red clover, field scabious and wild carrot.

Chalk scrub is dominated by woody shrubs, of which hawthorn is generally the most abundant, although dogwood and rarely blackthorn can form dense clonal patches. Less abundant but highly characteristic associate shrubs include wayfaring tree, wild privet, spindle and buckthorn.



White helleborine

Ancient woodland occurs in the areas known as Bogram's Wood and Beechfield Wood on the eastern side of Chapel Bank and possibly also at Threecorner Grove. Bogram's Wood consists predominantly of English oak standards over hazel and ash coppice. A variety of



Threecorner Grove

other tree and shrub species are also present, including field maple, wild cherry, beech and wych elm. The field layer is relatively diverse and contains ivy, bramble, dog's mercury, bluebell, yellow archangel, sanicle and wood anemone. The Threecorner Grove woodland is essentially very similar to Bogram's Wood and consists mainly of English oak standards over hazel coppice. Mature wild cherry, Turkey oak, ash and sycamore are also found here.

## Fauna

Hutchinson's Bank and Chapel Bank Nature Reserves are noted for their rich butterfly fauna, with 34 species having been recorded from the two reserves since 1983. The most notable of these is small blue, which is nationally rare. The fortunes of small blue are strongly tied to that of kidney vetch, as the caterpillars feed only on the vetch flowers. Dark green fritillary is also widely distributed at Hutchinson's Bank, together with dingy skipper, grizzled skipper, green hairstreak, white-letter hairstreak, brown argus, marbled white and many others. The moth fauna of Hutchinson's and Chapel Banks is also notably rich, with some 322 species having been recorded to date (as much an evaluation of recording effort as the intrinsic value of the habitats present).



Yellow meadow-ant is frequent in the grassland at both Hutchinson's and Chapel Bank, as evidenced by numerous active ant hills. Glow-worm, which is declining nationally, are regularly seen to congregate around the street lamp at the bottom of Farleigh Dean Crescent. Roman snail, a protected species, is common at both Hutchinson's and Chapel Bank.

Reptiles recorded from the reserves include common lizard and slow-worm. The only amphibians known to occur are the common toad and common frog. Some 80 species of birds have been recorded from Hutchinson's Bank to date. The scrub supports a good range of breeding species, while Chapel Bank and Threecorner Grove support a typical range of woodland bird species, including lesser spotted and green woodpecker, nuthatch and treecreeper.

Mammals recorded from the reserves include badger, fox, rabbit and common shrew. Roe deer, bank and field vole were recorded more recently. Badgers are protected under the Badgers Act 1992 and schedule 6 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981.



## Reserve details

<i>Location</i>	Hutchinson's Bank Nature Reserve lies in the London Borough of Croydon, 6km south-east of Croydon town centre and immediately south-west of New Addington. Chapel Bank Nature Reserve, some 200 metres to the south of Hutchinson's, is within the Tandridge District of Surrey.
<i>Area</i>	Hutchinson's Bank NR - 14.05 hectares Featherbed Lane Verge – 2.13 hectares Threecorner Grove – 1.96 hectares Chapel Bank NR - 10.87 hectares
<i>Grid Reference</i>	Hutchinson's Bank NR: TQ 383615 Featherbed Lane Verge - TQ 375623 Threecorner Grove - TQ 385611 Chapel Bank NR: TQ 386607
<i>Access</i>	Unrestricted pedestrian access is permitted to the reserves and a network of footpaths have been developed which enable access to most areas. Hutchinson's Bank NR – via Featherbed Lane and Farleigh Dean Crescent, or via footpath from Thorpe Close, New Addington. Threecorner Grove - from Featherbed Lane or via Hutchinson's Bank. Chapel Bank NR – from Featherbed Lane  A public footpath runs along the length of the Featherbed Lane Verge adjacent to Featherbed Lane. Another crosses the verge at the southern end and runs along the north-western boundary of Hutchinson's Bank, and links Featherbed Lane with New Addington. There are no other public rights of way within the reserves.
<i>Horseriders</i>	A permissive bridleway (The Gallops) has been established along the Featherbed Lane Verge and continues along the foot of Hutchinson's Bank, with access points at the bottom of Farleigh Dean Crescent and opposite Pear Tree Farm. This links up with statutory bridleways to Farleigh Court Farm and Little Farleigh Green Farm. There is no permitted access for horseriders to other parts of the reserves.
<i>Planning Status</i>	Hutchinson's Bank Threecorner Grove & Chapel Bank Local Nature Reserve Part of a Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation (Site M64) Metropolitan Green Belt  Hutchinson's Bank, Featherbed Lane Verge and Threecorner Grove Local Open Land (part)  Chapel Bank NR Site of Great Landscape Value Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) (Tandridge District Plan, Adopted 2001)

## Management Objectives

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The general long-term aims are to conserve the existing nature conservation interest of the reserves, and to enhance or restore the conservation interest where appropriate. These aims incorporate the following ideal management objectives:

- To maintain existing areas of chalk grassland
- To progressively restore chalk grassland in areas of recent scrub invasion
- To safeguard and, where possible, enhance populations of appropriate plants, butterflies and other notable species
- To retain a proportion of chalk scrub as an integral component of the downland ecosystem
- To maintain areas of mature woodland
- To collect further ecological information on the sites and to monitor the effectiveness of management
- To promote and interpret the wildlife interest of the sites to the local community
- To meet all legal and other obligations pertinent to the sites, including HLS requirements.



## *Chalk grassland*

The management of the chalk grassland is a high priority. If grassland is left unmanaged it will quickly be colonised by scrub and the chalk grassland species will be lost as has already happened on much of the reserve.

The site will be grazed year-round by a mixture of cattle, sheep and Dartmoor ponies dependent on site needs and stock availability. Grazing will be managed by the Downlands Countryside Management Project (DCMP) under an agreement with the Trust.

London Wildlife Trust will work together with DCMP to monitor the effect of grazing and suitably alter the grazing regime to ensure effective chalk grassland restoration while safeguarding notable species. This includes kidney vetch, small blue butterfly, greater yellow rattle, dark green fritillary and orchids among others. Sensitive areas such as scrapes at the Cutting will be grazed only in winter and protected by temporary fencing during the rest of the year. As a precautionary measure, stock density should be on the low side to prevent accidental overgrazing.



As part of the grazing regime, some undesirable species may need to be controlled and can include creeping thistle, spear thistle, curled dock, broad-leaved dock, common ragwort and common nettle.

In case of insufficient stocking density, mowing will need to be carried out to maintain the grassland habitat. A 3-year rotation with one third of a compartment cut each year is recommended. Mowing should consist of a coarse cut of 15 cm, carried out in the winter months when invertebrates are less active. The cuttings should be removed to prevent soil enrichment. In the absence of summer grazing, areas with significant amount of scrub regrowth, especially hawthorn and dogwood, should also be cleared of scrub during summer.

## *Scrub*

Scrub habitats are valuable in their own right and form an important component of the chalk downland ecosystem. Many butterflies and other insects benefit from the shelter afforded by patches of scrub. A proportion of scrub should therefore always be retained, covering 10-15% of the grassland area. This should consist of small, irregularly shaped blocks and scattered isolated bushes.

## *Woodland*

The woodland should be managed by non-intervention to allow it to develop naturally. The key management is to ensure the safety of visitors, which includes the annual inspection of trees and any necessary H&S works. Care should be taken to avoid disturbance to badger setts, of which there are several in the vicinity.

## *Monitoring*

Biological records are the most valuable tools in observing effects of practical conservation work and planning management in a way that benefits habitats and valuable features of a specific site. Each site is individual and will not react in the same way to standardised management prescriptions. It is therefore important that all partners involved in management of the site have access to data that can help to plan management of the site in informed and scientifically sound manner.

The Trust's volunteer Croydon local group has a substantial expertise in butterflies, orchids and other vascular plants. Therefore, monitoring of the site will be conducted by the reserve volunteers together with the Trust's employees and other volunteers.

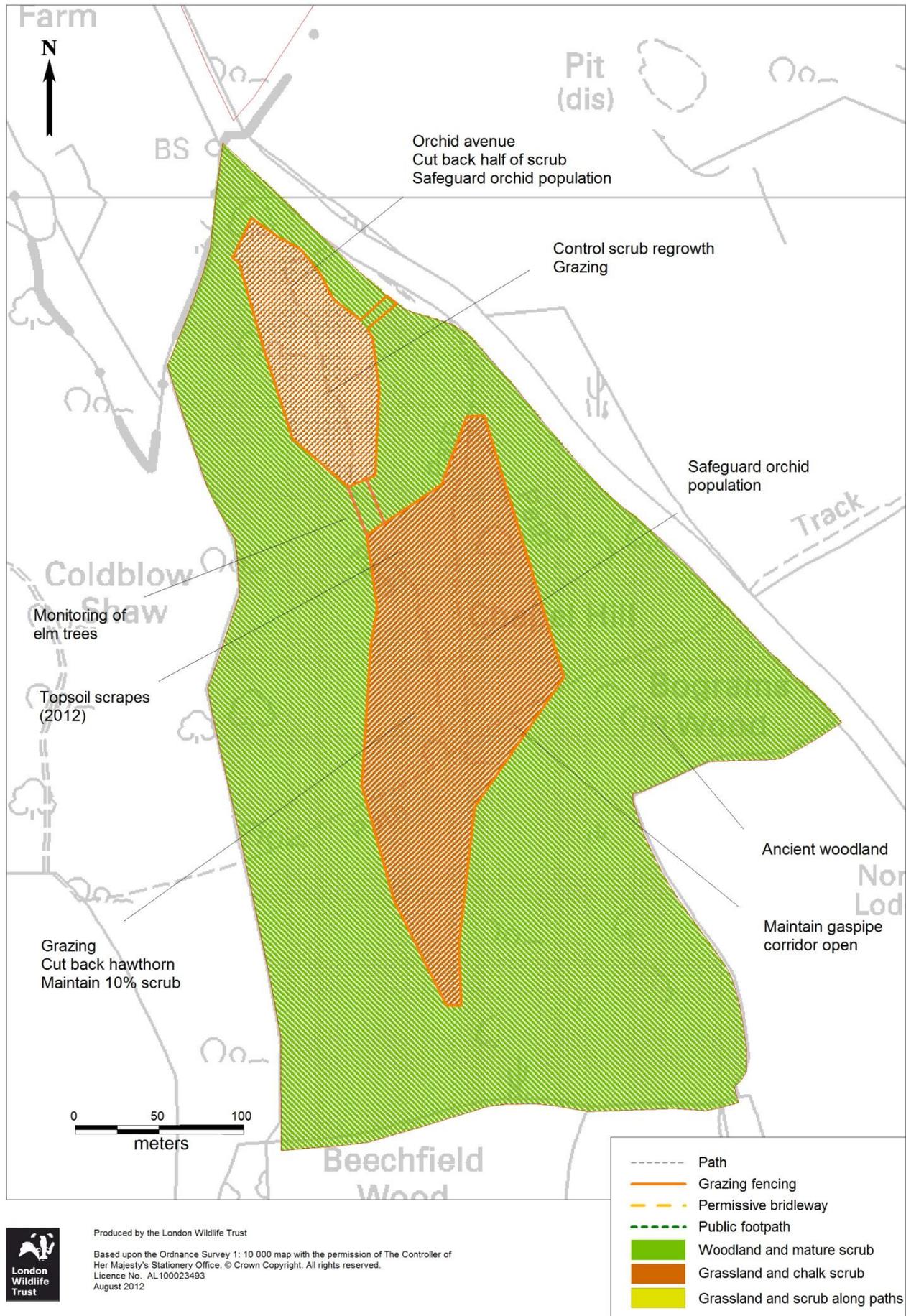


## Annual work schedule, 2012-17

	April- June	July- September	October - December	January - March
Grazing	✓	✓	✓	✓
If not grazed, cut grassland remove arisings			✓	✓
If not grazed, cut scrub re- growth in summer		✓		
Maintain scrub patches covering 5-10%, coppice on 4 year rotation			✓	✓
Clearance of mature scrub in the paddocks			✓	✓
Restore hedge along Featherbed Lane	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mow rank areas of grassland along bridleway			✓	
scrub clearance on Featherbed Lane Verge (one third of the area)			✓	✓
Cut back vegetation along footpaths as required			✓	✓
Fly-tipping clearance	✓	✓	✓	✓
Inspection of trees along paths	✓			✓
Repair steps where needed	✓	✓	✓	✓
Butterfly monitoring	✓	✓		
Monitoring of elm trees at Chapel Bank		✓		
Annual counts of rare plants	✓	✓		
Grassland monitoring		✓		
Breeding bird survey	✓	✓		



# Chapel Bank Nature Reserve



Produced by the London Wildlife Trust

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## How can you get involved?

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All you need is keen interest for working outdoors, suitable clothing and sturdy footwear. We will provide you with personal protective equipment and teach you how to safely use tools. Get in touch for details!



- Managing scrub using loppers and saws
- Pulling ragwort
- Felling small trees using hand saws
- Raking arisings from mowing and piling them in nearby scrub, cutting grassland using strimmers
- Annual grassland condition monitoring, monitoring of butterflies, orchids and reptiles.

London Wildlife Trust is the only charity dedicated solely to protecting the capital's wildlife and wild spaces, engaging London's diverse communities through access to our nature reserves, campaigning, volunteering and education.

Get in touch!

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