



## **AONB Conservation Fund**

### **Restoration of Wildlife Sites Report CF/1819/12**

Gorse management at The Riddings local wildlife site, Anchor

The aim of this project was to control the gorse regrowth on the acid grassland on this extremely important local wildlife site using an easier and safer method. In the past, the owner, Mike Whittall and his father before him cut the gorse by hand or with a tractor (the latter was unsafe on the steep slopes).

As explained in the original application for the grant, acid grassland is a priority habitat both in Shropshire and the UK as a whole. It is characteristic of much of the high ground in the Shropshire Hills AONB. Gorse and also bracken encroachment is an issue on many sites in the absence of appropriate grazing and more traditional methods of control.

The Riddings is one of the most important local wildlife sites in the Clun Forest and ranks amongst the best in Shropshire as a whole, comprising a complex mosaic of priority habitat and numerous uncommon and rare species. The owner Mike Whittall is very passionate about his land and carries out conservation work when advised by Shropshire Wildlife Trust.

A survey was carried out by the Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group and a copy of the botanical list with frequencies of indicator species found for this comparatively small area is enclosed (the list includes all historical surveys). The survey area was described by the volunteers as: 'a steep, sunny grassland dominated by scattered but dense gorse scrub' with the habitat described as 'acid grassland'.

Mike had a generous grant from the Conservation Fund to use a 'Robocut' to do the gorse cutting. I advised him to wait until after August to carry out the work, which he did, but when I contacted him again in October, he had cut the gorse but used a tractor instead of the Robocut. I told him that the grant would only be able to pay for the time spent on the work and expressed concern that he had used the tractor on such a steep incline.

I visited the wildlife site in December and below are photos of the slopes, as they were in March and then in December 2018 following the management work. I discussed the problem of the mulch I observed (which would have been the same if the Robocut had been used) and we decided that the best way to be rid of this was to put sheep



Before-photos taken March 2018



After-photos taken December 2018

on the slopes in order to disturb and to distribute the vegetative matter more evenly.

I will re-visit the wildlife site this summer to assess the vegetation regrowth and will take more photographs.