



Rodborough Common

Minchinhampton and Rodborough Commons are home to some of the country's very best wildlife. They're of international importance for their limestone grassland and the rare and diverse species that can be found. They're two of over 4,000 places in England designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

A Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is a designation for an area which is of special interest because of its fauna, flora or geology. These areas are very sensitive and are extremely important for conservation.

Why are the Commons so important?

The Commons also lie within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Rodborough Common has a particularly rich flora and fauna and has been given additional European protection as a Special Area of Conservation. More than a hundred species of grasses and wildflowers have been recorded, including rare orchids and over 30 species of butterfly, including one of the largest populations of the rare Duke of Burgundy butterfly in the country.

Grazing cattle

Grazing cattle on the Common is a tradition stretching back thousands of years. Without the cattle, the Commons would quickly revert back to scrub and woodland, and the rare grassland plants and animals would be gone. Each May on Marking Day, cattle are let out and graze the grass in just the right way to encourage wildlife and prevent scrub invasion.

Removing the scrub

In addition to the cattle grazing, the scrub has to be managed on Minchinhampton and Rodborough Commons. Scrub is a word used to describe trees, bushes and weeds like hawthorn, ash, birch, holm oak, cotoneaster and bramble. Although an important habitat in its own right, if left, scrub can quickly take over. On the Commons it's encroaching onto the priority grassland habitat so it's important to remove it, either by hand or mechanically using a tractor and flail. This enables species like the threatened Duke of Burgundy butterfly to thrive.

Ancient history

Rodborough Common offers a dramatic panorama overlooking Stroud and the Severn Vale. Defensive earthworks run for well over a mile across the common. These earthworks form the remains of a possible Iron Age settlement of the Dobunni tribe. They lived in an area that today broadly coincides with the English counties of Bristol, Gloucestershire and the north of Somerset. Their capital acquired the Roman name of Corinium, which is today known as Cirencester. The Dobunni were farmers who were incorporated into the Roman Empire in AD 43 and readily adopted the Romano-British lifestyle. After the collapse of the Roman Provincial Government, the area retained territorial identity for over 150 years before finally succumbing to the advances of the Saxons.

In the Middle Ages, the use of land was governed by the manorial system. Food was grown, animals grazed and fuel was gathered. Land remained in the ownership of the Lord of the Manor, but some local people were given the right to use the poorer areas which became known as 'common land'. Today, these 'rights of common' still include the grazing of animals. The people who are able to exercise these rights are known as 'commoners' because they own property within the historic Manor. These rights are usually recorded in the household deeds, and in the Commons Register held by Gloucestershire County Council.

For more information see: <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/minchinhampton-and-rodborough-commons>