



Putting *wildlife* on the map

The Coal Tips of Wansdyke 1995

: an assessment of their ecological value

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Introduction

The southern half of Wansdyke lies over the former North Somerset Coalfield, numerous active mines were situated in the area around Radstock and Midsomer Norton, the last of these closed in 1973. In many parts there are still substantial coal reserves below ground but the complex geological faulting and contorted nature of the seams along with the relative thinness of the strata make it uneconomical to continue mining.

The waste products from these mines were carried away or simply piled up as tips or batches. Many of these tips still exist today, their current use is varied. Re-extraction of coal has taken place at some, others have been levelled and built on. Many have been identified as areas in need of habitat improvement. In the past this has meant tree planting or a return to agricultural land. However with policies and reforms pushing for less agricultural production this approach needs to be evaluated. Others have been simply left to grow wild, some becoming areas of wildlife importance.

The wildlife value of Coal Tips can be considerable. In a county that is dominated by calcareous and basic soils, coal tips often provide small areas of neutral or acid soils. These soils are usually thin and well drained and often support a flora quite different to that of the surrounding area, many county and even national rarities can be found at some.

This study aimed to conduct a literary survey, and where appropriate field surveys of all the coal tips of Wansdyke in an attempt to highlight the best sites for wildlife. It is hoped that the information in this report will be considered by district and parish councils particularly in issues relating to the development and "improvement" of coal tip sites. Not all coal tips are of great nature conservation value, this report aims to highlight those that are.

Methods

Sites were identified using maps, referencing literature sources, and local knowledge. Existing biological survey data was collated for all sites by looking through records at Avon Wildlife Trust and at Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre (BRERC), present land designation of all sites was determined from local plans. These initial stages identified those sites where information was lacking or non-existent, these sites were considered priorities for visiting. Other sites with survey data but which were categorised for development or change under local plans were also visited as a priority. Some well known and adequately protected sites were not visited at all during this survey.

Section 2: Sites of Interest

No.: 7

Site Name: Clandown

Location: Clandown

Grid Ref: 680 559

Size of Site: c.4 Ha

Status: Part ALL/NCI, part Area of General Landscape Improvement, part undesignated.

Ownership: ?

Wildlife Interest: General Description: Mostly wooded, mixed and coniferous plantation, also scrub growth, some small isolated patches of acidic well drained grassland. Spp present included:

AWT Survey Aug. 1994

Black Knapweed
Sheep Sorrel

Previous Surveys: None on Record

Recommendations: Quite interesting landscape. Grassland at this site is restricted and scrub control is needed to maintain the grassland areas and their diversity of species. The areas of grassland fall mainly in the undesignated portion of the site. Access could be improved.

No.: 8

Site Name: Tynning

Location: Tynning

Grid Ref: 695 553

Size of Site: c.12 Ha

Status: entirely ALL/NCI, smaller part also General Landscape improvement

Ownership:

Wildlife Interest: General Description: A very Large site, consisting of quite mature pine plantation with good undergrowth, and wide open terraces of grassland with steep slopes and some erosion. Grassland is quite rank with a relatively low diversity at the time of the visit, better drained slopes had good diversity and species including:

AWT Survey Aug.1994

Sheeps Sorrel

Mouse ear Hawkweed
Wild Carrot

Previous Surveys: Avon Flora Project: recorded following species:
Slender Trefoil (Scarce nationally)
Rough Hawks-Beard

Recommendations: Definitely needs further survey. Quite dramatic scenery, good amenity value, potentially good nature conservation value.

No.: 9
Site Name: Radford
Location: Radford
Grid Ref: 674 580
Size of Site: c. 3 ha
Status: Part county SNCI, entirely, ALL/NCI, part Area of ancient monument/archaeological/historical interest.

Ownership:

Wildlife Interest: A nice site, nice open woodland, plus good pond with a good range of aquatic and marginal plant species inc.

Pale Persicaria
Dragonflies

Previous Surveys: AWT survey:
Oak (mature cover)
Ash (mature cover)
Birch (mature cover)
Beech (mature cover)
Allium Ursinum
Adoxa
Chrysospleium

Recommendations: Could potentially be made entirely SNCI, especially including the pond.

No.: 10
Site Name: Lower Writhlington (south)
Location: Lower Writhlington
Grid Ref: 700 550
Size of Site: 2.5 Ha
Status: Mostly ALL/NCI, small part Ancient Monument/Archaeological