

Pine scrub clearance by school children to restore heathland at Trigon, Dorset, England

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SUMMARY

In 1991, 5.7 ha of Scots pine *Pinus sylvestris* scrub was removed from a heathland in southern England. Trees with diameters less than 25 cm were cut using bow saws and loppers; mature trees were left untouched. Fourteen years later, the area could still be identified by the presence of cut stumps; considerable pine regeneration (330 trees/ha) was apparent as there had been no ongoing management.

BACKGROUND

Encroachment of trees and scrub onto heathland areas poses a major problem for heathland managers. Without removal, tree species such as silver birch *Betula pendula* and Scots pine *Pinus sylvestris* can dominate, shade out the dwarf ericaceous shrub community and result in a loss of many species associated with open heath.

The success of pine cutting by a volunteer group of school children on an area of heathland in Dorset, southern England, is documented here. The management work was carried out under the auspices of the RSPB Heathland Project as part of a wider programme of heathland management and education work conducted across the nationally important Dorset Heaths.

ACTION

Locality: The clearance was undertaken at Trigon (National Grid ref: SY 890912), Dorset, southern England, a site of 42 ha, of which approximately one third is dry heath. It is a component of the 660 ha Morden and Hyde Heaths Site of Special Scientific Interest and part of the Dorset Heaths Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

Pine cutting: Pine *Pinus* scrub was cut from 5.73 ha of the site in 1991 by volunteers from the local school, in conjunction with the RSPB Heathland Project. The area cleared consisted of mature dry heath, with young pine scrub

Table 1. The number of pine *Pinus* seedlings in five 10 x 10 m plots within the original cleared area 14 years after clearance (April 2005), Morden Bog and Hyde Heath SSSI, Trigon, Dorset.

Plot	Number of seedlings less than 5 years old	Number seedlings 5 – 10 years old
1	30	0
2	33	0
3	39	0
4	32	0
5	54	1

and a scattering of mature trees. Trees were cut using bow saws and loppers, only those less than 25 cm diameter at breast height were cut. Mature pine trees were left untouched. Cut material was chipped using a tractor mounted wood chipper. Chips were removed from the site in a high sided trailer, towed by a second tractor. Two RSPB staff supervised and worked with the school groups (with the RSPB staff operating the tractor and woodchipper for safety reasons). The total person days of all those involved in the scrub clearance (RSPB staff/ children / volunteers) was estimated at 60 days.

CONSEQUENCES

Fourteen years later, in April 2005, the area where the cutting had taken place could still be identified by the presence of old cut stumps. Considerable pine regeneration was apparent however, as no management had taken place in the interim.

Five 10 x 10 m plots were selected at random and the number of pine trees counted. The age of trees was estimated by their height and number of branches. The median value from the five plots (33 seedlings) equated to a density of 330 trees per ha (Table 1).