

Case Study

Fixed Point Photography –

an effective and easy method of recording and monitoring visual change

Background

Lowland heathland is internationally important for its biodiversity, providing a unique habitat for many rare and threatened species including nightjar, sand lizard, and sundew.

However, lowland heathland is rarer than rainforest; many former heaths have been lost to agriculture or forestry, or have been fragmented by development, road improvements and mineral extraction. Furthermore a lack of effective land management has meant that many sites have been invaded by bracken and scrub.

The South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) and partners have made the commitment to reverse the continuing decline of lowland heathland within the National Park. In 2016 the partnership was successful in securing a £1.44 million award from the Heritage Lottery fund for the Heathlands Reunited (HeRe) project that will:

‘Create wildlife corridors and recreate former areas of heathland to cover an area greater than 1,200 football pitches by the end of the five year project in 2021.’

Partners include: Amphibian and Reptile Conservation, Butterfly Conservation, Ministry of Defence Estates, Forestry Commission, Hampshire County Council, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, the Lynchmere Society, the National Trust, Natural England, RSPB and the Sussex Wildlife Trust.



Marking a 'fixed point'

The project

To achieve the aims of the HeRe project a great deal of practical conservation work such as scrub clearance is undertaken by staff, partners, volunteers, and contractors. It is important that this work is monitored. Fixed Point Photography (FPP) is an effective and easy method of recording and monitoring visual changes within the landscape. It involves taking a photograph, from the same point, at intervals over a period of time. The photographs are then compared to identify changes that are occurring and assessed as having either a positive or negative impact upon the character and condition of the landscape.

FPP was an exciting opportunity for members of the local community to become more involved with the project; 10 volunteers were recruited who attended a training day held at the South Downs Centre. The training was provided by Anne Katrin Purkiss a professional photographer and Graeme Lyons who undertakes FPP on Wildlife Trust sites. An agreed methodology for the collection of images was important to share. It was particularly important to ensure files were uploaded consistently to the central online photo library, for easy relocation and identification.

Post training the individual heathland site managers met their new FPP volunteer on site to agree their fixed points; they did a trial upload to the photo library prior to the volunteer's first official photo collection and upload in September 2017.

The trial assisted in ironing out any unforeseen problems, helping the volunteers to feel confident in their ability to complete the task. These skilled volunteers are now able to carry out this task independently, saving project staff valuable time.

“Thanks to HeRe we were given support and encouragement to properly record the results of the practical work we were planning on carrying out. These photographs would not have been taken without the HLF project providing the impetus and encouragement to do so.”

Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust

The outcome

Staff and volunteers have been trained in using an agreed methodology for collecting fixed point photography images.

Photographs have been taken at 15 heathland sites by 10 individual volunteers, twice a year.

Together they have learnt the importance of adopting a consistent approach to effectively monitor practical site works. The photographic evidence captured can help to inform future land management plans and support the case for making external funding applications.

The project partners have ready access to a pool of skilled volunteers who can collect and collate this photographic data on their behalf.

The FPP volunteers will come together in May 2018 to enjoy sharing their experiences to date, celebrating successes and to discuss any challenges faced, thinking together about positive changes that can be made and any further support required.

The South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan (PMP) 2014–19 sets out a shared vision for how we all would like the National Park to be in the future. It includes 11 long-term outcomes, and provides a framework for communities, landowners, charities, businesses and public bodies to work together to make this vision and these outcomes a reality.

This project successfully achieved the following PMP outcomes:

Outcome 1: The landscape character of the National Park, its special qualities and local distinctiveness have been conserved and enhanced by effectively managing land and the negative impacts of development and cumulative change.

Outcome 2: There is increased capacity within the landscape for its natural resources, habitats and species to adapt to the impacts of climate change and other pressures.

Outcome 3: A well-managed and better connected network of habitats and increased population and distribution of priority species now exist in the National Park.

southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/SDNP-Partnership-Management-Plan-2014-19.pdf

The future

FPP volunteers will continue to take and collate photos bi-annually throughout the duration of the 5 year project, providing a valuable documented record of the landscape change over time, often as a result of planned practical site works.

The project proposes to produce a PDF handbook on the methodology used to deliver this project, including the lessons learnt along the way, that can be shared with partners and other agencies.

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<https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/care-for/heathland/heathlands-reunited/>



Heathland in the National Park

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