

[REDACTED] site-check/condition assessment 12<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> August 2019  
Some headline statistics - Rob Large for Natural England, 18<sup>th</sup> October 2019

### Units visited

[REDACTED]

| Unit no.   | Name       |
|------------|------------|
| [REDACTED] | [REDACTED] |
| [REDACTED] | [REDACTED] |
| [REDACTED] | [REDACTED] |
| [REDACTED] | [REDACTED] |
| [REDACTED] | [REDACTED] |
| [REDACTED] | [REDACTED] |
| [REDACTED] | [REDACTED] |
| [REDACTED] | [REDACTED] |
| [REDACTED] | [REDACTED] |
| [REDACTED] | [REDACTED] |
| [REDACTED] | [REDACTED] |

[REDACTED]

| Unit no.   | Name       |
|------------|------------|
| [REDACTED] | [REDACTED] |
| [REDACTED] | [REDACTED] |
| [REDACTED] | [REDACTED] |
| [REDACTED] | [REDACTED] |
| [REDACTED] | [REDACTED] |

### Methodology

Surveyors carried out a series of walks aiming to cover the broadest area and range of SSSI feature habitats making multiple stops and assessing mapped feature condition attributes, as laid out in the Favourable Condition Tables (FCT) for the sites), either at the scale of 2m x 2m quadrats or across the visible surrounds. Target notes were also recorded as appropriate.

Natural England's guidance on Common Standards Monitoring of upland habitat features defines favourable condition as occurring where 95% of samples (quadrats) meet the defined target threshold values for all mandatory condition attributes.

A total of 140 condition assessment quadrats were recorded as follows: 100 in Blanket bog and valley bog, 22 in Subalpine dwarf-shrub heath and 18 in Upland wet heath. Other feature habitat types (e.g. Acid grassland, Broadleaved woodland etc.) were not assessed.

The extent of the site, resource constraints and the weather conditions meant that it was not possible to collect statistically significant numbers of samples of each feature habitat in each SSSI unit. Consequently the figures in this report are expressed at the level of the whole area assessed, or of the feature habitats considered.

This document summarises some preliminary analysis of the condition assessment data collected only. A more detailed analysis and discussion of issues raised in the target notes collected will follow in due course.

### Condition assessment data

Aggregated across all features and units a total of 80 samples (~57%) failed to meet the required threshold for favourable condition on at least one attribute. For the [REDACTED] units 51% of samples failed, while in [REDACTED] the figure was 60% although fewer samples were taken in the south and coverage was less comprehensive.

In Blanket bog and valley bog (the most widespread feature) the failure rate was 51%, for both dry and wet heathland types it was 72%. Again sample sizes were smaller for the heathland features.

The following table lists the attributes which are failing and the proportion of samples in the relevant habitats which fail. Note that any of the first six are capable of violating the 95% threshold and turning a unit unfavourable, even if all other attributes were favourable.

| Attribute                        | Failure rate | Applies to           |
|----------------------------------|--------------|----------------------|
| Dwarf shrub cover                | 62.50%       | Dry heath, Wet heath |
| Positive indicator species cover | 45.00%       | Bogs                 |
| Graminoid cover                  | 44.44%       | Wet heath            |
| Presence of Cross-leaved Heath   | 38.89%       | Wet heath            |
| Positive indicator species count | 15.57%       | Bogs, Dry heath      |
| Presence of Mosses and Lichens   | 9.09%        | Dry heath            |
| Evidence of burning              | 2.86%        | All                  |
| Sphagnum damage                  | 0.85%        | Bogs, Wet heath      |
| Cover of non-native species      | 0.71%        | All                  |
| Scrub and tree cover             | 0.71%        | All                  |

Other attributes were recorded, but either were not mandatory for condition assessment, or did not cause any quadrats to fail (e.g. disturbance, presence/frequency of negative indicator species, Bracken, Soft-rush etc.)

No attempt was made to assess directly the levels of grazing pressure, particularly on dwarf-shrubs. In part because this assessment is best carried out after the end of the growing season, but also because it is time consuming if done objectively and the expectation was that there would be little evidence of overgrazing. This was confirmed by other observations.

### Other data

A number of other attributes were recorded which are not mandatory for condition assessment, but which were considered relevant.

Cover of Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) was estimated in the area surrounding each quadrat. The average recorded cover across all habitats was 55%. This breaks down to Bogs 60%, Dry heath 35%, Wet heath 56%.

These figures are all consistent with insufficient grazing during the period when *Molinia* is more palatable and the consequent shading and build-up of thatch are likely to contribute to all of the more significant attribute failures in the table above.

Of the 22 Dry heath quadrats only two (9%) were recorded as having all growth phases of heather present. This is generally a consequence either of over- or under-grazing

25 out of 40 (62%) of dry and wet heath quadrats were reported as having signs of disease or die-back.

Around half of all quadrats showed some evidence of grazing, though in many cases this was just a few nibbled stems, some dung or hoofprints of indeterminate age. Only eight quadrats had “many” livestock nearby, fourteen had “several”, twenty-six had “few” and at the remaining ninety-two stops no livestock were visible nearby. Early indications are that the majority of those areas where many or several livestock were noted were on lower ground in the north and east of the [REDACTED] units and in the northwest of the [REDACTED] units (i.e. sheltered areas closer to farms).