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# Wisley Common - Marsh Clubmoss Habitat Assessment and Reintroduction Proposals

January 2024



# Introduction

*Lycopodiella inundata* formed part of the rare assemblage of plants within Ockham and Wisley Commons SSSI in the 1800s. The last records for this species within the locality were from 1815 at TQ0658, and at Ockham Common (1884) & Hut Pond (1886). It is unknown why Marsh Clubmoss was lost from Ockham and Wisley Commons SSSI, since several areas of suitable habitat still exist.

Following historic data collection, a site visit was conducted with Surrey Wildlife Trust to identify wet heathland habitats suitable to support Marsh Clubmoss. Three areas were visited, comprising two ponds and an area of wet heathland.

- Pond Farm Pond (TQ07525902): A large pond supporting *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, and heavily poached edges (from cattle). The seasonal draw-down zone is bare, but this quickly turns into heather dominated margins.
- Pond (TQ06905880): An extensive pond and area of wet heath, with *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*. Areas of bare ground largely associated with pond edges, rather than inherently open bare peat.
- Wet heath (TQ07515893): Open wet heath supporting associate species. This area supports open conditions, with bare peat covered in *Zygodonium ericetorum* (algae) and other associate species: *Drosera rotundifolia*, *Sphagnum* mosses, *Erica tetralix*, *Molinia caerulea* (in low density). *Zygodonium ericetorum* is thought to play an important role in maintaining moisture levels for the short-rooted Marsh Clubmoss, particularly during drier periods.

A photograph of a white cow with black spots grazing in a field of ferns and trees. The cow is the central focus, standing in a lush green field with many ferns. In the background, there are several tall, dark green trees under a clear blue sky. The overall scene is a natural, outdoor setting.

## Current Management

Wisley Common benefits from cattle grazing and as such, the wet heathland areas are periodically disturbed, ensuring areas of compacted bare peat persist. This form of management also ensures the encroachment of scrub and *Molinia* is checked, preventing excessive habitat management requirements should an introduction of Marsh Clubmoss go ahead. Given other areas of wet heath are present in the wider area, there is opportunity for spores to be transported on the cattle, and for new populations to spring up.

# Site Suitability

## Marsh Clubmoss Scoring System

A scoring system has been created to classify the value of sites for MCM introduction. Ten attributes are given a score of 1 (present) or 0 (not present).

Attribute	Pond Farm Pond TQ07525902	Pond TQ06905880	Wet Heath TQ07515893
Management	1	1	1
Associate species	0	0	1
Zygonium	0	0	1
Bare ground	0	0	1
Long-term persistence	1	1	1
General vibe	0	0	1
Sufficiently wet (hydrology)	1	1	1
Free from Scrub (pine and gorse)	0	0	1
Free from Molinia	1	1	1
Part of a broader landscape	1	1	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>

The wet heath site at Wisley Common scores highly under this system, and as such is an excellent candidate for Marsh Clubmoss reintroduction.

We will continue to monitor the two other pond environments, which provide some suitability. These areas hold potential for future sub-sites (either through intentional reintroduction efforts) or naturally through cattle-induced spore movements.



# Reintroduction Proposals

The aims of The Species Recovery Trust are to reverse the decline of Marsh Clubmoss through appropriate management and a reintroduction program. This will initially comprise a series of low-key translocations (of plant material and spores) into receptor sites to explore the viability of this methodology (given there is only 1 documented successful translocation to date, the population of which is dwindling). This project has already begun on the Dorset Heaths, and we hope to expand this into the south-east in 2024.

Our reintroduction projects are essentially trials, and will commence with the movement of small amounts of plant material which will be monitored for a minimum of 10 years. No works will take place until the appropriate consents have been obtained.

## Donor Site

Thursley NNR supports over 5000 plants, with populations occurring at a high density where thinning out will provide additional habitats to grow in. In line with IUCN criteria, no more than 10% of the population will be removed.

## Receptor Site

The wet heathland site at Wisley Common (TQ 0751 5893) provides excellent conditions for Marsh Clubmoss as described above. The receptor site has been paired with the donor site by possessing similar auto-ecological profiles.

The translocation would involve the movement of five small turves (no larger than 30x30cm), in spring and autumn 2024. Location details will be recorded, and where possible markers used to assist with re-finding the plants.





Marsh Clubmoss Turf



Meticulous record collection



Marsh Clubmoss turf planted in receptor site



All work conducted by hand

# Reintroduction Proposals

## Management Prescriptions

Limited requirement given the inherent nature of wet heath and mires and the presence of cattle grazing across the site. Long-term management will inevitably be required in the form of small-scale scrub clearance, as well as focussed grazing efforts or small-scale disturbance using a heavy-tracked vehicle (on a 5-8 yearly basis). Creation of shallow scrapes may also benefit the population in the long-term.

## Timing of Proposals

Due care will be taken not to disturb reptiles, birds and other species on site. Care will be taken to ensure no invasive or problem species will be introduced from the donor site.

## Monitoring

The population will be monitored on a biennial basis for the first 5 years by SRT / SWT. Dependent on the outcome, this would move to an annual check of the population in the following five years. Required management and further plantings will be focussed by the result of these monitoring checks.



The Species Recovery Trust is a charity set up to tackle the loss of some of the rarest species in the UK.

There are over nine hundred native species in the UK that are classed as under threat, with several hundreds more currently widespread but known to be in significant decline. The countryside is now bereft of many species that were a familiar sight a mere generation ago.

A small number of these species are on the absolute brink of existence, poised to become extinct in our lifetimes; our goal is to stop them vanishing.

Our aim is to remove 50 species from the edge of extinction in the UK by the year 2050. In addition we are reconnecting people with wildlife and the natural world through training programmes and awareness raising.





A photograph of a forest floor in spring. The ground is covered with a dense carpet of purple bluebells. Several tree stumps and fallen logs are scattered across the scene, some covered in moss. Tall, slender trees with green foliage form the background, with sunlight filtering through the canopy.

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