

Downland management cards



Habitat fragmentation

When parts of a habitat are destroyed it can leave smaller unconnected areas behind. This is known as 'habitat fragmentation.' Imagine one big island being divided into lots of smaller islands. Fragmentation can have a negative impact on wildlife in several ways:

1. Habitat loss
2. The quality of habitat
3. Increased extinction risk

Conservation grazing

By wandering the fields, eating, trampling, lying on and crushing the land, along with the poo left behind, grazing animals leave a patchwork of microhabitats. The Old Chalk New Downs project is working with Trosley Country Park to remove some of the larger areas of scrub and put in new fencing to expand the area of existing chalk grassland and enable ongoing conservation grazing.

Scrub management

Scrub provides good habitat for wildlife so leaving some areas of scrub scattered throughout the downland, at least around the edges, will provide nesting sites for breeding birds, shelter for species such as invertebrates and reptiles, and berries for migrating and over-wintering birds. The Old Chalk New Downs project is working with the Birling Estate to restore a large area of chalk grassland through scrub removal and fencing.

Under-grazing or no grazing

When not enough animals feed on an area of land the coarse grasses and scrub may take over. This may result in the loss of the chalk grassland species.



Land development

Activities such as quarrying, road building, housing and landfill are types of land development which could cause severe damage to the downland habitat.



Recreational pressure/disturbance

If lots of people walk the same route through the downland everyday it may have an impact on the structure and type of plants and grasses growing. Trampling of vegetation may cause soil erosion and make it difficult for plants to grow.



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Invasion by non-native plants

Non-native plant species may cause problems by outcompeting the chalk grass and wildflowers. Non-native plants have been introduced to an area.

Removal of hedgerows

The creation of larger fields due to changes in farming and housing development for growing populations has led to hedgerow removal or a lack of hedgerow management. Many of Kent's hedgerows are in poor condition because of the excessive use of fertilisers and pesticides in intensive farming, a decline in traditional management techniques like hedge-laying, and general neglect leaving straggly, unhealthy hedges.

Over-grazing

When too many animals feed on an area of land we call this 'over-grazing'. Large numbers of animals can damage the grass and wildflowers by trampling. The plants that are suited to grow there may change as the soil conditions change because of lots of animal poo!



Intensive farming

Farming which produces large amounts of crops, usually by using chemicals and machines is known as 'intensive farming'. Intensive farming methods could have a negative impact on downland because of increased use of fertilisers, herbicides and pesticides, removal of hedgerows, ploughing and planting crops at different times of year.

Hedgerow management and planting

Tall, thick, bushy well-managed hedges are most valuable for wildlife. Hedgerows provide food and shelter for many species. They often link into woodlands and make corridors along which wildlife can travel. Hedgerows can also improve their environment by preventing soil erosion, capturing pollutants such as fertilisers and pesticides running off fields, storing carbon to help combat climate change, and providing homes for predators of many pest species. The Old Chalk New Downs project has set-up a Hedgerow Heroes project to monitor the health of hedgerows and restore them where possible.

Visitor information and education

The Old Chalk New Downs project aims to reconnect people with the downland landscape through school visits, events, trails, leaflets and on-site information boards. By raising awareness of the habitats and heritage of the downs it is hoped people will be inspired to care about this environment and protect it for future generations.