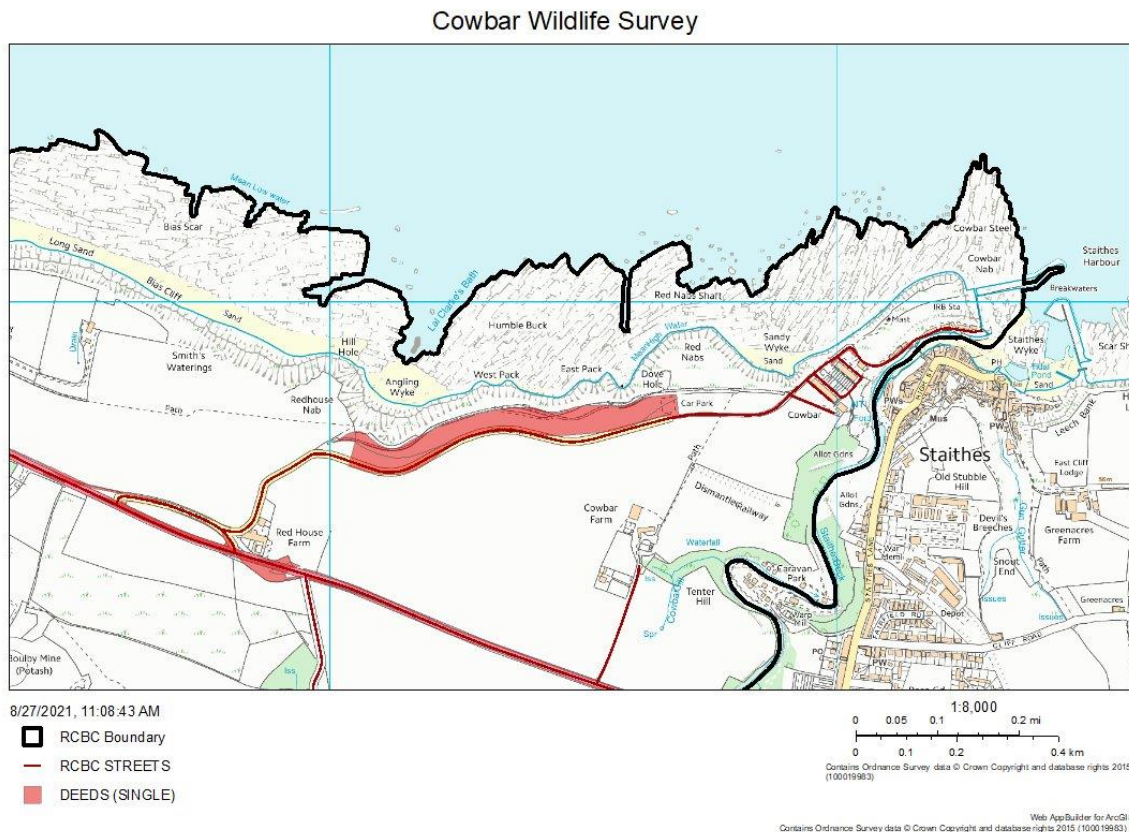


Cowbar Grassland Survey

A walk over survey of the grassland area to the North of Cowbar, between Cowbar Lane and the Cleveland Way, as highlighted on the map below. The walkover survey was completed on 28th June 2021 and 19th July 2021. The aim of the survey was to identify wildlife present on the site and assess habitat to support wildlife.

Katherine Knox (East Cleveland Ranger)

Requested by Kevin Wilson Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council Biodiversity Officer



Botanical Interest

The sward is dominated by grasses including false oat grass, cocks foot and common bent. However a variety of plant species were found on site including red clover, vetch, marsh thistle, common knapweed, yarrow, ladys bedstraw, common sorrell, plantain, common spotted orchid, mouse eared hawkweed and birds foot trefoil.

The grassland would be defined as semi improved grassland, although not as rich in wildflowers and wild grasses as unimproved grassland and priority habitats it still has wider biodiversity value.

Invertebrate Interest

A variety of invertebrates were observed on site including moths and butterflies such as burnet moths, orange tip, cabbage white, painted lady and small blue. Many of the plants on site are food plants for the caterpillars of such butterflies and good nectar sources for bees. Although invertebrates observed are of common occurrence (no local significant species), they are important to the wider wildlife interest on site.

Local residents also identified other butterfly species including small blue, small tortoiseshell, red admiral and ringlet. They also identified a number of bee species and beetles.

Ornithology Interest

A number of bird species were observed whilst surveying the site. Skylark, lapwing and corn bunting were observed on site during the surveys and are red list species therefore of the highest conservation priority. House martins and meadow pipit were also observed on site, these birds, which are amber list species.

Several of these birds are ground nesting birds (including skylark, lapwing and meadow pipit). Although no nests were identified during the survey, it is possible the nests are present. All wild bird species, their eggs and nests are protected by law, which means you should always try to avoid harming birds. Ground nest sites are particularly vulnerable from public access.

In addition, local residents have identified a number of other bird species on site including barn owls tawny owl, kestrels, wagtails, sand martens and kittiwakes.

Mammal Interest

Although no mammals were directly observed on site during the surveys, there was evidence of numerous runs and burrows on the grassland for small mammals. Local residents have recorded a variety of small mammals including weasels, stoats, voles, mice, hares and hedgehogs, as well as deer and foxes. The area is also likely to provide good foraging habitat for bats, which again have been observed by local residents, although there is no roosting opportunities for bats on site.

Further survey work would be needed to identify the variety of mammals on site and population estimates.

Reptiles

Although no reptiles were observed during the site visits, the habitat at Cowbar is favourable for their presence. Suitable habitat for reptiles includes variable vegetation structure in a sunny, south facing aspect. Slow worms have been identified on site by local residents.

Reptiles can be negatively impacted by reduction in habitat quality, risk of fire and effects of increased littering. Further survey work would be needed to identify the likely presence/absence of reptiles and to assess population size.

Site Management

The area is currently unmanaged, although the perimeter of the grassland is cut annually in the early autumn.

Pressure/Human Impact on Site

During visits to site I have witnessed vehicles parking on grass verges and mid grassland. This is likely to have a negative impact on the wildlife value on site, particularly disturbance to breeding birds.

Overview

Although the majority of species and habitats identified are widespread at a regional and national scale, the Cowbar grassland is surrounded by intensively managed agriculture (majority arable) which is likely to have low wildlife value, making the Cowbar Grassland locally valuable.

Suggestions

- Prevention of vehicles accessing the grassland, this may be a physical barrier (such as a raised mound or birds mouth fencing) or greater, long term parking enforcement.
- The site would also benefit from signage, including no parking signs and interpretation to educate site users on the wildlife present on site.