



Craig Best



## New hope for Hedley Fell

You may have already heard that Durham Wildlife Trust has recently become the new owner of Hedleyhope Fell. My name is Craig Best and I have been employed by the Trust to work with local people to manage and improve the Fell for wildlife and people. My post has been made possible because of funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

This is the first newsletter from the Fell. It will keep you informed of what's going on and how you can get involved in the project.

Hedleyhope Fell comprises approximately 200 ha of mid-altitude heathland. This type of heathland grows between upland heath which is found further up the Dale and lowland heath at Waldrige Fell. Most of the site is registered as common land with common grazing rights held by a few local farmers.

This habitat is important in the region and supports a number of rare and uncommon plants and animals. They include the Green Hairstreak butterfly, Velvet Ant, Red and Black Grouse, Short Eared Owl and plants such as

Lesser Skullcap and Stags Horn Club Moss. More recently Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary butterfly and Tree Sparrows have been recorded. Many of these species are recognised as priority species in Durham. I'm sure over the next few years other important species will be discovered!

Heathland is a habitat that continues to exist mainly because of grazing and burning. Without continued management heathland would change into scrub and then, eventually woodland. You would be correct in thinking woodland is a valuable resource but many of the plants and animals that exist in

heathland rely on active management, such as grazing.

You will see very little change on the Fell over the next year. This is because it is important that we find out what lives and grows there. A number of local experts will be surveying the Fell to look for breeding and winter birds and invertebrates. Butterflies and the vegetation will also be surveyed. I would be interested to know what you have seen in the last few years. At the moment we are unsure if the Fell has many reptiles living there. If you have seen any adders or lizards then please contact me.

**Craig Best**

Short eared owl and Skylark (inset); Derin Smith



# What improvements are we going to make

Once we have this information then we will be able to produce a management plan which will guide us on how best to improve the Fell. The improvements will not just be for wildlife but for visitors as well.

Parts of the Fell have not been grazed effectively for at least 20 years. This is why you can see a large number of scattered trees, scrub and bracken on the fell. Some of the scattered trees will be removed and the bracken will be controlled. This will not happen until we have the information from the plant and animal surveys. Some birds and butterflies need areas of trees and bracken to maintain healthy numbers.

Of course we don't want to be doing this for ever so I will be working closely with the common holders to ensure the Fell is grazed enough in the future to stop trees and bracken taking over and to make sure the Fell is not overgrazed.

So what about people then?

By making use of the existing public rights of way, desire lines (where people want to walk anyway) and illegal vehicle tracks, I will be drawing up

an access strategy to show the best routes on site to improve. This will not be ready until the end of the year. Between now and then I will be monitoring where people walk and asking walkers for their ideas. My initial thoughts are to improve an existing footpath which will link Tow Law and Cornsay Colliery as a long distance walk. A circular walk on the lower part of the Fell and a circular walk on the top part of the Fell along the B6301 where dog walkers currently walk. This route will also be suitable for people with disabilities. A plan will feature in a future

newsletter for local people to comment on.

A small car park will be installed for visitors to the site. Both circular footpath routes would start and finish from the car park. The car park would also accommodate a coach so that groups from local schools can visit the site.

Situated in the car park and throughout the Fell there will be information panels and signs which will tell people about the Fell and help to guide visitors around the site.

A number of guided walks and opportunities for

learning how to identify plants and animals will start once access on the Fell has been improved. Local schools will also be invited to visit the Fell, to learn about their local environment.

The level of disturbance by motorbikes, quads and off road vehicles in recent years has damaged the Fell and disturbed wildlife. We plan to look at ways of keeping vehicles off the Fell to stop them disturbing wildlife and walkers. The local police and off road squad are already patrolling the site.



Volunteers at work to prevent fly tipping

# In brief

- Improve habitats for plants and animals
- Restore disturbed areas to plants typical of a heathland
- Control scattered trees, scrub and bracken to stop them taking over the fell
- Ensure the Fell is grazed to benefit wildlife
- Keep sheep on the Fell and off the road
- Improve footpaths on the Fell
- Provide parking facilities for visitors
- Guided walks and opportunities for learning
- Install information panels and signs telling visitors about the Fell
- Encourage local schools to visit the site to learn about their local environment
- Stop motorbikes, quads and off road vehicles disturbing wildlife, walkers and scarring the landscape.



Volunteers removing fly tipping on Hedleyhope Fell



Adder and Common lizard, Photos: Darin Smith



Small pearl bordered fritillary, Photo: Darin Smith

## Don't forget!

If you have seen adders or lizards on Hedleyhope Fell please inform Craig Best via the contact details on the back page.

# How can you help?

Durham Wildlife Trust relies almost entirely on volunteers to help manage our reserves. If you have an interest in the future of Hedleyhope Fell then I would be pleased to hear from you. There are a number of ways in which you can get involved. I am setting up a task force to work on the Fell. As a volunteer you would learn new skills such as tree and scrub

management, bracken control and footpath maintenance. Alternatively, if a hands on approach is not your forté then you could become a volunteer warden. The fell would benefit from a number of people patrolling the site and reporting incidents such as fly tipping, the condition of footpaths and generally keeping an eye on what's going on. If you have any other ideas

then please let me know!

Unfortunately due to the high cost of printing and distribution future editions of this newsletter will not go to everyone's door. To make sure you get the next copy please contact me.

Please contact.

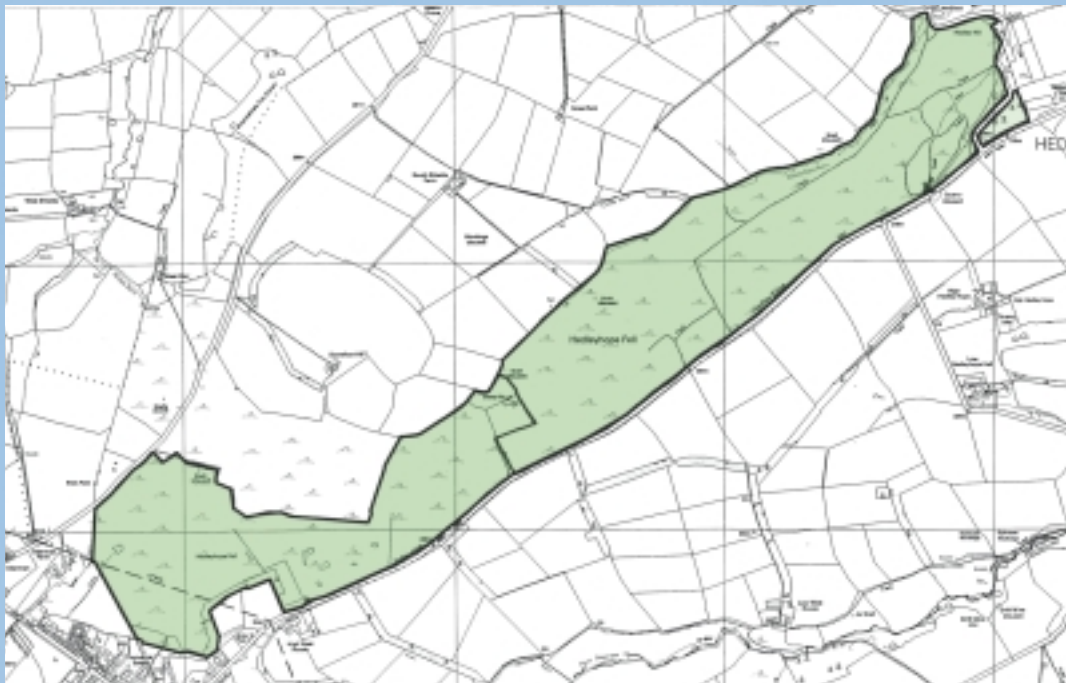
- If you would like to continue receiving future editions of

Hedleyhope Herald.

- If you have any stories about the fell and would like them included in future editions.
- If you own a local business and would like to sponsor future newsletters and get advertising space in return.

**Craig Best**  
Hedleyhope Fell Wildlife and Community Officer

## Map of Hedleyhope Fell Nature Reserve



**DURHAM**  
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Durham Wildlife Trust aims to conserve wildlife and to promote conservation within the County of Durham, City of Sunderland and the Boroughs of Gateshead, South Tyneside and Darlington. For further information visit [www.wildlifetrust.org.uk/durham](http://www.wildlifetrust.org.uk/durham)