

**Land Adjacent to White Gables, Caverswall
Common**

Extended Phase I Habitat Survey

April 2013

Notice to readers

This report has been prepared by Absolute Ecology with all reasonable skill, care and diligence, within the terms of the contract with the client. The actions of the surveyor on site, and during the production of the report were undertaken in accordance with the Code of Professional Conduct for the Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (www.ieem.org.uk).

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Non-technical summary

Absolute Ecology were commissioned to undertake an Extended Phase I Habitat Survey of land adjacent to White Gables, Caverswall Common, Staffordshire. The Phase I survey was undertaken on the 18th April 2013 by an experienced and licensed ecologist who is a full member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology & Environmental Management (CIEEM).

No evidence of protected or notable flora and fauna species was found during the survey, with the exception of three relict bird's nests being present within the wooden stable block within the site.

Contents

Notice to readers	2
Non-technical summary	3
Contents	4
1.0 Introduction	5
Background	5
Site Description	5
2.0 Methodology	6
Desk Study	6
Habitat Survey	6
Fauna	6
Valuation of Ecological Features	7
Nomenclature	7
3.0 Legislation	8
4.0 Results	9
Desk Study	9
Habitats	9
Fauna	9
5.0 Development Constraints and Recommendations	11
Habitats	11
6.0 References	12
7.0 Photographic Plates	13

1.0 Introduction

Background

- 1.1 Absolute Ecology was commissioned to undertake an Extended Phase I Habitat Survey of a site adjacent to White Gables, Caverswall Common, Caverswall, Staffordshire
- 1.2 The Phase I survey was undertaken on 18th April 2013 by an experienced ecologist who is a full member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology & Environmental Management (CIEEM). The objective of this report is to provide the client with information on any known or potential protected or rare species that may be using the site, and to outline recommendations on how to proceed with the works in a legal and ecologically sensitive manner.
- 1.3 Unless the client indicates to the contrary, information on the species found to be present on the site will be passed to the county biological records centre to update records held for the area.

Site Description

- 1.4 The site comprises an area of land adjacent to the dwelling property White Gables, Caverswall Common, Staffordshire at OSGR SJ 95319 44474.
- 1.5 The site is mostly bare ground, with two buildings within it. One is of mixed brick and breeze block construction and the other is a multi-roomed wooden building presumably previously used as stabling for livestock.
- 1.6 The vegetation within the site is very limited, with a partial mature Leyland cypress hedge on the western boundary, and a relict hedge dominated by hawthorn and holly, with some silver birch on top of a grassed bank on the northern boundary of the site.

2.0 Methodology

Desk Study

- 2.1 In order to compile background information on the site and immediate surroundings the Staffordshire Ecological Record (SER) was contacted.
- 2.2 Information requested was as follows:-
- Records of protected species within the 1 km of the site.
 - Records of rare or notable species within the 1 km of the site.
 - Non-statutory site designations on or within 1 km of the site.
- 2.3 Additionally, MAGIC (Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside, 2010) was used to establish whether any of the following were present:-
- Statutory site designations on or within 1 km of the site.
 - Statutory sites designated for bats within 5 km of the site.

Habitat Survey

- 2.4 The site was visited on the 18th April 2013 and was surveyed in accordance with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) Phase I Habitat Survey methodology (JNCC, 2007). This technique provides an inventory of the basic habitat types present and allows identification of areas of greater potential that might warrant further study.
- 2.5 The observable higher plant species in each habitat type within the site, and their abundance, were recorded using the DAFOR scale:

D	Dominant
A	Abundant
F	Frequent
O	Occasional
R	Rare

Fauna

- 2.6 Habitats present on the site were searched for obvious signs of faunal activity, *e.g.* presence of badger setts, mammal tracks or herpetofauna under refugia. Any buildings and mature trees on site were visually examined from the ground to identify features with the potential to support roosting bats or nesting birds.

Valuation of Ecological Features

- 2.7 The value of areas of habitat and plant communities has been measured against published criteria where available. Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) have been searched to identify whether action has been taken to protect all areas of a particular habitat and to identify current factors causing loss and decline of particular habitats. The presence of injurious and legally controlled weeds has also been taken into account.
- 2.8 When assigning a level of value to a species, its distribution and status (including a consideration of trends based on available historic records) has been taken into account. Other factors influencing the value of a species are: legal protection, rarity and Species Action Plans (SAPs). Guidance, where it is available, for the identification of populations of sufficient size for them to be considered of national or international importance has also been taken into account.

Nomenclature

- 2.9 The English name only of flora and fauna species is given in the main text of this report; however, scientific names are used for invertebrates where no English name is available. Vascular plants and charophytes follow the nomenclature of The Botanical Society for the British Isles (BSBI) 2007 database (BSBI, 2011) with all other flora and fauna following the Nameserver facility of the National Biodiversity Network Species Dictionary (<http://www.nhm.ac.uk/nbn/>), which is managed by the Natural History Museum.

3.0 Legislation

- 3.1 The United Kingdom Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) 1994 sets out a strategy for implementing the Convention on Biological Diversity, which was signed by the United Kingdom at the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit in 1992. The published report contains action plans for the United Kingdom's most threatened species and habitat plans for the most vulnerable areas.
- 3.2 The Local BAP sets out the county's part in the UK biodiversity planning process, in the form of local habitat and species action plans. Local BAPs are intended to focus resources, to conserve and enhance biodiversity, by taking account of national and local priorities.
- 3.3 Schedule 1 Part 1 of The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (and amendments) – this lists birds protected by special penalties at all times. It prohibits intentional killing/injuring, taking, possessing, disturbing and selling (including parts and derivatives, eggs, nests, *etc.* as applicable) as well as damaging, destroying or disturbing nests in current use or dependent young, *etc.*
- 3.4 Schedule 5 of The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (and amendments) – this prohibits deliberate killing, injuring, taking, possessing, disturbing and selling (including parts and derivatives) as well as damaging, destroying or obstructing any structure or place of refuge of listed fauna, such as Dormouse, Otter and bat species.
- 3.5 The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010, consolidate all the various amendments made to the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994, in respect of England and Wales. It is illegal to kill, disturb, destroy eggs, breeding sites or resting places, to pick, collect, take cuttings, uproot or destroy in the wild as well as keep, transport, sell/exchange and offer for sale/exchange species listed.
- 3.6 The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 – this increases protection given by The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (and amendments). The offence to intentionally damage any structure or place that a wild animal listed in Schedule 5 of the Act uses for shelter or protection or deliberately disturbing any such animal while in such a structure or place is extended so that the offence also covers reckless damage or disturbance. The CRoW Act also places a duty on Ministers and Government Departments to have regard for the purpose of conserving biological diversity in accordance with the Convention on Biological Diversity.
- 3.7 The Protection of Badgers Act 1992 - this Act makes it illegal to wilfully kill, injure or take any Badger, or attempt to do so and it is an offence to intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any part of a Badger sett.
- 3.8 The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act, 2006 - as well as creating Natural England, this act gives all public authorities the duty to have regard for conserving biodiversity within the commission of their duties. This includes a duty to restore and enhance as well as maintain biodiversity. The act also strengthens protection for Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and makes authorities liable for allowing damage to such sites or their features.

4.0 Results

Desk Study

- 4.1 There are no statutory designated sites within 1 km of the site.
- 4.2 There are no statutory designated sites for bats within 5 km of the site.
- 4.3 There are no non-statutory sites within 1 km of the site.

Habitats

- 4.4 The following habitats or vegetation types were identified on the site during the course of the habitat survey.
 - Bare Ground
 - Hedgerows
 - Built Environment

Fauna

Bats

- 4.5 SER provided two records of bat species within 1 km of the site, one for pipistrelle bat and one for Daubenton's bat, but these are both some distance from the site itself. There are buildings on site but neither had any indication of current or historic use by bats. The brick/breeze block building was without a roof until recently, and currently has no windows or doors making it bright and draughty. There is no internal roof void.
- 4.6 The wooden stable block has some potential to support roosting bats, but all areas were accessible and no evidence of bats was found. None of the trees on site offer any features suitable for roosting bats such as rot holes, or cracked or split limbs although a small number had a dense coving of ivy. As such, bats are not considered to pose a constraint to development and are discounted from the remainder of this report.

Badgers

- 4.7 SER provided records of badger within 1 km of the site, but none of these fall within 100m of the site itself. No evidence of badger activity, such as hairs, dung pits, latrines or snuffle marks, was discovered during the survey. As such, badgers are not considered to pose a constraint to development and are discounted from the remainder of this report.

Birds

- 4.8 There is potential for nesting birds to use the Leyland cypress hedge for nesting, but there are no current plans to remove or damage this. Three relict birds nests, one blackbird and two house martin were found within the wooden stable block, but again there are no plans to alter this building for around one year.
- 4.9 The site as a whole offers limited potential for nesting birds.

Amphibians

- 4.10 SER provided a single record of great crested newt from the River Blythe. There are known to be ponds within 1km of the site, but there are no particularly suitable aquatic or terrestrial habitats within the site for amphibians. As such, great crested newt are not considered to pose a constraint to development and are discounted from the remainder of this report.

5.0 Development Constraints and Recommendations

- 5.1 The site is the subject of a possible planning application for a residential development. Ecological constraints and recommendations with regard to any development are discussed below.

Habitats

- 5.2 Botanically, the site itself does not appear to have any rare species and it is not particularly diverse.

Potential Impacts of Works

- 5.3 There are no habitats particularly suited to provide shelter for protected or notable flora and fauna species within the site and impacts on such species from the development is negligible.

Recommendations

- 5.4 The following are general recommendations that are likely to be a minimum requirement for any future development of the site. To prevent potential delays, it would be prudent to undertake the recommended surveys well in advance of any master-planning and certainly before any planning application is made.

Birds

- 5.5 Where possible, habitats suitable for nesting and foraging birds should be retained, enhanced or created within any new development. The hedgerow habitats within the site are likely to be the most valuable to nesting birds, and should be retained as far as possible.
- 5.6 Nesting birds may be present in the hedgerows and the wooden stable block during the bird breeding season (February to September inclusive). If vegetation removal or work on the building is planned during these months, a prior check for nesting birds should be undertaken by an appropriately qualified ecologist. Any active nests that are found must not be moved until fledglings have dispersed and the nest is no longer in use.

6.0 References

BSBI (2011). *BSBI 2007 List*. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.bsbi.org.uk/html/database.html> [accessed on 27th September 2011].

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Joint Nature Conservation Committee (2007) *Handbook for Phase I Habitat Survey – a Technique for Environmental Audit*. JNCC: London.

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UK BAP (2008) *Priority Habitat Descriptions* [Online]. Available at: <http://www.ukbap.org.uk/library/UKBAPPriorityHabitatDescriptionsfinalAllhabitats20081022.pdf> [accessed on 27th September 2011]

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (and amendments). (c.69), London: HMSO

Phase I Habitat Survey

7.0 Photographic Plates

1) View to southern boundary of site



2) View to northern boundary of site showing derelict hedgerow



3) Interior of brick and breeze block building



4) Wooden stable block and Leyland cypress hedge

