

Background

Heathland is a rare and valuable habitat, supporting a wide range of specialist species. However, without active management, heathlands can quickly become dominated by grasses, scrub, and bracken, leading to a decline in heather and other specialist plants.

At Fire Beacon Hill (Devon), the existing heathland was showing signs of ageing and reduced structural diversity. To reverse this decline and rejuvenate the habitat, SPconservations was tasked with creating areas of bare ground to stimulate natural regeneration of heather.

Objectives

- Rejuvenate heather stands by encouraging seed germination.
- Increase structural diversity across the heathland.
- Support biodiversity, particularly invertebrates, reptiles, and ground-nesting birds.
- Promote long-term resilience of the heathland ecosystem.

Methodology

- Site Assessment: Survey of existing vegetation to identify suitable areas for intervention.
- Bare Ground Creation: Targeted removal of surface vegetation and soil disturbance using [insert method, e.g. low-ground pressure machinery, turf stripping, or hand tools].
- Patch Design: Small, scattered patches created in a mosaic pattern across the heathland to maximise edge habitat.
- Aftercare: Monitoring of regrowth, with follow-up control of invasive species where necessary.

Results

- Heather Regeneration: Early signs of natural heather seedling establishment observed within [insert time frame].
- Biodiversity Gains: Bare patches quickly used by invertebrates such as solitary bees and ground beetles, providing additional food resources for birds and reptiles.
- Habitat Diversity: The mosaic of bare ground, young heather, and mature stands has increased structural complexity across the site.
- Resilience: The works have extended the life of the heathland and reduced the risk of long-term habitat decline.



