## Site name: The Playing Field Pit

**Site status:** Registered common land
**Grid ref:** TM 36342 57182
**Area:** 0.25 ha
**Date**: 13th March 2017
**Recorder:** S. Bullion & J. Crighton
**Weather conditions:** Wispy cloud, sunny, 11°C
**Biodiversity value:** Medium

## Map:

**Photos:**

*View looking west through the pit*

*Grassy area with badger activity in west of pit, with elm scrub on the right*

*One of the holes of the main badger sett in north east bank*

*Variegated yellow archangel (can be invasive)*

*Multi-stemmed mature oak, with ivy, on south eastern corner*

*Blackthorn scrub adjacent to playing fields, south western edge*

*Elm hedgerow and ivy-covered elms (some dead) behind*

**Habitat type(s):**
Dense continuous scrub, tall ruderal, species-poor intact hedgerow (elm)

**Subsidiary habitats:**
Mature trees, sunny grassy glades

**Site description:**
The Playing Field Pit lies to the north of a large area of short mown amenity grassland that is used as recreational space. The survey area represents a disused pit, surrounded by areas of dense scrub, elm hedge and mature trees. There is a good mosaic of shaded areas and more open grassy glades, although later in the year the canopy will cast a greater shade and ruderal species will be more dominant. The area is well used by badgers, with evidence of their activity throughout the bottom of the pit and the banks.

**Protected species seen or known:**
Badger (2012) and evidence noted during survey

**Protected species potential:**
Bats

**Priority habitats present:**
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**Priority species seen or known:**

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**Priority species potential:**

Dunnock, white-letter hairstreak butterfly, toad, stag beetle

**Connectivity:**

Connectivity from the Playing Field Pit to the wider countryside is moderate. There is a band of scrubby trees along the western edge of the playing field, and an area of new plantation west of the trees. There is also a network of hedgerows along arable field margins which provide a degree of connectivity.

**Structural diversity:**

The Pit has excellent structural diversity. There are mature trees covered with ivy, dense scrub thickets,

**Flora:**

The pit is surrounded by scrub of varying density. There is a very dense thicket of blackthorn on the south-western edge, and another patch of dense growth of young, suckering elms on the north-west slope. There is also scattered elder, hawthorn, bramble and cherry plum with some mature sweet chestnut and elm. There is a large multi-stemmed oak in the south-eastern corner, which is covered with ivy. An elm hedge, which is regularly trimmed and laid horizontally, is present on the northern road-side boundary and there are a several tall elms immediately south of this hedge. At least two of these tall elms are dead (TN 1), with others still living, but all are ivy clad.

In the lower areas of the pit, it is mostly tall ruderal vegetation with alexanders, nettle, burdock, ground ivy, green alkanet and cleavers in the more shaded areas. There are also patches of shorter sward with lords-and-ladies (arum) and violet. Towards the west of the site there is an area of low growing grassy, disturbed land with high levels of badger activity (TN 2).

**Avifauna:**

This site has excellent potential for nesting birds, both migrant and native species. Great tits were seen singing during the survey and the dense scrub may support nesting nightingale.

**Invertebrates:**

Many spiders were noted during the survey and several comma butterflies were seen in the sunny glade. The nettles also are an important food plant for a number of butterfly species. This site is generally good for invertebrates with fallen deadwood and a variety of foraging opportunities. The presence of elm may help support white-letter hairstreak butterfly. Stag beetle larvae may be present if there is subterranean deadwood.

**Herpetofauna:**

Due to the small size and shading, this site is sub-optimal for reptiles. However, the pit may provide good hibernation habitat for common toad.

**Mammals:**

This site is heavily used by badgers. A main sett was located with at least four active holes, an outlier sett and three fresh latrines were also seen. There was evidence of snuffle holes and trampling in the sunny glade of the pit. There was also evidence of rabbits, including burrows, droppings and foraging dug outs. The multi-stemmed oak and ivy covered trees could provide roosting opportunities for bats.

Other common species of mammal such as fox, and muntjac deer are likely to forage on this site. Mice, voles and shrews are also likely to be present in the hedgerows on the boundaries of the site.

**Comments and recommendations:**

Evidence of the work carried out in accordance with the recommendations made in 2004 by Jon Woods (SWT Voluntary Conservation Adviser) is still apparent.

Any future management should have regard to the presence of badgers. All badger legislation has been combined under the Protection of Badgers Act (1992). This makes it an offence, amongst other things:

- to wilfully kill or injure a Badger, or attempt to do so;
- to intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to a sett;
- to intentionally or recklessly disturb a Badger when occupying a sett;

Guidance is available at https://www.gov.uk/guidance/badgers-protection-surveys-and-licences Accessed 29 March 2017.

Variegated yellow archangel is listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). It is illegal to plant or otherwise cause to grow in the wild any species listed on Schedule 9. It is likely that this plant has colonized naturally from garden waste. Given this is already an established population (TN 3), the spread of the plant should be monitored and ideally plants removed should be disposed of appropriately to prevent their spread.

More information is available on http://www.plantlife.org.uk/uk/discover-wild-plants-nature/plant-fungi-species/variegated-yellow-archangel

A factsheet is also provided from the GB Non-native Species Secretariat regarding non-native species.

Scrub management: there is dense blackthorn on south western edge, although encroachment is being managed by mowing and cutting back of the southern side adjacent to the playing field. If in future the blackthorn becomes too leggy, it can be coppiced to ground level in sections, although this is an unpleasant plant to handle due to the long sharp spines and consideration is needed regarding the careful disposal of any arisings. They could be piled up in a small area within the pit to slowly rot down. Management of blackthorn scrub is autumn/winter work.

Scrub management: there is also some elm scrub on the northern bank of the pit, south of the roadside, particularly towards the west of the site. Small-scale rotational clearance could take place each year to maintain diversity of age structure of elm. If elm is maintained at a relatively low growth

form it is much less susceptible to succumbing to Dutch elm disease. Management of elm scrub is autumn/winter work.
The roadside hedge has been laid in the past and regrowth is now regularly cut back. This management should continue in autumn/winter.

Assessing tree safety was outside the scope of this survey. However, was noted that there are some tall dead elms bordering the road side. Consideration should be given to felling these into the pit and leaving the fallen wood in situ.

It is not believed that the ivy on the large oak tree is problematic to the tree, but growth can be controlled by careful cutting back in late winter.

Suffolk Wildlife Trust fact sheets are included regrading scrub and also ivy.