

Preliminary assessment of Oak sapling study, 27Acres Field.

27 Acres Field is in the recently fenced New Barn / Brookhouse area of the Knepp Castle Estate. It has been fallow since 2005. As part of the baseline audit of this area prior to the introduction of cattle, ponies and fallow deer, it was decided to attempt a count of the woody seedlings/saplings that have become established in 27 Acres, and to record the incidence of browse. Such browsing would have been due to roe deer and rabbits.

The count took place over 2-3 days in March 2009, and was carried out by a number of volunteers - Charlie Burrell, Ted Green, Suzanne Perry, Theresa Greenaway and others.

Counting was limited to oak, willow and birch, although there was a considerable amount of bramble, rose, blackthorn and hawthorn. It became apparent that there was so much willow that counting every sapling was unrealistic, especially as there were some very dense patches of growth. Similarly, in some places oak seedling establishment had been so dense that counting individuals was again unrealistic. If nothing else, the methodology used was a clear demonstration of the value of quadrats.

Nevertheless, the results obtained are a useful indication of oak and willow spread following arable reversion and also the baseline level of browsing. An initial analysis of the figures has been carried out the results of which are given in Table 1. The average height of the oak seedlings was 70 cm.

| Species | Number | % Browsed |
|----------------|---------------|------------------|
| Oak | 138 | 83 |
| Willow | 168 | 59 |
| Birch | 10 | 70 |

Table 1. Number and % browse of individual oak, willow and birch saplings counted.