

## **Dynamic DunesCAPES starts work on Devon's beautiful and threatened sand dunes**

**Coastal sand dunes are the most threatened habitat in Europe in terms of biodiversity loss, so a new £10m conservation project will breathe life into dunes in England and Wales by restoring them to support their beautiful but rare specialised wildlife.**

In Devon, Dynamic DunesCAPES will rejuvenate sand dune systems at Branton Burrows and Woolacombe. Work in Devon is led by Plantlife and National Trust. Branton Burrows is owned and managed by Christies Estates, working in partnership with Dynamic DunesCAPES.

Dynamic DunesCAPES, a new and ambitious conservation project, plans to restore 7000 hectares of sand dune habitat in England and Wales. The main threats that dunes face are over stabilisation, with excessive growth of scrub preventing the natural movement of sand through a dune system and reducing the amount of bare sand available for the specialist species which rely on it, and invasive species growth overtaking the habitats of native plants which naturally grow on dunes.

Work in Branton will create new areas of bare sand, giving sand lizards and a huge variety of plants places where they can thrive. Scrub and invasive plant species such as Japanese rose and sea buckthorn will be removed. Removing some of the fast-growing willow species from the dune slacks – the damp depressions between dune ridges – will improve the slack pools which are essential for many amphibian species.

The work at Woolacombe also includes removing some of the dense scrub. To move away from mechanical mowers, the North Devon Ruby Red cattle, known as 'The Ladies', break up dense bramble on the dunes as they graze, creating a range of height and variety in the plant life. This allows insects and wildflowers to flourish. In an exciting initiative led by the National Trust, their grazing area is marked by cables buried in the dunes; their collars sound an alarm as they approach the border, letting them know not to go further. This

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means physical fences and turnstiles are not needed, allowing the rolling dunes to keep their natural character.

Bev Phillips is the Dynamic Dunescapes Devon Engagement Officer. "The project is so different to any projects that I have been involved with in the past. It is vast, ambitious and focuses on one of the most depleted and undervalued habitats in Europe.

"I am already starting to unravel the deep history of Woolacombe Dunes and Braunton Burrows and am learning about the mosaic of habitats needed for a healthy dune system. I am starting to face challenges regarding how people perceive and use the dunes and how access and litter are often a problem that I would like to help overcome. If I can play just a small part in improving dune systems here in North Devon as well as getting people as excited about them as me, then I will feel deeply satisfied."

Christies Estates, who own Braunton Burrows, have said, "Christie Estates is looking forward to working with Dynamic Dunescapes on Braunton Burrows over the next three and a half years. At the core of the North Devon UNESCO biosphere reserve, Braunton Burrows is the biggest continuous area of sand dunes in England and contributes to Braunton's status as one of the most bio-diverse parishes in the country.

"This project will complement the already existing careful management of Braunton Burrows by the Estate supported by Natural England. The work being carried out will have a long lasting and positive impact on the site, creating greater resilience and sustainability for its future. Works will include exposing more areas of bare sand and the removal of scrub and particularly non-invasive plant species such as Sea Buckthorn which threaten the diversity of plant species for which the Burrows is renowned."

The project is funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and the EU LIFE Programme. Project partners are Natural England, Plantlife, National Trust, Natural Resources Wales, Cornwall Wildlife Trust, Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust and Cumbria Wildlife Trust.

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**Images: Single-use (X3)**



Image 1: Cattle grazing the dunes in Woolacombe with collars linked to digital fences. Credit: National Trust



Image 2: Scrub clearance at Braunton Burrows, Credit: Hawley



Image 3: Creation of bare sand by scraping scrub from Old Met dune slack, Credit: Rupert Hawley

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Find out more about Dynamic Dunescapes on the project website:

<https://dynamicdunescapes.co.uk>

And about the project actions in Devon: <https://dynamicdunescapes.co.uk/project/devon/>

**Notes to editors:**

In Devon, when describing works at Braunton Burrows, it is important that it is acknowledged that Braunton Burrows is owned and managed by Christies Estates, who are working in partnership with Dynamic Dunescapes.

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About the project

[Dynamic Dunescapes](#) is a partnership project restoring sand dunes across England and Wales for the benefit of wildlife, people and communities, funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and the EU LIFE Programme. Project partners are Natural England, Plantlife, National Trust, Natural Resources Wales, Cornwall Wildlife Trust, Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust and Cumbria Wildlife Trust.

The coastal dunes of England and Wales are internationally important habitats for wildlife, listed as one of the most threatened environments in Europe for biodiversity loss. These dunes are a sanctuary to rare species like the fen orchid, natterjack toad and sand lizard. But, dune management messaging supporting dune stabilisation over many decades has meant that dunes have become overgrown with vegetation. We now realise that this is putting protected wildlife at risk. Healthy sand dunes need to be free to move and be dynamic. Many species need areas of open sand to thrive, so this project will bring life back to the dunes by creating areas of open sand. Other specialised creatures need us to improve the dune slacks, as these often water-filled dips behind the dunes are important habitats for amphibians and birds. Invasive species will also be removed from the dunes and dune grasslands, to improve conditions for rare native plants to flourish.

We will work with skilled local and national experts, and involve schools and local groups, volunteers and visitors of all ages and abilities to help rejuvenate our dunes.

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