



Bracken Management

Bracken can be a valuable wildlife habitat in itself, supporting large numbers of invertebrates, some of which only occur on Bracken, and it provides nesting, feeding and roosting habitat for a variety of birds. It is estimated some 27-40 invertebrates in the UK feed on bracken. Unfortunately, bracken can be detrimental to other species by shading them out and by the release of allelopathic chemicals. From an aesthetic point of view it can be very monotonous on the golf course if in abundance and as such some clubs want to remove bracken.

It would be unrealistic to consider total eradication and undesirable ecologically and from a golfer point of view. The bracken does provide colour, texture and backdrop to many holes, therefore a planned approach to bracken control should be considered. Areas where bracken is considered to be undesirable for golf should be targeted e.g. where it comes into play, or slows up play, or where large areas have shaded out other vegetation.

Peak times for bracken control coincide with other wildlife activity; especially ground nesting birds and their unfledged young, and deer fawns. Therefore, survey the area to be managed first for evidence of nesting birds and other wildlife. The European adder can also be found basking in bracken so take care when operating in such areas.

Bracken is carcinogenic to humans and is also a favoured haunt of the sheep tick which can carry Lyme Disease. Therefore, it is important that individuals check themselves for tick bites after working in bracken areas. Any feeding ticks should be removed fully and any bites that result in a circular rash around the bite should be viewed by a general practitioner.

Methods of control

Target the leading edge of the bracken stands to slow down the rate of bracken invasion into bracken free areas where orchids may be present. As with all operations health and safety regulations should be adhered to.

Cutting and Crushing

This is most effective when bracken is at, or near, full frond and control does depend on gradual, sustained depletion of the bracken rhizome system. Two treatments are required each year; the first in late June and the second in August before senescence (in decline prior to death). Neither method should be used if ground nesting birds are at risk. Leave those areas until last or avoid until the nests have become inactive.

Hand cutting of small areas of bracken on uneven ground is preferable to machine cutting.

Crushing with Holt rollers or small bracken crushers may be feasible but only at sites not prone to erosion. The timing for crushing/rolling is the same for that of cutting. Rolling does not cut off the stems but leaves them attached to the root to bleed sap; this reduces food energy for the bud development in the following year.

Crushing and cutting will provide control if repeated once a year for a number of years (at least 3). In conjunction with chemical control measures, both techniques can be effective pre-treatments or aftercare.

Pulling

Hand pulling of sparse bracken fronds can be an effective means of follow-up or even a means of limiting unwanted encroachment into other areas. Pulling should be undertaken at the same timings as those suggested for cutting.

Chemical use/ herbicide treatment

This is highly effective if a full programme of primary treatment and aftercare is undertaken. Control is more effective using a combination of spraying and physical methods.

It is advised that expert advice is sought before the use of any chemical treatment.

The product Asulam in the form of Asulox is no longer permitted to be used to treat bracken. The Chemicals Regulation Directorate issued a Notice to authorise the use of asulam in the form of Asulox to control bracken from 1 July 2016 until 12 September 2016. A use-up period has been established until 31 October 2016 that permits the storage, disposal and use of stocks. Note that during this period, the sale and distribution of stocks will not be permitted.

From 1 November 2016, it will be illegal to apply or store asulam.

For more information on this see <http://www.brackencontrol.co.uk/>

Roundup is a non-selective herbicide that is taken up by all green plant tissue. It is any suitable for use where all vegetation in the area is to be killed.

Herbicide treatment should be carried out in late July /August when the fronds are fully unfurled/mature to ensure that the chemical is fully absorbed. The statutory conditions of use on the product label must be adhered to when using any chemicals for bracken management. It is also important to note that a single spray application will not eradicate bracken unless a follow up strategy is employed.

Any re-growth in the following year can be cut, pulled or crushed. Again the ideal time is late summer. Any re-growth in the same year can be cut back six weeks later. Such a combination of techniques will gradually deplete the vigour of the rhizomes. It may take several years to control, and regular control may be necessary thereafter, particularly where there are other stands of Bracken nearby.

Further information

Sears Rural Scotland - [Bracken management - A guide to best practice.](#)

Bracken Control Group - <http://www.brackencontrol.co.uk/>

SNH Advisory Note - <http://www.snh.org.uk/publications/on-line/advisorynotes/24/24.htm>