

RICHMOND PARK GRAZING TRIAL

Grazing with traditional beef cattle has proven to improve the floral diversity of grassland on a number of nature reserves across the UK. Cows nibble back rough, dominating grasses allowing greater varieties of delicate species to find their own niche. Cows were known to have roamed Richmond Park at least until 1943 and it is thought that their absence has contributed to the decline of species diversity of the grassland. In 2008, a trial grazing project commenced to determine if this was an appropriate management technique for the Park.

In the first year, just two cows (British White x Gloucester) grazed a 4 hectare paddock near Holly Lodge from January to June in 2008. The area was left for the summer to allow flowering. In the second year, three cows returned for a longer grazing period starting in October 2008.

The first year was intentionally under stocked as animal welfare and public acceptance was the primary interest. The cows were very happy in their new residence with an abundance of food and members of the public had nothing but positive comments for the change to their favourite walking routes.

In the second year, grazing has started to have a more positive effect on the grassland. Visually, it looks less dense, however, the cows are still finding plenty of forage. Botanical surveys indicate that the cows are having a positive effect although it's far too early to prove anything meaningful.

The intention is to continue Winter/Spring grazing for five years before making a final evaluation.

Animal welfare will always be the highest priority. The cows are checked daily and water is provided constantly. Providing supplementary feed would be counterproductive as this would gradually increase soil fertility, which has an adverse effect on species diversity. Low numbers of traditional breeds will always be used to ensure enough palatable forage is available. We did make one small exception during the very cold weather of January 2009 and allowed the cows to have a few bales of hay to comfort them on the coldest nights.



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The Royal Parks are: Bushy Park, The Green Park, Greenwich Park, Hyde Park, Kensington Gardens, The Regent's Park & Primrose Hill, Richmond Park and St James's Park.

