

Sue Goodfellow

The effects of Climate Change.

Talking of climate change can you explain a little bit further how that might have effected life on the moor?

I think certainly it probably effected the composition of vegetation on the moorland, particularly with regard to gorse, gorse in the past has died back at times of severe winters and I can particularly remember the winter of '84 and '85 and I remember people phoning up and saying, 'What's happened to all the gorse on the moor?', because it had gone dark brown and looked like it had been sprayed, people thought it had been sprayed with herbicide it looked so dead, but that just doesn't happen any more and the gorse grows very fast and the sort of gorse we've got on Haytor Down, which is western gorse, some of that is growing at least a foot a year and you can imagine that over five years that actually makes quite a big bush. Of course grazing is another factor, but never the less the grazing I think is not keeping pace with the growth in gorse, for a number of reasons. But climate change is quite complex, for instance we've had high brown fritillary butterflies on Haytor Down for some years and they're a very rare species and we think they are more or less on the edge of their climatic range up here so you would expect as things get warmer that would actually benefit the high brown fritillary up here, but there are actually less now in number than they were, and we think that might be because of the increase growth in grass because of the length of growing season which is shading out the violets which are the lavaival food plant, so climate change can actually be very complex and its not a simple case of saying because its warmer these species that like warm areas will be there, it's actually much more complex than that.