

4: PLAN SUMMARY

Brown Moss Management Plan – Brief Summary

Vision

Brown Moss will be a site where scientifically important species and habitats are conserved.

This will be a site where visitors can enjoy quiet walks around a number of pools which will be surrounded by some muddy margins, marshy vegetation, and fringed by heathland, grassland and woodland. These pools and marshy areas will support a range of plants, a variety of amphibians, including newts, frogs and toads in addition to a host of aquatic insects, such as dragonflies and damselflies.

The woodland will have trees of different ages and will support a variety of birds, mammals and insects and will have open glades where herbs and young trees will grow. There will be open areas across the site which will have a variety of low growing plants typical of heathland.

Visitors will have the opportunity to explore and learn about the rich diversity of life which this mosaic of habitats provides.

All management will be sustainable and will aim to preserve the conservation value of the site for future generations.

Description

Brown Moss is a 32 hectare site situated in North Shropshire and is part of the larger Meres and Mosses Natural Area which covers Shropshire, Cheshire, Staffordshire and Clwyd.

The site has a number of designations associated with it which reflect its national and international importance as a wetland area. Amongst these is its status as a Site of Special Scientific Interest, notified because of its scientifically important wetland plant communities. The most significant is its SAC (Special Area of Conservation) designation due to the presence of *Luronium natans* (Floating Water-plantain).

The following are species and habitats which occur at Brown Moss and are in the Shropshire Biodiversity Action Plan:

Luronium natans

Riccia canaliculata

Great Crested Newts

Lowland Heathland,

Peat Bog (this will include the schwingmoor)

Standing open water (meres, pools, canals and ponds)

There are a number of pools scattered around the site, most are shallow and in years of low rainfall often dry up leaving areas of damp mud. The pools differ in pH value and nutrient status and are surrounded by secondary woodland, or in some cases have become overgrown with scrub. This, along with an apparent reduction in water levels, has contributed to a reduction of

the ecologically important aquatic plant and animal communities to be found in the draw down zones around the pools. Fluctuating water levels are a feature of the site and these draw down zones provide suitable conditions for a number of interesting wetland plant species. All three native species of newt have been found breeding in the pools, including the Great Crested Newt, a protected species.

A small schwingmoor (quaking bog - pool 9), existing near the western edge of the site, has seen a gradual encroachment of soft rush and shading from the surrounding trees.

Since the cessation of grazing during the 1960s once large areas of heath have now been succeeded by birch and oak woodland and only small patches of relic heathland still remain within the open grassy areas. There are, however, two small areas of restored heathland to the west of the large pool (pool 6) which were created during the 1990s

The natural island on pool 6 has been extended by the excavation of a ditch across a peninsula of land which protruded out towards the original island. The original ditch which separated the island from the mainland has become silted up over the years and remains as a boggy depression between the two

There is a small car park and some road-side parking to the east of pool 6 and a larger car park within the wooded area between pools 5 and 6. The site is a registered common for which a number of individuals still hold rights. There is open public access across the site but no legal Rights of Way.

There are a number of ditches around the site, some of which drained surrounding farmed land. Others appear to have linked various pools. Many of these ditches have become silted up, in-filled with vegetation or in some cases diverted elsewhere. As the hydrology of the site is critical to its future integrity, further investigation into the quality and quantity of water coming into the site will be essential.

The site is popular for quiet recreation such as walking, bird watching, dog walking and feeding the wildfowl. It is often visited by botanists, and students studying a range of wetland related subjects. It is often used by people parking up in the car parks and roadside in the evening and local youths have been known to occasionally ride motorbikes around the site.

Management

The plan identifies 9 important features or activities and describes their proposed management for a 5 year period between April 2007 and March 2012. These are summarised below.

Open water, marsh, swamp and fen communities

Objective: To achieve and maintain the wetland communities at a favourable status whereby the extent of the wetland areas represent between 35-50% of the overall site and a variety of specific plant species are present throughout, as identified in the 'favourable status' statement in Feature 1,

Objectives part of this plan. All pollution sources will have been identified and controlled and tree and scrub species will cover no more than 5% of the total wetland compartments.

This will principally involve the management of surrounding scrub and trees to prevent them from taking over in these areas. In the absence of grazing the marsh vegetation around some of the pools will need to be cut. A maximum of 1/3 of each selected area will be cut per year to allow for the seeding of the marsh vegetation and to ensure that any insects, birds and animals have refuge. All material cut will have to be removed from site.

Liaison with the Environment Agency will be vital to try and secure good quality water on site throughout the year.

The ongoing control of *Crassula helmsii*, to prevent further spread and its impact on more favourable species, will be continually assessed.

Luronium natans (Floating Water-plantain)

Objective: To create conditions favourable to the growth of *Luronium* so as to achieve and maintain the plant at a favourable status.

The primary need is to establish the continued existence of *Luronium* on the site. Trees and scrub encroachment, water levels and water quality are all factors which will affect its growth and all of these will need monitoring and management.

Great Crested Newts

Objective: To achieve and maintain a long-term viable population of Great Crested Newts, at favourable status, across the site. There should be connections via suitable habitats between breeding pools and terrestrial habitats for feeding, refuge and hibernation.

This will involve the management of the pools to ensure that there are suitable open areas, marginal cover and sufficient water levels to enable breeding at least once in every four years. There will be an annual programme of monitoring to establish which pools are being used for breeding. Fallen trees, logs and habitat piles will be left, where appropriate, to provide suitable feeding and refuge areas.

All work carried out for other features will take account of the possible presence of Great Crested Newts.

Schwingmoor

Objective: To achieve and maintain the quaking bog (schwingmoor) at favourable status whereby the surrounding trees and scrub do not threaten the long-term viability of the bog, pollution sources are controlled and a range of specific plant species are present.

This will involve the annual cutting and removal of Soft Rush growth around the bog (1/3 of the area to be done per year). Some removal of the

surrounding trees will be necessary to limit the leaf build up and subsequent input of nutrients. There will be regular cutting and treating of tree/scrub seedlings which encroach upon the bog. Water levels and their management need investigation.

Semi-natural broadleaved woodland

Objective: To maintain favourable status whereby the desired extent of woodland is allowed to develop through natural succession with minimum intervention. The extent of the woodland should not exceed approximately 16 hectares, (maximum 50% of the total extent of the site).

This intervention will involve some thinning of trees, particularly along the edges of the woodland in order to create a structured fringe and allow light to penetrate the woodland edges. Some management of bracken will be needed although for the most part the woodland will be self managing.

Heathland / acid grassland

Objective: To restore to a favourable condition whereby there is approximately 60% dwarf shrub cover, a varied age structure to the heather, approximately 5% bare ground and 10% grassland with specific species present.

The extent of the heathland/acid grassland will be between 3.2 and 4.8 hectares (represents between 10% and 15% of the total site).

In the absence of grazing there will need to be an annual programme of clearing the young and re-grown Birch and controlling the Bracken. Rotational cutting of the heather will be needed to ensure a varied age structure.

Access

Objective: To encourage sustainable use of the site by visitors whereby visitors are from all age groups and all relevant interest groups, with at least 95% of visitors expressing overall satisfaction with their visit.

Managed access will not be detrimental to the conservation value of the site. Work will involve regular visitor monitoring with questionnaires, repairing wide wet patches on paths, installing signage with basic information, maintaining the car parks and developing wheelchair access where appropriate.

Relationship with the local community

Objective: To maintain good relationships with a broad range of community groups and individuals ensuring that the long term management objectives for the site are met.

This will be achieved through continued liaison, discussions and consultation with user groups, providing educational opportunities for a wide range of groups and individuals, and through provision of opportunities for direct involvement in the practical management of the site.

Interpretation

Objective: To provide interpretation which will inform visitors about the various habitats and species of importance on site and their significance for nature conservation.

Not less than 90% of visitors should be aware of the importance of the site for nature conservation. All visitors should have the opportunity to learn more about the site and there are at least 2 educational visits (schools, colleges, groups) and 2 interpretive events (public) each year.