

The Christopher Cadbury wetland reserve at Upton Warren: The Flashes – a summary of the management Plan

Brief Description

The Flashes reserve is part of the Upton Warren Pools Site of Special Scientific Interest, first notified in 1972. It consists of three distinct parts. The Flashes, to the south, is 9.40 ha and the pools owe their existence to past underground brine extraction, which has caused subsidence and consequent flooding. The Flashes are saline and salt tolerant plants form a unique inland salt marsh. The Moors, to the north, is 17.18 ha (total area 26.58 ha). The Moors Pools are shallow and freshwater. These two parts are owned and managed by Worcestershire Wildlife Trust. The third and central section is a sailing lake. This is managed by Worcestershire County Council as an outdoor education centre.

The varied wetland habitats and associated meadows, scrub and woodland attract many breeding birds. Most notable in recent years have been avocet, little ringed plover, common tern, lapwing, oystercatcher, lesser spotted woodpecker and sedge warbler; as well as birds on passage e.g. osprey and over-wintering birds such as bittern, snipe, curlew and many species of duck. Birds of prey that frequent the site include hobby in the summer and peregrine all year round. Insects are abundant with many dragonflies and butterflies. Studies of the flies breeding in the pools have revealed nationally rare species associated with the saline conditions. Otter are now present on the reserve on a regular basis and water voles have a breeding population in the centre of nearby Bromsgrove and are present in a nearby watercourse.

The nature reserve is on the edge of the Forest of Feckenham Living Landscape area and is an important link between the Droitwich Canal wetlands, the Birmingham and Worcester Canal, the river Salwarpe and the river Severn.

The reserve is very accessible and two disabled access hides are available at the Moors. The reserve provides a unique opportunity for visitors to view wildlife up close from the bird hides. This gives particular enjoyment to birdwatchers and children. Upton Warren is Worcestershire's premier bird-watching reserve

Management aims

- Protect, manage and restore the wetland habitats.
- Provide habitat structure, water levels and food supply for breeding, resident, migrating and wintering birds.
- Protect and enhance the distribution of the saline plants.
- Create a safe haven for a viable breeding population of water voles and suitable conditions for otters
- Increase our knowledge and understanding of water quality and movement. In 2010 a hydrological survey was completed. These studies are ongoing and the findings are being used to inform our own land management and land owner engagement.

Rationale

The diverse range of wetland habitats include open water, salt marsh fen, reed bed, wet grassland, alder and willow woodland support many bird species. The site has considerable botanical

importance. The halophytic (salt loving) plants around the Flashes pools represent one of the few inland areas of saline vegetation in Britain. Significantly the shallow pools and surrounding open habitats support wintering waders as well as breeding birds such as little ringed plover and avocet.

Several nationally important species are found on site including, rare midges and moths, mammals such as otter and three species of bat, wintering birds e.g. bittern and shoveler, breeding waders, as well as plants associated with the saline marsh habitat e.g. lesser sea spurrey and reflexed salt marsh grass.

All the habitats require management. Without management the open habitats succeed to the detriment of the species for which the site is notified as a SSSI for. The priority is to gain a better understanding of the hydrological system and manage the water levels to suit plant communities and associated wetland birds, and maintain the open nature of the habitats.

Summary of management

Species and habitat quality monitoring includes the following;

- Meadow flora / saline communities recording
- Carry out NVC level survey
- Fixed point photography
- Bird recording, record breeding, wintering and passage waterfowl and waders
- Monitor water levels and quality
- Record other species

Manage Habitats

- Grasslands managed by grazing through-out the year, cutting and weed control where necessary
- Maintain islands by clearing weeds annually, stoning with gravel and re –building when needed.
- Water, swamp and reed bed managed by controlling water levels and cutting areas of reedbed
- Hedgerows to be pruned along path sides and over mature hedgerows to be coppiced
- Scrub and rough grassland to be partially cut on rotation
- Bankside management to include mowing and cutting as well as pollarding or coppicing of bank side trees
- Hen Brook restoration plan (including new hide) to be developed over the period of the plan.

Species conservation

- Provide terns with artificial islands
- Provide bird boxes for small birds
- Protect little ringed plovers

Pest Control

- Prevent mink colonizing the site

- Prevent fox entering key areas
- Rat management

Health and safety audit and management planning

- Carry out management planning visits and meetings
- Carry out health and safety visits and tree inspections

Community and access

- Maintain and improve infrastructure
- New interpretation panels and signboards
- New screens
- Improved pathways
- New hide

Public involvement and understanding

- Develop website
- Manage wardening system
- Maintain feeding station
- Support volunteers
- Liaise with the Outdoor Education Centre and other neighbours