

Wilden Marsh – a summary of the management plan

Brief Description

With a total area of 37.50 hectares and occupying about 50% of the River Stour floodplain/corridor between Kidderminster and Stourport, Wilden Marsh Nature Reserve and Site of Special Scientific Interest forms the largest continuous extent of marshland in Worcestershire. Worcestershire Wildlife Trust owns 14.10 hectares and has a management agreement on a further 23.60 hectares of land that remains in private ownership.

The site had been drying out with a noticeable fall in groundwater levels due to the deepening of the River Stour in the Wilden Flood Alleviation Scheme in the late 1970s, resulting in loss of water storage within the marsh and the accompanying changes in the marshland flora and fauna. However, with support from the Environment Agency and Natural England in early 2010 two rock ramps were constructed in the river as the key lynch pins in the plan to re-wet the Site of Special Scientific Interest. Since then a phased plan of restoring the entire SSSI has started and is ongoing.

The reserve lies within Worcestershire Wildlife Trust's Stour Valley Living Landscape, which has been identified as a target area for the Trust to try and increase biodiversity through partnership working with other landowners.

Access to the Wildlife Trust owned land is restricted to marked pathways only. There is no public access to the land in private ownership under the management agreement.

Management Aims

The primary aim of the Wilden Marsh and Meadows Site of Special Scientific Interest is to maintain a high groundwater level throughout the year. Wilden Marsh will be managed to provide the optimal wetland habitats for flora and fauna. The reserve's principal habitats of botanical and nature conservation importance occur within a complex matrix of floodplain wetlands - i.e. marshy grassland and mire, mesotrophic fen/ swamp, wet woodland (alder and willow carr) and open water (ditches, pools, scrapes). Other habitats - dry broadleaf woodland, dry mesotrophic/acidic grassland and scrub are also present, but are of secondary importance.

Our management will provide quality wetland habitat including marshy grassland, swamp, wet woodlands, ditches and scrub. These will support nationally important populations of both resident and migratory bird species, including breeding water rail, lesser spotted woodpecker and grasshopper warbler and provide habitat cover for otters. Potential breeding birds include grey heron and Cetti's warbler. The long period over which different plants are flowering, especially the later flowering species will be extremely beneficial to the rare bees that have recently (2010) been recorded on the reserve.

Rationale

Wilden Marsh forms the largest continuous extent of marshland in Worcestershire, and in conjunction with nearby wetlands in the Stour Valley makes it an extremely valuable site. The reserve is particularly rich in wetland species and is improving as restoration progresses. Highly visible examples include marsh orchid and marsh cinquefoil. Associated with the site are grass snake, common lizard, warblers, lesser spotted woodpecker, barn owl and otter.

Summary of Management

- Monitor plant life, breeding birds and water levels
- Maintain a year round high (near surface) water table (average of -2cm)
- Maintain lowland neutral grassland habitat through grazing and scrub management
- Restore and maintain wet grassland
- Restore and maintain wet woodland
- Restore and maintain pools and swamp habitats
- Reverse invasion of Himalayan balsam and other weeds
- Extend the existing water supply for water troughs
- Install fencing, gates and cattle bridges
- Restore and maintain pollards and coppice trees
- Maintain management paths and infrastructure.