

# **BREIGAM MOOR SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST**



Photograph © Julian Woodman, CCW

## **YOUR SPECIAL SITE AND ITS FUTURE**

Your Special Site and its Future' is part of our commitment to improve the way we work with Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) owners and occupiers. In it, we explain what is special about the wildlife on your site, and what care is needed to look after its wildlife into the future.

All SSSIs are considered to be of national importance and we recognise the crucial role that owners and occupiers play in their management and protection. We need you to share your views and knowledge of this site with us, to help safeguard it.

We hope that you will find 'Your Special Site and its Future' interesting and helpful. Please contact us if there is anything about the site and its management that you would like to discuss.

## What is ‘special’ about the wildlife at Breigam Moor SSSI?

Breigam Moor has one special feature:

### **Marshy Grassland**, with associated base-rich flushes

Marshy grassland is an uncommon and declining habitat, as much of it has been lost through drainage and agricultural improvement. Much of the remaining marshy grassland in Britain is found in Wales and we have a special responsibility for its conservation.

At Breigam Moor, however, some of the marshy grassland is of an unusual kind that would never have been very common, as it depends on a flow of lime-rich groundwater. In places, this rises to the surface as springs. Within areas of marshy grassland, the vegetation varies subtly according to how wet or free-draining the ground is, and the soil type. The special conditions at Breigam Moor have allowed the development of a rich community of plants, including the uncommon blunt-flowered rush, meadow thistle and a variety of different sedges.

As well as the features listed above, Breigam Moor has other habitats that contribute to the special wildlife interest. These include shallow watercourses, mature hedgerows and areas of damp semi-improved grassland. This mixture of habitats is also important for much of the wildlife.

## What do we want Breigam Moor to look like?

The following is a description of how we would like to see the feature at Breigam Moor:

*In the main field and adjacent corners of neighbouring fields there is a rich mixture of grasses, rushes and flowering plants, which bloom in succession from spring to late summer. There are patches of very wet soils influenced by very lime-rich waters. Many different insects and other invertebrates also find the conditions they need here.*



Devil's-bit scabious, © Tristan Hatton-Ellis, CCW

*The marshy grassland occupies half of the total site area. As it is naturally rich in lime, the vegetation here is particularly species-rich. Large areas are dominated by blunt-flowered rush, with purple moor-grass and several different kinds of sedge, and this type of vegetation occupies around half the total area of marshy grassland. Elsewhere, the blunt-flowered rush is less dominant but the vegetation is otherwise similar. The first flowers to appear in spring are the small pink heads of marsh valerian, followed by fen bedstraw in early summer and devil's-bit scabious and saw-wort later in the year. In a few places, near springs, the vegetation is generally shorter and more open and flowers of marsh lousewort can be seen in July.*

*Around the edges of the site, other kinds of rush, sedge and several different grasses are found where the influence of the lime-rich water is less. Trees and scrub only occur around the edges of the wet fields, purple moor grass, large sedges and soft rush are nowhere dominant in the sward and excess leaf litter is not allowed to build up.*

*By contrast, within the marshy grassland, it is hard to find plants such as creeping buttercup, nettles, thistles and docks, which are common in disturbed and nutrient-enriched areas. However, these species might occur near gateways, where stock has congregated in the past.*



Photograph © Julian Woodman, CCW

### **What management is needed on Breigam Moor SSSI and why?**

Although Breigam Moor is an excellent place for wildlife it will only remain so if the necessary management continues. CCW's priority is to work with you to ensure that this management is carried out.

### **What does this mean in practice?**

Some management is essential to conserve the special features. These are the activities we regard as most important:

**Grazing** is very important, as it prevents the grassland becoming rank and a few, strong species taking over. Grazing allows a whole range of finer grasses and other plants to grow together. It also prevents the grassland turning into scrub and woodland. Light grazing, preferably by cattle alone, or by a combination of horses and cattle, is the best management to maintain the marshy grassland.

Grazing by sheep should be avoided. It is damaging because sheep prefer the more palatable flower species and are able to nibble individual plants. Eventually, under heavy sheep grazing, these flowers can completely disappear.

Summer grazing is important. The aim of grazing will be to produce a sward that varies from 10 to 50cm high by the end of the summer. These conditions can be achieved through light grazing between about May and October.

Grazing should not take place in winter and may have to be avoided at times in wet summers. However, grazing is needed here to prevent leaf litter building up and to stop willow scrub becoming established. The plant communities can tolerate an occasional year without grazing but, following this, mowing or topping would be helpful. This would help disperse the dead plant material and make the new growth more accessible to stock in the next grazing season. Ideally, the cut material would be removed.

**Scrub management.** Grazing alone may not be sufficient to prevent scrub such as willows and brambles gradually encroaching onto the marshy grassland, and this has already happened in places. Some scrub control may therefore be necessary at times. It is best to cut a little each year, between October and February, ground conditions permitting.

**Other management actions could damage the features within a very short time. These are the ones we regard as the most important:**

The **use of manure, inorganic fertilisers and other chemicals** at Breigam Moor would be very harmful to the marshy grassland. This is because they stimulate the growth of one or two grass species at the expense of the many different plants we are trying to encourage.

**Stock feeding** can lead to local nutrient enrichment and so should not take place except in any specific locations agreed with CCW.

Any **clearance of ditches or drains** needs to be undertaken with great care, because the marshy grassland depends on a certain level of soil moisture for its survival. The ground water will fluctuate between seasons, and so the ground will be naturally drier in summer than in winter, but it is important that the lime-rich spring water does not dry out. The best approach is to maintain any ditches as they have been kept in the past, neither deepening them or neglecting them. Some of the recently deepened ditches around the southern and western edge may have to be modified as they might be too deep and affecting the hydrology of the site.

### **Finally**

Our knowledge and understanding of wildlife is continually improving. It is possible that new issues may arise in the future, whilst other issues may disappear. This statement is written with the best information we have now, but may have to change in the future as our understanding improves. Any information you can provide on the wildlife of your site, its management and its conservation would be much appreciated.

**If you would like to discuss any aspect of your SSSI, or have any concerns about your SSSI, please contact your local CCW office.**

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