Scottish Natural Heritage

BEMERSYDE MOSS
Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 175

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Purpose

This is a public statement prepared by SNH for owners and occupiers of the SSSI. It outlines the reasons it is designated as an SSSI and provides guidance on how its special natural features should be conserved or enhanced. This Statement does not affect or form part of the statutory notification and does not remove the need to apply for consent for operations requiring consent.

We welcome your views on this statement.

Description of the site

Bemersyde Moss Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is an open water transition fen, lying 4 km north-east of Newton St Boswells.

The open water transition fen consists of a mineral-rich lowland fen. The centre is a mosaic of fen vegetation with open pools of water surrounded by sedge, reed-swamp and poor fen of a high inorganic content. The vegetation is dominated by reed canary-grass *Phalaris arundinacea* and bulrush *Typha latifolia* with mats of floating bog-bean *Menyanthes trifoliata* extending out into the open pools. The locally rare species nodding bur-marigold *Bidens cernua*, green figwort *Scrophularia umbrosa* and celery-leaved buttercup *Ranunculus sceleratus* are typical of the habitat but are rare or extremely localised in the Scottish Borders. Unusual species of moss have also been recorded.

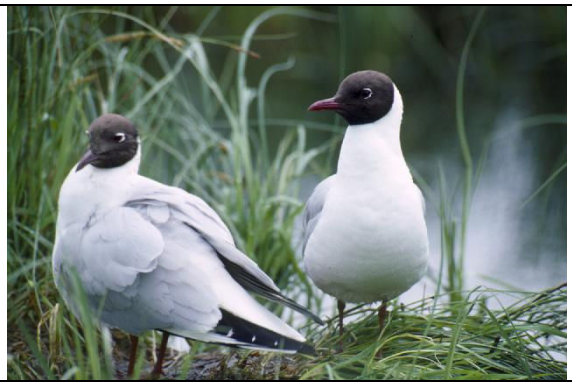
The 2003 site condition monitoring (SCM) assessment of the transition fen found the feature to be in favourable condition. The total area of transition fen and open water had been maintained since the site was notified and water levels maintained at suitable levels. The characteristic species were all present and there was no invasion of undesirable species.

At the time of site notification in 1987, the site held more than 1% of the total British breeding population of black-headed gulls, and was the largest breeding colony in Lothian and Borders, with 10,000+ pairs recorded. Records for the colony have been found dating as far back as 1907, with more systematic recording beginning in the early 1980s when 2,500 to 3,000 pairs were recorded.

In 1999, there were a total of 11,000 pairs during egg harvesting. There appears to have been a 40%-50% fledging success in most years. Since 2001, though, there has been a serious decline in numbers of pairs arriving and almost no young have fledged each year. Only 950 pairs were counted in 2005 compared to the mean average of 13,952 pairs in the period 1996-2000, a decline of about 93%. However, the reason for this decline is currently unknown. The condition of this feature is therefore unfavourable, declining.

Though not notified features, the site also supports various uncommon waterfowl, including pochard, black-necked grebes, and a small population of ruddy duck, which are known to breed on the site. The wintering population of wigeon is one of the largest in the Scottish Borders. The site is also important for wintering whooper Swans and small numbers of greylag and pink-footed geese.

Natural Features of Bemersyde Moss SSSI	**Condition of feature (and date monitored)**
Black-headed gull (*Larus ridibundus*) – breeding	Unfavourable, declining (May 2005)
Open water transition fen	Favourable, maintained (September 2003)

Open water transition fen	Black-headed Gulls
	

Past and present management

Bemersyde Moss has been substantially managed over the centuries. The site was once part of a much larger area of loch and peatland, which was drained in the late 18th century. The area was then used as a hay meadow until failure of the drainage system resulted in the rise of the water level and the secondary development of the current vegetation. Since the 1940s, the area of standing water has increased by nearly 40%.

The SSSI forms the Scottish Wildlife Trust's Bemersyde Moss Nature Reserve and is currently managed for its conservation value. However, as the SSSI is maintaining itself, little management work is carried out, apart from the building and maintenance of a hide.

The owner manages the land for both nature conservation and sporting benefits, with the occasional wildfowl shoot in winter and, when gull numbers allow, collects black-headed gull eggs under licence.

Other land management activities include grazing of the north strip of the SSSI in conjunction with the surrounding field; for a while this was stopped as part of a Rural Stewardship Scheme (RSS) agreement to protect wetland margins. However, as this produced a very rank margin, grazing was reintroduced between 1st August – 31st March, in conjunction with the neighbouring field.

Objectives for Management (and key factors influencing the condition of natural features)

We wish to work with the owner and occupier to protect the site and to maintain and, where necessary, enhance its features of special interest. SNH will carry out site survey, monitoring and research as appropriate to increase our knowledge and understanding of the site and its natural features and the effectiveness of its management.

1. **To maintain the extent, distribution, structure, function and processes of the open water transition fen habitat and the typical species of these habitats.**

    - Ensure appropriate water levels by maintaining inputs and ensuring the outlet is not altered substantially; if necessary, repair/reinstate the sluice.
    - Maintain good water quality through low silt and fertiliser inputs from agricultural and forestry operations in the hydrological catchment, or at least within a wide buffer area around the fen.
    - Maintain the ratio of open water to fen vegetation by occasionally removing encroaching vegetation.
    - Maintain the key fen habitats by monitoring the spread of scrub and, if encroaching, control by occasionally cutting some.
    - Occasional grazing of the northern strip of the SSSI, in conjunction with the neighbouring field, to open up the sward and prevent the vegetation becoming rank and tussocky.

2. **To restore and maintain the population of black-headed gull at sustainable levels.**

    - Research the reasons into the decline of the breeding population of black-headed gull and implement any forthcoming proposals.
    - Maintain the extent, distribution, structure, function and processes of the related habitats and the species typical of these habitats.

3. **To maintain the assemblage of wintering and breeding waterfowl on the site.**

    - Maintain the extent, distribution, structure, function and processes of the related habitats and the species typical of these habitats.

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site (Key to influencing the condition of the natural features)

Water – The open water transition fen vegetation is dependent on input from rainwater and run-off from the catchment. Activities or changes which potentially affect the supply of water and its level within the fen will have a major influence on site management. At present, these factors are not threatened.

Nutrients – The catchment of the fen is outside the SSSI boundary. Nutrient input to the fen is high due to the arable catchment of the site, and from guano produced by the breeding colony of black-headed gulls present just before the lowest water levels. This has resulted, at times during the summer, in very poor water quality and a high level of algal growth.

The Scottish Rural Development Programme should be explored for potential opportunities to fund the management required on Bemersyde Moss SSSI in order to achieve and maintain favourable status of the notified features. Options selected from the package "Wetlands except lowland raised bogs" are the most appropriate for the management of the fen and surrounding catchment area including options on "management of wetlands", "buffer areas for fens and lowland raised bogs" and "water margins and enhanced riparian buffer areas".

Date last reviewed: 6 August 2010