

Brown Moss Countryside Heritage Site



Brown Moss is a 32 Hectares remnant of the last Ice Age and has previously been found to host over 200 species of plants. The site is an internationally significant area for nature conservation designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Ramsar Site and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for its wetland habitats and the species it supports. It is also a Local Nature Reserve and identified as a Nature Improvement Area (NIA). The national body for the protection of freshwater habitats – The Freshwater Habitat's Trust describes Brown Moss as one of their national flagship sites. Brown Moss is a key site within the Meres & Mosses landscape and aerial photography reveals what an oasis it is within an intensively managed agricultural landscape.

Key features of the site includes ancient wetland habitats such as:

Swamp - an area of low-lying, uncultivated ground where water collects supporting a variety of woody plants and trees.

Marsh - an area of low-lying land which is flooded in wet seasons or at high tide, and typically remains waterlogged at all times supporting a variety of reeds and grasses.

Bog – characterised by their poor soil and high peat content. Of particular importance is the Floating Bog otherwise known as a **Schwingmoor Bog**, this is a very rare habitat.

Fen - a low and marshy or frequently flooded area of land similar to a bog but with less peat and more plant life.

Open Water – Supporting a variety of wetland birdlife. Seasonal levels result in exposed muddy draw-down zones which are now thought to be essential in certain life cycles of rarer species of flora and fauna.

Other significant features of the site include:

Access & Recreation – Brown Moss is a popular destination for walkers and offers quiet recreation within a natural setting. Whitchurch is the closest town but many daily walkers live adjacent to or near the site.

Heathland - Lowland heath is globally scarce and defined as a landscape characterised by plants like the heathers - especially common ling, bilberry and the gorses and supports numerous highly specialised plants and animals.

Semi-natural Broadleaf Woodland – Extensive natural regeneration mostly of Birch and Oak, less than 50 years old due to removal of livestock for grazing.

Key Species of Brown Moss include:

Mud Snail (*Omphiscola glabra*)

This is currently the only known site in Shropshire where this exists.
14mm – 25mm in size



Tubular Water Dropwort (*Oenanthe fistulosa*) is a perennial wildflower which is mainly found in boggy areas such as marshes, pond edges and fens. It doesn't spread particularly easily to new wetland habitats, tending to prefer permanently wet soil which is rich in lime. Be aware that it is a poisonous plant for both humans and animals. It is a priority species under the UK BAP.



Channelled crystalwort (*Riccia canaliculata*)

A rare liverwort and currently this is the only known site in England where this exists



Great Crested Newt (*Triturus cristatus*)

An amphibian that is not that uncommon in north Shropshire but which is scarce globally hence it has high protection status, as such a license is required to even touch them.



Notable Lost Species

Floating Water Plantain (*Luronium natans*). The site was designated a special area of conservation in 1992 as a result of the presence of this plant. Sadly, in recent years, *Luronium*, along with other priority species such as Pillwort, Lesser Water Plantain have disappeared from the site. A decline perhaps associated with a loss of traditional management using grazing animals. The heathland and

woodland in which the ponds lie is common land where historically livestock would have grazed, keeping the site open and creating the perfect condition for a diverse range of wetland plants.

Also of concern for site managers are two invasive species which are proving almost impossible to eradicate. These are New Zealand Pigmy Weed (*Crassula helmsii*), as the name implies this is a non-native pond plant which almost certainly is a garden escapee. In addition, another pond non-native is Water Fern (*Azolla filiculoides*). Both these species can choke ponds and suppress native species, however, research continues.

Stakeholders

Shropshire Council owns and manages Brown Moss. Management greatly benefits from working in partnership with Natural England, who provide ecological advice and administer countryside stewardship funding. Other partners include Shropshire Wildlife Trust and the Freshwater Habitats Trust who provide specialist conservation advice and community support via landscape scale initiatives such as the Meres and Mosses project.

The role and input of local residents and visitors to the site is crucial to the long term management of Brown Moss. A new group – Friends of Brown Moss, will be established in 2017, this will enable greater communication and participation in site management and involvement.

Management Options

Being a wetland site, the key factors affecting the diversity of flora and fauna on site include pollution to the watercourses and an increase in tree cover.

Pollution to the water can occur because of run-off of fertiliser from neighbouring farmland. This is being monitored constantly and any incidents will be dealt with at source.

Tree cover has increased considerably since the 1940's because of a lack of grazing on site. This has resulted in a corresponding reduction in water levels as the trees act as sponges releasing the water into the atmosphere. If no management was to occur with regards tree management the site would quickly become a woodland with a fraction of the biodiversity we currently have on site. This would certainly result in the loss of the protective designations the site benefits from.

In late 2016, a local grazier was found and a herd of docile Hereford cows was brought to site. Whilst there have been some teething troubles in terms of access and part of the site being churned up by a tractor delivering haylage during the winter we are confident that measures to introduce a new access point will resolve these issues. On a very positive note, the cows have already begun to have an impact by grazing on the willow saplings and courser vegetation. This has resulted in more favourable conditions for the rarer species of plants and animals to flourish.

In addition, tree felling has occurred around several of the pools and the Schwingmoor floating bog. Tree felling will continue in the coming years to ensure continued favourable conditions increase.

Infrastructure such as paths, benches, boardwalks, bridges, car parks and fencing will be maintained to ensure visitors can enjoy their visit in a safe manner. In addition, Shropshire Council periodically monitor trees on site to ensure visitor safety.

Getting Involved

We will shortly be launching the Friends of Brown Moss and the first meeting will be advertised locally and via the Whitchurch Rural Parish Council website together with our own website, Shropshires Great Outdoors, which can be found at:

<http://www.shropshiresgreatoutdoors.co.uk/site/brown-moss-countryside-heritage-site/>

As the site managers, we within Shropshire Council's Outdoor Recreation Service would like to set up a Friends of Brown Moss Group to enable us to:

Keep you better informed and ask your opinion on specific matters.

Work with you to resolve issues before they become problems.

Organise events, courses and training tailored for you and the site.

Organise regular work parties in practical conservation management and monitoring

Contact details:

Shaun Burkey, Country Parks & Sites Officer

Outdoor Recreation, Shropshire Council,

Wardens Bungalow, Swan Hill, Ellesmere, SY12 0DQ

T: 01691 624448

E: shaun.burkey@shropshire.gov.uk

Web Links:

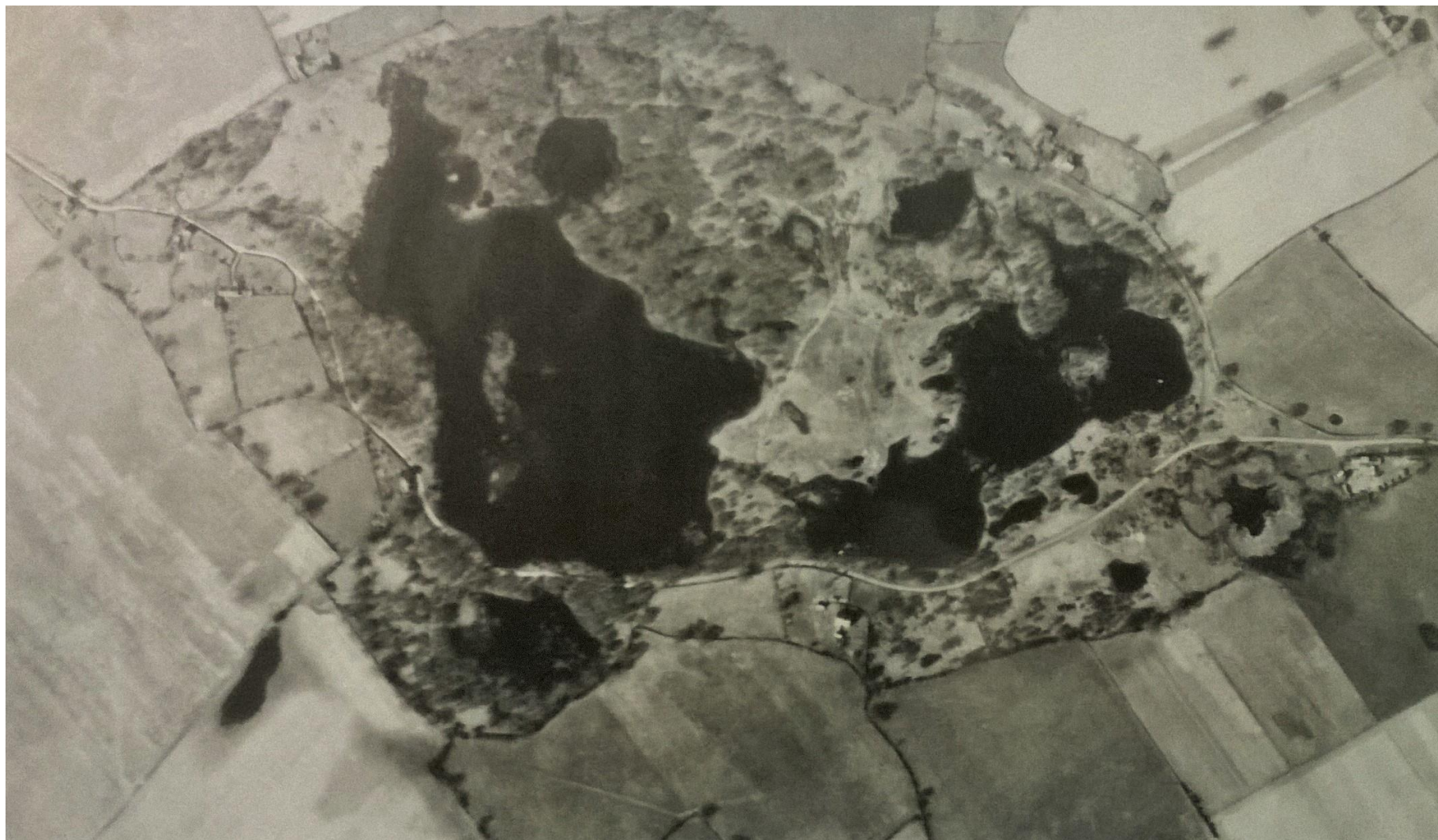
Shropshire Wildlife Trust <https://www.shropshirewildlifetrust.org.uk/>

Natural England <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england>

Freshwater Habitats Trust <http://freshwaterhabitats.org.uk/>

Shropshire Botanical Society http://www.shropshireecology.co.uk/botanical_society.html

Aerial Photography 1940's to present day



1947



2004



2016