OXWICH BAY SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST

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 and geology on your site, and what care is needed to look after its wildlife and geology 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 and geology at Oxwich Bay SSSI?

Oxwich Bay has a number of special features including sand dunes, saltmarsh, reed bed, open water and ditch systems, fen, calcareous grassland, maritime grassland, dry heath, coastal scrub, vascular plant assemblage, invertebrate assemblage, semi-natural broadleaf woodlands, wet woodland and geomorphology. Individual species such as Dune Gentian, Cetti's Warbler, Narrow mouthed whorl snail are also features in their own right.

As well as these features, Oxwich Bay has other habitats that contribute to the special wildlife interest. These include scrub, bracken, meadows and intertidal communities. This mixture of habitats is important for much of the wildlife including otters using the whole site.

What do we want Oxwich Bay to look like?

The following is a description of how we would like to see the features at Oxwich Bay.

The dune system exhibits every stage of natural dune succession from frontal embryo dunes to fixed dunes through to mature woodland. The rich diversity of flora will be maintained with species such as early purple, pyramid, southern marsh and bee orchid. Theses will be present along with wild herbs and other non-flowering dune species such as lichens, bryophytes and fungi.

The frontal dunes are dominated by marram grass with pockets of sea holly present amongst bare shifting sand. A diverse insect population will be present, including the butterflies small blue, dingy skipper, common blue, brimstone and orange tip, There are a number of low lying winter flooded hollows (slacks) containing early pioneer grasses, and a variety of flowering plants. Scrub encroachment of the dunes (especially slacks) does not occur at the expense of the diverse dune flora.

The salt marsh at Oxwich displays a range of successional stages made up mainly of plants from the middle-upper stages of salt marsh such as Sea lavender, Thrift and Sea purslane together with muddy creeks containing pioneer species like glasswort and salt marsh grass.

The reed beds are alive with bird song in summer and include colonies of Reed warbler, Sedge warbler and the nationally rare Cettis warbler. A scattering of scrub species of mainly Willow and Sallow grow in the reed beds but not in quantities that would cause drying out or shading out of important flowering plants The various ditches are clear and function as drains keeping water moving through the wetland system. Small areas of scrub/carr grow within the reed beds, but are prevented from getting large enough to threaten the integrity of the reed beds. Otters may be seen using the ditches and open water to feed on the numerous fish.

There is open water at Oxwich in the three lakes between the reedbeds, fen and woodland. Clear water edged by reeds and irises will be alive with dragonflies and insects in the summer. Herons, Egrets and little grebes can be seen.

Warblers can be seen and heard throughout the marsh especially the distincitive calls of the Cettis warbler standing out from other birdcalls.

The water will be free of pollution and nutrient enrichment with healthy populations of fish and aquatic plants.

A range of fen communities grow amongst the reed beds. Typical species such as common reed, Reed mace, sedges (e.g. bottle sedge and great tussock sedge), club-rushes, bur-reeds and bog mosses should be present along with submerged aquatic plants and flowering herbs of wetland margins. Stands of vegetation dominated by common reed or scrub do not threaten the more species rich and nutrient poor fen.

Calcareous grassland can be found out on the Point. The grassland includes plants typical of calcareous grassland such as salad burnet, wild thyme, carnation sedge, ribwort plantain, sheep's fescue and birdsfoot trefoil. Also at this site Portland spurge, common rockrose with its bright yellow flowers, and during spring the blue flowers of spring squill are present. The grassland will grow amongst heath and scrub.

Maritime grassland occurs on the 'hard' limestone cliffs, on edges and crevices or where a break in slope allows soil to accumulate. The grassland grows in less exposed areas of the cliff containing a maritime form of red fescue, sea plantain and inland species such as ribwort plantain. The vegetation of these grasslands depends directly on their exposure to the sea.

Within the dry heath, heathers and gorse grow in close association with grasses and sedges. Smaller plants like birds foot trefoil, heath bedstraw, milkwort and tormentil grow under the heather and in the more open areas of heath. Lizards may be spotted basking in the sun and birds such as linnets and stonechats are present. If you are lucky the Dartford warbler can be found singing amongst the gorse. Maritime species like sea thrift and spring squill grow in the heath closest to the sea.

Along the coastal path, the main habitat is coastal scrub, which is characterised by the presence of gorse, bracken, blackthorn and hawthorn. You will spot whitethroats that like to nest along here, as well as robins and dunnocks and encounter stonechats, linnets, thrushes and blackbirds. Spring flowers will include primroses and bluebells under the trees, and in the summer, red campion.

Healthy populations of regionally and nationally rare species such as Juniper, purple gromwell, round leaved wintergreen and Dune gentian will all be present. Invertebrates such as the strandline beetle, under shoreline debris, Grey bush cricket and a nationally rare mining bee.

Keen eyes can see the tiny Narrow Mouthed Whorl snail living in the transition zone between the salt marsh and sand dune.

Woodland dominates the headland, steep and rocky in places the wood has mature trees and a rich spring ground flora. Plenty of young sapling will grow where gaps in the canopy allow light into the woods. Oxwich woods are home to ash, beech, oak and sycamore a dense shrub layer of hazel (including relict coppice), hawthorn, ash saplings and sycamore saplings provides thick undergrowth providing cover for

woodland animals. Dog's mercury, bramble and bluebells thrive in the spring before the leaves fully emerge, ramsons, wood anemone and hart's tongue fern will also be present. Wet woodland can be found in pockets around the dunes including willow, downy birch and alder with scattered alder buckthorn.

Oxwich has special coastal geomorphology that is visible and accessible to allow the study of classic coastal forms between dunes, beach and cliff.

What management is needed on Oxwich Bay SSSI and why?

Although Oxwich Bay is an excellent place for wildlife/geology 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?

The encroachment of scrub, bracken and reed is a natural process that will occur within a number of the habitats at Oxwich. Although natural, too much scrub can mean that other habitats such as heath, grassland, fen, dune, and marsh may be lost. An example of undesirable scrub would be large areas of marsh covered in thick willow and sallow scrub. Small area would be expected and actually add to the sites diversity. A balance is needed to ensure that scrub is always kept in check. Grazing is a useful tool to slow down young scrub developing and where grazing isn't possible machine and hand removal with stump treatment may be required. Bracken can quickly encroach into an area without grazing animals that help to trample the bracken; other methods of bracken control include cutting or bruising. The dune and grassland areas are prone to bracken encroachment without management if they are not properly managed. Reed encroachment into areas of open water will occur, effectively shrinking open water while adding silt and drying them out over time, in such areas reed may need to be cut back to opening waterways.

Grazing. Overgrazing can cause damage, but at the same time some grazing can benefit the site. Too much grazing or using the wrong animals might leave the marshes, dunes and grasslands in a poor state. A balance needs to be found where grazing is benefiting the site. Ponies are ideal stock to help control succession in the dunes. Cattle would be most suitable to graze the wetter marsh.

Recreational pressure. The dunes and paths along the cliffs and woods are popular recreational areas receiving a large number of visitors each year. However, unauthorised camping and parties can cause problems with fires, damaging the delicate wild plants and littering. It is important we educate visitors to the area and arrange regular litter picks in the busy periods. Trampling of the cliff and coastal slopes by walkers may threaten the plants growing there.

Open water. To prevent 'silting up' of the open water the ponds and channels will be regularly maintained cutting and removing encroaching reed and scrub when required.

Reed Beds. The reed beds themselves are important habitats and will be managed to ensure a good quality reed with a number of different species, which is most useful to

birds such as the warblers. The reed beds can be managed through cutting or controlled burning.

Pollution Control. A frequent monitoring programme of water quality to show any pollution issues will be undertaken. The maintenance of the channels running through the marsh system will ensure any high nutrient pollution from local sources such as the village will be carried out the marsh quickly.

Finally

Our knowledge and understanding of wildlife and geology 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.

Your local office is;
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