Brent Island 5-yearly monitoring visit

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1. Introduction

Consistent with the 5 yearly review of the management plan, plant species on Brent Island were surveyed by Rodger Keedle in May 1994 and 1999 and by Ben Driver in 2004. The 2009 survey was undertaken by Naomi Scuffil, Assistant Ecologist for the Dartmoor National Park Authority, on 29 May 2009.

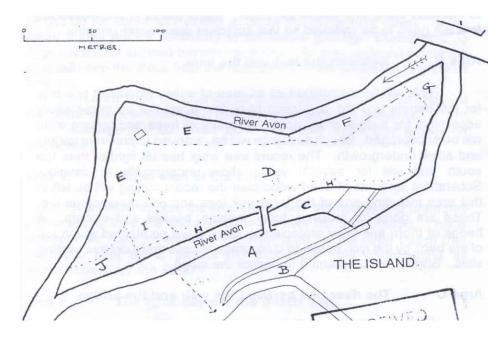
Good data already exists for plants, trees, shrubs and other wildlife, such as birds and invertebrates. As before, the survey focused on flowering plants, ferns, grasses, sedges and rushes and any changes in vegetation, particularly in the meadow area, are used to help inform the management process.

During the 1999 survey, quadrat based monitoring of herbaceous plants in the meadow area was set up and this was repeated in 2004. Quadrat-based recording was not repeated in 2009; instead the entire meadow was surveyed and the abundance of plant species noted in the DAFOR scale. The previous surveyors had carried out a whole site search for flowering plants, ferns, grasses, sedges and rushes during the 1994, 1999 and 2004 surveys; this was repeated in 2009 – although it must be noted here that as less time was spent on site in 2009, a number of the more rare plant species will have been missed. Photographic monitoring of fixed points was also set up in 1999, and repeated in 2004 and 2009; any visual changes in vegetation are discussed in this report.

2. Monitoring of the meadow

This was set up in 1999 and consists of a survey of 3 areas:

- Area 1 –the tussocky grassland, compartment I in the management plan
- Area 2 –western part of the meadow, compartment D in the management plan
- Area 3 –eastern part of the meadow, compartment D in the management plan
 (a path across the middle of the meadow marks boundary between areas 2 and 3)



In 1999 and 2004, 25 quadrats (25 x 25cm in size) were randomly placed and any herbaceous plants rooted in the quadrat were recorded. Plants that occurred outside of quadrats were recorded, along with grass species and abundance. In 2009 the quadrat survey was not carried out; only a full species list for each area was undertaken and the abundance noted in the DAFOR scale. The delineation of Areas 1 and 2 was no longer very clear in 2009.

Results

Table 1 – Presence of herbaceous species in three monitoring areas:

	Area 1	Area 1	Area 1	Area 2	Area 2	Area 2	Area 3	Area 3	Area 3
Species	-1999	-2004	- 2009	– 1999	- 2004	- 2009	- 1999	- 2004	- 2009
A = 1-111 = =111 = f = 11									
Achillea millefolium	•	-	•	•	-	•	-	•	-
Anthriscus sylvestris	_	_	•	_	_	_	_	_	_
Centaura nigra	_	*	-	•	•	_	•	•	-
Cirsium arvense	-	-	-	-	-	-	•	*	*
Conopodium majus	_	*	*	-	♦	-	•	*	*
Digitalis purpurea	-	-	*	-	-	-	-	-	♦
Galium aparine	_	-	♦	-	-	-	-	*	-
Heracleum									
sphondylium	*	*	♦	-	-		-	♦	♦
Hieracium spp	-	-	♦	-	-	-	-	-	♦
Hyacinthoides non-									
scriptus	-	-	♦	-	-	-	-	-	-
Hypochaeris radicata	-	-	-	*	♦	-	-	♦	-
Leontodon									
autumnalis	-	-	-	*	-	-	-	♦	♦
Lotus corniculatus	-	-	-	*	♦	♦	-	-	-
Oenanthe crocata	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	♦	-
Plantago lanceolata	*	*	*	*	♦	*	*	*	*
Plantago major	-	-	-	-	-	♦	-	*	*
Ranunculus acris	-	-	-	*	♦	-	*	-	-
Ranunculus bulbosus	-	-	-	*	-	-	-	-	-
Ranunculus ficaria	*	*	-	*	*	-	*	*	-
Ranunculus repens	*	-	♦	*	-	*	*	*	*
Rumex acetosa	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Rumex obtusifolius	-	*	♦	-	-		-	-	*
Stellaria graminea	*	-	♦	*	-	-	*	*	-
Stellaria media	-	-	♦	-	-	-	-	-	-
Taraxacum officinale	-	*	-	•	-	-	*	*	-
Trifolium pratense	-	-	-	-	-	*	*	*	*
Trifolium repens	-	-	-	•	*	*	*	*	*
Urtica dioica	-	-	*	-	-	-	*	♦	*
Veronica arvensis	-	-	*	-	-	-	-	-	-
Veronica									
chamaedrys	_	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
TOTAL	7	9	17	15	10	8	15	20	15

Table 1 shows that the total number of flowering plants on the meadow has fluctuated over the last ten years, with species numbers increasing in Area 1, decreasing in Area 2, and remaining stable in Area 3.

Table 2: Abundance of herbaceous plants on the meadow in 2009:

Species	Area 1	Area 2	Area 3
Flowering Plants			
Achillea millefolium	R	R	
Anthriscus sylvestris	R		
Cirsium arvense			R
Conopodium majus	0		0
Digitalis purpurea	R		R
Galium aparine	R		
Heracleum sphondylium	R	R	R
Hieracium spp	R		R
Hyacinthoides non-scriptus	0		
Lotus corniculatus		R	
Plantago lanceolata	0	O, LF	F
Plantago major		R	R
Ranunculus repens	Α	A	Α
Rumex acetosa	Α	F	F
Rumex obtusifolius	0		0
Stellaria graminea	R		
Stellaria media	R		
Trifolium pratense		R	R
Trifolium repens		0	0
Urtica dioica	R		R
Veronica arvensis	0		·
Veronica chamaedrys	LF	LF	LF

Table 3: Abundance of grasses on the meadow in 2004 and 2009:

Species	Area 1 2004	Area 1 2009	Area 2 2004	Area 2 2009	Area 3 2004	Area 3 2009	
Agrostis capillaris	Α	0	Α		Α		
Alopecurus pratense	0		R		R		
Anthoxanthum odoratum	0	F	Α	Α	Α	Α	
Cynosaurus cristatus		R					
Dactylis glomerata	F	A, LD	0	O-F	0	Α	
Festuca rubra		0		0		0	
Holcus lanatus	Α	A, LD	F	Α	F	Α	
Lolium perenne			F	R, LD	0	R, LD	
Phleum pratense	R						
Poa pratense					R		
Poa annua		F		F		F	
Poa trivialis			R			0	
D = Dominant, A = Abundant, F = Frequent, O = Occasional, R = Rare, L = Locally							

Tables 2 and 3 show that on the meadow overall, sweet vernal grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*, cocksfoot *Dactylis glomerata*, annual meadow grass *Poa annua*, creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens* and common sorrel *Rumex acetosa* are the most abundant species, with clusters of ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata* and Germander speedwell *Veronica chamaedrys* present throughout the meadow. A comparison with the data from 1999 and 2004 shows that these species have been the most abundant throughout the survey time. Species that appear to have declined in numbers are lesser celandine *Ranunculus ficaria*, hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium* and lesser stitchwort *Stellaria graminea*. Some species, such as common knapweed *Centaura nigra* and autumn hawkbit *Leontodon autumnalis* were not found at all in the 2009 survey. In contrast, several additional species, such as bluebell, *Hyacinthoides non-scriptus*, wall speedwell *Veronica arvensis* and hawkweed *Hieracium spp* were surveyed for the first time in 2009.

Discussion

The results show a mixed picture, with some species increasing in numbers, and others decreasing. Some of this is probably a factor of seasonal variation, and possibly also an unclear delineation of where Area 1 ends and Area 2 starts, as the term 'tussocky area' as a description for Area 1 was not a clear description any longer in 2009.

In general, the condition of the meadow is fairly stable, although there has been a small increase in ruderal plants, such as nettle *Urtica dioica*, hogweed and creeping thistle *Cirsium arvense*. The proportion of Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*, cocksfoot *Dactylis glomerata* and creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens* is quite large, all of which are indicators of nutrient-rich conditions; however, the abundance of sweet vernal grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, a positive indicator for meadows, has remained in good numbers in the sward.

3. Whole site search for flowering plants, ferns, grasses, sedges and rushes

The whole site was walked slowly and species seen were recorded. Most were recorded in the field and a few samples were removed for later identification. Approximately 1 hour was spent on this part of the survey, which is less than was spent in previous years – hence the reduced numbers of species recorded is probably a reflection of this, rather than a real decrease in plant species.

Discussion

The results appear in full in the appendix and are discussed in the following section:

Two additional plant species were found during the whole site search, bringing the total number on site to 144 species. These were garlic mustard *Alliara petiolata* and a cultivated avens species (*Geum spp*). These species could have recently established or might have occurred at very low abundances for some time, being overlooked during the previous surveys.

The 'missing' flowers, grasses and ferns had perhaps been overlooked on this occasion. Only one ecologically significant grass, Crested dogs-tail, *Cynosurus cristatus*, was not readily apparent in the meadow, but this can be difficult to find in early summer prior to flowering. Many of the missing plants are 'exotics' or garden escapes, such as hellebores, bellflowers, cultivated snowdrops, daffodils etc. which perhaps grow casually, not occurring every year and some might no longer exist on site.

Some species losses might be attributed to the change of surveyor or perhaps changes in survey effort (time spent searching for new species). The site is complex, encompassing a number of different habitats and species and the vegetation by the river is difficult to access due to brambles, nettles etc. Therefore, plants could be easily overlooked during the survey, especially as the new surveyor had no prior knowledge of the site.

Overall it is not apparent that there have been any significant changes during the last five, or even ten years, i.e. no ecologically important species have been lost or gained.

4. Fixed point photographic monitoring

Colour photographs have been regularly taken from 11 fixed points since May 1999. The map of the locations from 1999 was not found; hence the locations were re-found using just the pictures as a guide (only eight points were found; a map of these locations is attached). Overall, there is very little change between 1999, 2004 and 2009, as these selected photos show:







2009





5. Conclusions and management recommendations

Currently, the meadow is in good condition, despite some apparent decrease in species diversity. Species diversity can vary on an annual basis; furthermore, slight changes in survey methodology, and more importantly, the amount of time spent on site, will invariably lead to a perceived change in species abundance. Overall, the condition of the meadow has been stable, with no large increases or decreases of certain species.

In particular, the abundance of the coarser grasses, such as Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus* and cocksfoot *Dactylis glomerata* have remained stables, as has the abundance of the positive indicator species sweet vernal grass, *Anthroxanthum odoratum*. This stability can be seen on the photographs.

The current management regime, with an annual cut in September, after the majority of herbs have seeded, is appropriate and can remain the same. Moving to an earlier cut would unlikely to be of benefit, as the herbaceous plants currently present are 'summer' meadow species which will continue to flower into September. If cutting, it is important to remove the arisings, to help encourage diversity. Late summer grazing would be advantageous, but I understand this is not a feasible option for the site.

In terms of managing for increased species diversity, it might be advantageous to bring in seed from a Dartmoor haymeadow to spread onto the site in late summer. The best thing to do would be to select a fairly small area of the site, with the lowest species diversity, and highest amount of coarse grasses. At the moment there is not much difference between Areas 1,2 and 3, so any one of these is suitable. You will need to remove the turf, and sow seeds from an existing Dartmoor haymeadow by spreading hay from one of these meadows. You can repeat this process over the years on bigger areas to increase the size of the meadow. The best time to do this is early September, and I have enclosed a leaflet on haymeadow creation, which lists contacts from where good quality hay can be obtained.

The scrub and rough grassland around the edge of the meadow provide good cover for a range of wildlife. No further control of scrub is needed at present, but it is advisable to continue the photographic monitoring so that changes can be observed.

At present there is a small population Himalayan balsam in Area H. This can be a troublesome species and should be removed as quickly as possible. The easiest way to remove the plant is by pulling or cutting it before it flowers and sets seeds. Due to the proximity to a watercourse I would not recommend chemical control.

Appendix -results of the whole site search

Scientific Name	Common Name	1994-99	2004	2009
Ferns				
Asplenium trichomanes	Maidenhair Spleenwort	_	•	•
Asplenium ruta-muraria	Wall Rue	•	•	
Athyrium filix-femina	Lady Fern	•	•	•
Dryopteris affinis	Scaly Male Fern	•	•	
Dryopteris dilitata	Broad Buckler Fern	•	*	_
Dryopteris felix-max	Male Fern	•		
Equisetum fluviatile	Water Horsetail	<u> </u>		
Phyllitis scolopendrium	Hart's-tongue Fern	•	•	•
Polypodium vulgare	Common polypody	•	*	
Polydtichum setiferum	Soft Shield Fern	▼	*	
Pteridium aquilinum	Bracken		•	•
rteridiam aquilinum	Didckeii	10	8	7
		10	0	,
Grasses				
Agrostis capillaries	Common Bent	•	*	*
Alopecurus pratense	Meadow Foxtail	•	•	•
Anthroxanthum odoratum	Sweet Vernal Grass	•	*	•
Brachypodium sylvaticum	Wood False-Brome	•	*	
Cynosurus cristatus	Crested Dogs-tail	•		•
Dactylis glomerata	Cock's-foot	•	*	*
Deschampsia caespitosa	Tufted Hair-grass	*		
Festuca gigantea	Giant Fescue		*	
Festuca rubra	Red Fescue	*	*	•
Glyceria fluitans	Flote Grass	*		
Holcus lanatus	Yorkshire Fog	*	*	*
Lolium perenne	Perennial Rye grass	•	*	*
Melica uniflora	Wood mellick	•	*	
Poa annua	Annual Meadow Grass	*	*	*
Poa nemoralis	Wood Meadow Grass	+	*	
Poa pratense	Smooth Meadow Grass	+	*	
Poa trivialis	Rough Meadow Grass	*	*	*
Phleum pratense	Timothy Grass	•	*	*
		17	15	11
Sedges and rushes				
Carex remota		•	*	♦
Juncus effuses	Soft rush	*	*	
Luzula campestris	Field woodrush	•	*	*
Luzula slvatica	Greater woodrush	*	*	*
		4	4	3
Flowering Plants				
Achillea milefolium	Yarrow	+	•	*
Aegopodium podagraria	Ground Elder	•	*	*
Ajuga reptans	Bugle	•	•	

Scientific Name	Common Name	1994-99	2004	2009
Alliaria petiolata	Garlic Mustard			*
Allium ursinum	Wild Garlic or Ramsons	*	*	*
Anemone nemorosa	Wood anemone	*	*	
Anemone nemorosa 'vestal'	Cultivated Wood Anemone	*		*
Angelica sylvestris	Angelica	*	*	
Anthriscus sylvestris	Cow Parsley	*	*	*
Aquilegia vulgaris	Cultivated Columbine	*	*	
Arctium minus	Lesser Burdock	*	*	*
Arum maculatum	Wild Arum	*	*	
Bellis Perennis	Daisy	*		
Campanula spp	Cultivated Creeping Bellflower	*		
Campanula spp	Cultivated Giant Bellflower	*		
Cardamine flexulosa	Wavy Bittercress	*	*	
Cardamine pratensis	Lady's Smock	*	*	
Centaurea nigra	Black Knapweed	*	*	
Cerastium fontanum	Common Mouse-ear	*	*	
Chaerpphyllum temulum	Rough Chervil	*	*	
Chrysosplenium oppositifolium	Opposite-leaved Golden-saxifrage	*		
Circaea luteriana	Enchanters Nightshade	*	*	*
Cirsium arvense	Creeping Thistle	*	*	*
Cirsium vulgare	Spear Thistle	*	*	
Conopodium majus	Pignut	*	*	*
Coronopus didymus	Lesser Swinecress		*	
Crocosmia crocosmifolia	Montbretia	*	*	*
Cymbalaria murais	Ivy-leaved Toadflax	*	*	*
Digitalis purpurea	Foxglove	*	*	*
Dipsacus fullonum	Teasel	*	*	*
Doronicum spp	Leopards-bane	*		
Epilobium hirsutum	Great Willowherb	*		
Epilobium montanum	Broad-leaved Willowherb	*	*	
Eupatorium cannabinum	Hemp Agrimony	*		
Euphorbia uranlensis	Twiggy Spurge		*	
Fallopia spp	Cultivated Knotweed	*		
Fragraria vesca	Wild Strawberry	*		
Galanthus spp	Cultivated Snowdrop	*		
Galium aparine	Goosegrass or Cleavers	*	*	*
Galium odoratum	Sweet Woodruff	*	*	
Geranium dissectum	Cut-leaved Cranesbill	*	*	
Geranium phaeum	Dusky Cranesbill	*	*	
Geranium robertianum	Herb Robert	*	*	*
Geum urbanum	Wood Avens	*	*	*
Geum ssp	Cultivated Avens			*
Gladioulus byzantinus	Eastern Gladiolus	*		
Glechoma hederacea	Ground Ivy	+	*	*
Hedera helix	lvy	*	*	*
Heleborus foetidus	Cultivated Stinking Hellebore	*		
Heleborus viridis	Cultivated Green Hellebore	*		

Scientific Name	Scientific Name	1994-99	2004	2009
Heracleum sphondylium	Hogweed	*	*	*
Hieracium spp	Hawkweed	*		
Hyacinthoides non-scriptus	Bluebell	*	*	*
Hyacinthoides hispanica	Spanish Bluebell	*		*
Hypericum androsaemum	Tutsan	*	*	
Hypochaeris radicata	Common Cats-ear	*	*	*
Impatiens glandulifera	Himalayan Balsam	*		*
Lamiastrum galeobdolon	Yellow Archangel	*	*	
Lamium Purpurea	Red Dead-nettle	*	*	*
Lapsana communis	Nipplewort	*		
Lathyrus montanus	Bitter Vetch	*		
Lenontodon autumnalis	Autumn Hawkbit	*	*	
Leontodon hispidus	Rough Hawkbit	•	*	*
Linaria purpurea	Purple Toadflax	*		
Lotus corniculatus	Bird's-foot Trefoil	•	*	*
Lysichiton americanus	Skunk Cabbage	•		*
Lysimachia nemorum	Yellow Pimpernel	•	*	*
Meconopsis pcambrica	Welsh Poppy	•	*	
Mentha spp	A lemon scented garden mint	·	*	
Mercurialis perennis	Dog's Mercury	•	•	•
Montia sibirica	Pink Purslane	•	•	•
Myosotis laxa	Water Forget-me-not	•	•	•
Myosotis sylvatica	Wood Forget-me-not	•	*	
Narcissus spp	Cultivated daffodil	•	*	
Oenanthe crocata	Hemlock Water Dropwort	•	*	•
Oxalis acetosella	Wood Sorrel	•	•	•
Petasites hybridus	Butterbur	•	*	
Plantago lanceolata	Ribwort Plantain	•	*	*
Plantago major	Greater Plantain	•	*	•
Primula vulgaris	Primrose	•	*	<u> </u>
Prunella vulgaris	Self-heal	 	*	
Ranunculus acris	Meadow Buttercup	 	*	_
Ranunculus bulbosus	Bulbous Buttercup	 	•	
Ranunculus ficaria	Lesser Celendine	•	*	
Ranunculus repens	Creeping Buttercup	•	•	A
Rubus fruticosus	Bramble	—	*	•
Rumex acetosa	Common Sorrel		A	<u> </u>
Rumex crispus	Curled Dock	V	*	•
Rumex obtusifolius	Broad-leaved Dock	•	*	•
Scrophularia nodosa	Figwort	▼	*	*
Silene dioica	Red Campion	▼	*	*
Sonchus oleraceus	Smooth Sow-thistle	▼	•	—
		▼		
Stachys sylvatica	Hedge Woundwort Lesser Stitchwort	•	*	_
Stellaria graminea				*
Stellaria media	Chickweed	•	*	•
Taraxacum officinalis agg.	Dandelion Wood Sage	•	*	•
Teucrium scorodonia	Wood Sage	•	•	

Scientific Name	Common Name	1994-99	2004	2009
Torillis japonica	Hedge Parsley	*	*	
Trifolium pratense	Red Clover	+ +		*
Trifolium repens	White Clover	*	*	*
Umbillicus rupestris	Wall Pennywort	*	*	
Urtica dioica	Nettle	*	*	*
Valeriana officinalis	Red Valerian	*		
Veronica arvensis	ica arvensis Wall Speedwell			*
Veronica Chamaedrys	Germander Speedwell	*	*	*
Veronica montanum	Wood Speedwell	*	*	*
Veronica serpylifolia	Thyme-leaved Speedwell	*		
Viola palustre	Marsh Violet	*		
Viola riviniana	Common-dog Violet	*	*	
	Bamboo	*		
	Cultivated Snakeweed			
		106	77	53

Table 3 -grass species abundance in each area (measured on the DAFOR scale)

Species	Area 1	Area 2	Area 3
Agrostis capillaris	A	Α	Α
Alopecurus pratense	0	R	R
Anthroxanthum odoratum	0	Α	Α
Dactylis glomerata	F	0	0
Holcus lanatus	Α	F	F
Lolium Perenne		F	0
Phleum pratense	R		
Poa pratense			R
Poa trivilalis		R	

D=dominant, A=abundant, F=frequent, O=Occasional, R=rare.