

# BRENT ISLAND TRUST

## MANAGEMENT PLAN

Revised 15<sup>th</sup> October 2009

The Island is managed for the protection of wildlife and for people to enjoy. When these aims conflict the protection of wildlife will normally take precedence. The aim of management for wildlife is to maintain a diversity of natural habitats for the benefit of a range of species. They are defined as follows:

- a) The Meadow
- b) Areas of tussocky grass
- c) The Orchard
- d) Areas of bramble, nettle, blackthorn and willow thicket
- e) The river margins
- f) The river
- g) The leat
- h) The weir
- i) Mature woodland
- j) Between the gate and the weir
- k) Structures - the linhay and the bridge

Methods of management are through research, recording and communication, so that people using The Island can understand and participate in what is happening. Communication is through the boards in the linhay, newsletters and discussion with members. The aim is to keep the number of official notices to a minimum as they detract from the natural appearance of the Island. Working parties are organised and everyone who is willing to help is welcomed. No work should be carried out without the knowledge and approval of the management committee, as the committee is responsible to the membership for ensuring that any activity is consistent with this management plan. Dogs are welcome on The Island subject to their owners being responsible and keeping them under control.

Management for wildlife requires patience and consistency. Habitats need to be maintained in the same way for a number of years in order to foster the species that depend on them.

- a) **The meadow:** This is ancient pasture land on deep loamy sand, which has almost certainly never been sprayed or ploughed. After being let for grazing it was left empty for five years until acquired by the trust in 1994, when it was cut and raked in the summer and then grazed in the early autumn. Grazing is now problematic owing to foot and mouth disease, and new guidelines concerning the use of electric fences. Since 2001 the meadow has been cut every autumn. The cut grass is raked and removed to reduce fertility and encourage wild flowers and finer grass species, which support a diversity of insects. Tree seedlings growing in the meadow will be removed. A strip on the outside edge of the path bordering the path around the meadow will be cut annually, to prevent brambles encroaching. An area of turf will be stripped in 2010 to experiment with the sowing of an appropriate wildflower seed mixture to encourage bees, butterflies and invertebrates. Plugs of wild flowers such as ox-eye daisies, scabious and common orchids will also be planted.
- b) **Areas of tussocky grass:** These provide important habitat for small mammals, including voles, and for insects and the birds which feed on them. It is important to keep brambles and sapling trees out of these areas, and it is intended to cut this area less often, at the discretion of the committee.
- c) **The orchard:** An area at the south western end of the meadow will be planted with orchard apple trees in the winter of 2009/10 in memory of the trust's first secretary, Don Stansbury, who died at the end of 2008. Traditional and local varieties will be chosen if possible. The area of grass under the trees will be mown or strimmed more frequently to prevent the trees becoming choked.
- d) **Areas of bramble, nettle, blackthorn and willow thicket:** Bramble patches provide food and shelter for wildlife and create less accessible areas. Thickets of blackthorn and willow

have provided nesting areas for blackcaps and dense bank cover which is protected by brambles, and is essential for the otters known to be on this river. Areas that are less used by dogs and less frequently entered by people need to be conserved and remain undisturbed to protect the wildlife which shelters there. One area of brambles will be cut back with brushcutters every winter in a rolling programme to prevent invasion by sapling trees and keep the bramble growth young and healthy.

- e) **The river margins:** Large trees shelter the meadow. The bramble and shrub cover provides shelter for wildlife. Otters pass along the River Avon but have not yet been recorded here. Views of the river have been opened up, but it is important to restrict access to other areas of the river bank. Rhododendron on the banks has to be kept in check or removed where possible, and invasive Himalayan Balsam must be removed. Bracken will be prevented from encroaching on the meadow by removing the top of young growth in early summer.
- f) **The river:** The aim is to preserve the natural character of the river for most of the length of The Island with occasional viewpoints. Checks are made for signs of otters and salmon.
- g) **The leat:** This provides a different water environment because it is shallow and slow moving. The aim has been to keep a consistent flow and depth. A new gate with adjustable valves was provided by Dartmoor National Park in 2003, although these are prone to being blocked by debris in the river and need regular clearing. In 2006 DNP installed a third opening at a higher level and fitted a fine mesh grille to filter the debris. In 2005 skilled masons from the DNP repaired areas of the walled bank of the leat which had collapsed.

A watch will be kept on this for signs of further erosion. The skunk cabbage is being contained and should be kept within about 20 metres of the gate. Large trees should not

be allowed to grow along the northern side of the leat as the roots would damage the banks. Working parties of Scouts and Guides have cleared silt and debris from the leat to ensure it flows easily.

- h) The weir:** This is essential for the preservation of the weirpool - an important feeding area for insects, birds and bats. Rare Brandt bats breed in nearby Church House. The weir is also important for the leat, and for the balance between the two arms of the river. The weir was rebuilt with a pumped concrete monolith base in August 2003. Gravel may have to be removed from the fish pools to provide sufficient depth for fish to migrate upriver. In the Autumn spate salmon are regularly seen running upstream at Lydia Bridge. A watch has to be kept for large tree trunks in the river and these should be reported.
- i) Mature woodland:** The area between the leat and the lane is rarely entered by dogs or walkers. It is being kept as woodland. It contains several of our largest trees and significant piles of wood on the ground, which are good for wildlife and which are not disturbed. The area of mature woodland across the river from the northern side of the Island is in private ownership and is an important part of the natural landscape, with similar effect to the area across the leat. All large trees on the Island have been identified and measured around the girth at a height of four feet. Some heights are being recorded periodically. The coppice of oak and the north eastern end is being left to grow naturally, although saplings are thinned as necessary. Two white willows have been planted in the brambles south of the linhay and two wild cherries to the north of the linhay.
- j) Between the gate and the weir:** Young oaks to the north of the path are being left to grow to maturity. Hazels and alders are naturalising in the area between the path and the leat, and these should be encouraged as they will

provide a good habitat for a diversity of wildlife, including birds and small mammals. Larger species of trees should be removed. The oak with the plaque beyond the bridge is dying and will be kept under observation. The path will be surfaced periodically with wood chips.

**k) Structures:**

- **The linhay** was renovated with help from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Dartmoor National Park, English China Clays and the Spurr family in the summer of 1997 by local builder Alan Lake. The display boards provide information about the island and its wildlife. There are two separate loft areas which are suitable for barn owls but which could be used by other species. The space under the eaves at the front and back of the building has been partitioned into 20 areas suitable for a variety of birds and bats. They may also be used by insects and mammals. Use of these areas is monitored and recorded. Tree creepers nested in the linhay in 2004 and nuthatches in 2006. Display boards will be changed at intervals to maintain the interest of visitors.
- **The bridge.** The stone surface of the bridge occasionally needs dressing to prevent damage to the arches. Some stones on the central pier which had fallen out were replaced in 2004. Ivy will be removed periodically to prevent damage to the masonry. The bridge was repointed in 2009.

Species surveys of the flowering plants, grasses, sedges and rushes, ferns and trees have been carried out by botanists from Dartmoor National Park in 1994, 1999, 2004 and 2009. It is intended to repeat this every five years, with the next survey due in 2014. Records are also being kept of birds, butterflies, dragonflies, spiders, mammals and reptiles.