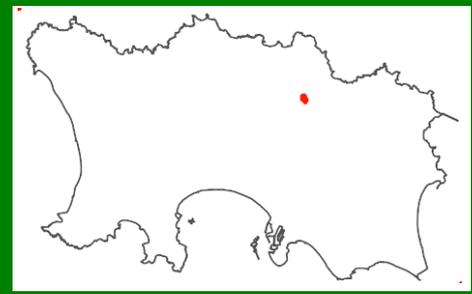


Le Petit Pré

Site of Special (Ecological) Interest



Introduction

This beautiful site set in the Trinity countryside is made up of a wet meadow with a stream in a gently sloping valley bottom surrounded by woodland. Both of these habitats are listed as being valuable in a local context in the Jersey Biodiversity Strategy. The site is one of the few wet meadows in Jersey unaffected by drainage works carried out in many valley bottoms from the twelfth century onwards, perhaps due to its small size and, until recently, its inaccessibility. Occasional grazing by cattle, hay cutting and timber collection for fuel has maintained its species richness by slowing down the dominance of bramble, bracken and scrub.



Willow warbler

The woodland, was badly affected by the Great Storm in 1987 but this provided an opportunity for an amount of management and re-planting. The aim now is to create woodland with both diversity of species and a varied age structure.

Le Petit Pré is owned by Trinity Manor and is managed by the States of Jersey Natural Environment by agreement with the owner. This generous co-operation means that the area is protected for nature conservation.



Bog pimpernel

History

The main evidence of past management within the woodland is the presence of multi-stemmed trees, most notably **Sweet Chestnut**. This suggests that these trees were coppiced in the past, either deliberately as part of a rotation, or, more likely, as a one off, presumably to harvest the timber, it is well known that fuel was in short supply during the German occupation of Jersey. It is believed that members of the ROA, Russikaya Osvoboditelnaya Armiya (Russian Liberation Army) who fought under German command during World War II were stationed in the woodland, and the remains of their dug out shelters in the banks can still be vaguely seen.

A relatively fast flowing stream meanders through the meadow and then into an area of wet woodland, thought to be the location of an historic mill pond, before eventually disappearing under the playing fields, which along with the main road have been created by infilling and raising the level of the valley bottom

The meadow has been grazed by cattle in the summer months in the past, and has not been fertilized or sprayed for at least the last 25 years, which have contributed to the rich floral displays which we see today.

A footpath was built in 1989 so that visitors could enjoy a circular walk around the spectacular meadow

Management

Because of the division of habitats between woodland and meadow each requires different management treatment:

- 1) Woodland - Gaps created in the canopy as a result of the storm in 1987 have presented ideal opportunities for self-seeding of new tree saplings, which leads to a better age variation to the woodland. Although this is beneficial, if the wrong type of species becomes dominant such as **Sycamore**, much of the biological interest of the woodland is jeopardised.

There are two areas of deciduous woodland, one on either side of the valley. Interestingly the north east facing woodland is cooler and damper than the woodland facing south west facing woodland, this is reflected in the different tree species to be found. Plants which thrive in darker conditions are more frequent on the north facing valley side with less **English Oak** here and more **Sweet Chestnut** and a lot more **Mountain Ash** and **Holly**, with the occasional **Yew**.



Ashy Furrow bee

Woodland management aims at diversifying the structure with both old and young trees present at any one time and to control the likelihood of less desirable trees becoming dominant.

- 2) Meadow - In order to stop the encroachment of scrub into the meadow and to conserve its species richness, management is essential. An annual regime of cutting is carried out, followed by the raking and removal of the resulting vegetation after the plants have set seed in September or October. This helps to maintain and increase the diversity of the grassland sward whilst at the same time reducing the abundance of coarse and potentially dominating species including **Hemlock Water Dropwort** and **Bramble**. Importantly this is the time of year when ground conditions are driest, allowing easier access and resulting in minimal damage. Although relatively dry under foot, the momentous task of cutting and removal of vegetation is all done by hand.

Wildlife

In addition to the picturesque nature of this site it also delivers on the wildlife front. More than 100 plant species, high for such a small area, have been recorded here, resulting in a vibrant, noisy and colourful show of insects. The sweet aroma of **Water Mint** fills the air as this plant is widespread in the damp meadow, as is **Common Marsh Bedstraw** and the sunshine yellow **Bird's-foot Trefoil**. **Water** and **Marsh Horsetail** grow freely alongside the stream edge.



Wood cricket

Whorled Caraway, a locally very rare member of the carrot family has been found here although recent searches for it have not been successful. Other plants found in the meadow include **Bog Pimpernel**, **Ragged Robin** and **Cuckoo Flower** with its soft pale violet flowers, which show at the same time as the arrival each spring of the first migrant cuckoos to our shores.

The variety of plants reflects the wealth of insects with rarities such as the **Wood Cricket** whose elegant fast calling trills can be heard in late summer. **The Ashy Furrow Bee** is found here which is fairly uncommon in Jersey and is very rare on mainland UK

where it is listed as being endangered. Jersey holds the largest British population of this bee and therefore our ones are very important on a national scale.

The impressive **Emperor Dragonfly** and the dainty **Blue Tailed Damselfly** can commonly be seen here as well as the Jersey Biodiversity Action Plan species the **Beautiful Demoiselle Damselfly**.

The variety of habitats provided at Le Petit Pré are attractive to a number of birds. Breeding species include **Bullfinch, Blackcap, Barn Owl** and **Short-toed Tree Creeper**, a small tree dweller which breeds in the Channel Islands but is a vagrant to the UK. More recently **Buzzards** can be regularly seen circling the skies above the woodland and in the winter month's flocks of **Redwing**, (a member of the thrush family named after its red coloured underwing) feed on the hawthorn and holly berries.

The charismatic **Red Squirrel** can often be seen scampering from branch to branch and is resident in the woodland.

Visiting

Parking for cars is available in the car park adjacent to the Major Riley playing fields opposite Trinity School.

The footpath is accessible through a wooden gate in the far North West corner of the playing field.

If travelling by bus from St Helier board route 4 to the Trinity School bus stop.



Redwing

Photo credits

Anne Haden: Bog Pimpernel

Tim Ransom: Wood cricket, Ashy Furrow Bee

Romano da Costa: Redwing, Willow warbler

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Biodiversity