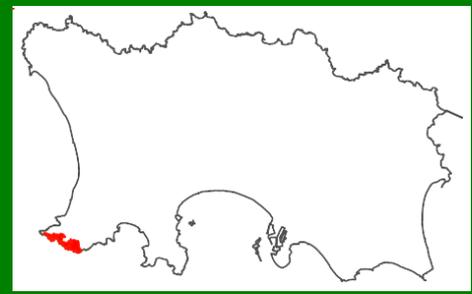


La Lande du Ouest

Site of Special (Ecological) Interest



Introduction

Jersey's south west coast includes a number of well-connected heathland sites. The long and narrow coastal site of La Lande du Ouest, otherwise known as Gorselands, stretches from the Prison west towards *Corbière lighthouse* with large areas covered by heather, gorse and coastal grassland. Gorselands is very exposed to the Atlantic storms and gales and the dwarfed vegetation reflects this. On a windy day it ranks as one of the most exhilarating places for a walk in the Island.

The site, located in the south west portion of the Jersey National Park covers 0.45km² and is mostly held in trust granted to the Public of Jersey by Charles le Quesne.

Biologically it is important as it supports over 116 species of plants, which in turn create the vegetation communities and habitats which support many kinds of animals. The coastline is rugged and the industrial past reveals itself in the form of camouflaged structures once used for quarrying nestled amongst the granite cliffs. Rose coloured granite quarried here was transported via the Railway Walk to the harbour and shipped to England to be incorporated into the London Embankment.



Common redstart

The lighthouse at La *Corbière* provides a magnificent backdrop to many of Gorselands views and was the first in the British Isles to be built of reinforced concrete.

Atlantic Dry (Maritime) heathland has a limited distribution in Europe. Where it once occurred widely, it has now been reduced to such a degree that it has become a rare habitat across its range. This is just one of the criteria for which the site was designated as a Site of Special Interest (SSI) in 1996. As with other south coast heathland sites, Gorselands also provides an important link or corridor for wildlife to maintain current or create new populations.

The warmth and glow that radiate from the granite on a summer's evening help provide the conditions for animals and plants more usually associated with Mediterranean climates.

History

Gorselands and the surrounding area has a very rich historical and archaeological heritage. There is a flint scatter site near La *Corbière* which dates human settlement of the area to at least 7,000 years ago. This coastal stretch was a major site for the local quarrying industry in the early part of the 20th century, and this industry has largely shaped the landscape we see today. There are many old quarries on site, resulting in steep inland cliffs, quarry pools and quarry spoil, all of which provide important habitats for many species. Old structures from this industry still stand, such as the stone crusher standing sentinel above the desalination plant, and the remains of old quarry cottages. Many German bunkers and other structures from the Island Occupation in WWII can also be found on site some of which are looked after and maintained by the Channel Island Occupation Society and are open to public viewing.

Management

The work carried out at Gorselands to maintain the site's scientific interest and appeal is varied but is dominated by the need to control invasive plant species. There are three main project areas which aim to improve the site's biological health:

- 1) Invasive Species Control. *Mesembryanthemum* (or iceplants) have long been known in Jersey's gardens and inevitably some have escaped into the wider environment. Originally, these plants, which include the Hottentot fig, are from South Africa and the first record of its presence in Jersey was from 1868 in St Brelade's Bay. In the absence of its natural control, by tortoises and baboons eating the fruit and leaves, the oceanic climate on the south west coast of our Island favours the plant and it continues its smothering spread at a rate of 1.5m a year, eliminating Jersey's natural vegetation in its track. Great progress is being made by the Rangers, Probation and Community Services, Back to Work, Conservation Volunteers, Corporate Groups, Schools and specialised rope access teams to control the fig, clearing it in large swathes from our cliffs and coastal slopes.
- 2) Maintaining a varied heathland structure is very important in order to attract a wide variety of wildlife. This largely involves varying the age structure of the heather and gorse stands to create patches of pioneer grassland and more mature gorse and scrub, important for nesting birds.
- 3) Without the historic grazing of livestock the fern, bracken tends to become dominant on heathlands. Bracken is a native plant to our shores but it should not be allowed to overcome the conservation of priority habitats such as the Atlantic Dry (Maritime) heathland.



Bee wolf

Wildlife

Gorselands supports some very unusual and uncommon plant species such as **Shore Dock**, which is a protected plant across Europe, **Prostrate Wild Asparagus** and the **Jersey Buttercup**. The **Greater Broomrape**, a parasitic plant which doesn't harness its energy from the sun but rather steals it from nearby growing gorse is also found here.

The site's invertebrate records are also indicative of its diverse nature and include Red Data Book species such as the **Cornish Shieldbug**, the ant ***Lasius emarginatus*** and the **Blue Winged Grasshopper**.

The name *Corbière* originates from 'corbeau' meaning the place of the ravens (or crows) and **Ravens** still make themselves known here with their guttural calls and aerobic flying. Other birds which feel at home on these exposed cliffs and coastal habitats are the **Cormorant**, the **Peregrine Falcon** and more recently the area has been recolonised by the **Fulmar**, a bird which spends most of the year on the wing traversing the Atlantic Ocean, only returning to land for nesting. **Common Whitethroats** and **Stonechats** are often seen perched on the tops of gorse bushes. The call of the stonechat sounding like two pebbles being knocked together.



Jersey buttercup

Many interesting mosses and lichens are found on the short coastal grasslands including the rare lichen ***Umbilicaria grisea*** which within the British Isles is only found in Jersey. Also the beautiful but rare **Starry Hoar-moss** can be seen hanging from rock faces. The varied habitat types across the site provide homes for a wide variety of insects including the **False Widow Spider**, the **Heather Mining Bee**, a bee which depends on heather for its food and nesting requirements, the **Bee Wolf**,

the most spectacular of our solitary wasps, the **Jersey Grasshopper** and the **Wood Ant**, a species now extinct on the UK mainland and a favoured food of the False Widow Spider.

Visiting

Bus routes 12, 12A and 22 provide a frequent service to La *Corbière* which is a good location to start your exploration. From here you have the options of walking east towards the meteorological radar station and returning on the Railway Walk or to continue past Beauport and St Brelade's Bay to Portelet <https://www.jersey.com/west-coast-jersey-walks>

There are a couple of car parks with bicycle racks available on site and Public toilets are located near to La *Corbière*.



Jersey grasshopper

Photo credits

Anne Haden: Jersey buttercup

Tim Ransom: Jersey grasshopper, Bee wolf

Romano da Costa, Common redstart

Author: Tim Liddiard



Biodiversity



Government of Jersey