

news release

14 March 2005

Petalwort blossoms at Braunton Burrows

Precious rarities benefit from management work

English Nature survey work has confirmed the benefits of management work carried out at Braunton Burrows. Over the past year, three of the Burrows rarities- amber sand-bowl snail, water germander and petalwort- have been monitored by specialist contractors. All three were found to have undergone population increases in newly created areas of damp, bare sand- the favoured habitat for these rare plants and animals.

The management work was funded by English Nature and the Ministry of Defence, working in partnership with the landowners. Earth-moving equipment was used to remove sand and vegetation and allow the less competitive rare plants and animals a chance to reappear.

James Diamond, English Nature Conservation Officer said “This work has had exactly the results we had hoped for. These tiny plants and animals will often go unnoticed by many visitors but they are a very special part of the Burrows and their exceptional wildlife.”

John Breeds, MoD Site Supervisor acknowledged that many visitors were concerned to see heavy machinery at work on the site, but said “Creating new areas of bare sand does look very drastic at the time, but this monitoring shows that it can soon bring fantastic results.”

The monitoring found that petalwort has increased from about 2500 plants in 1998 to over 22,000 in 2005. This puts Braunton Burrows in the top three populations for petalwort in England.

In one managed area, amber sand-bowl snail numbers increased from six dead individuals in 1998 to almost 5000 living or freshly dead individuals in 2004. In areas which had not been worked on, numbers had declined or remained stable.

Eight areas which formerly supported water germander have been worked on over the past five years. By 2004 populations of the plant had re-appeared at seven of these sites.

Ends

Notes for Editors

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1. The natural beauty of Braunton Burrows has been safeguarded for several centuries under the careful ownership of the Christie family. The Christie Devon Estates Trust allows public enjoyment of the site, where this will not compromise nature conservation and military training objectives.
2. The Ministry of Defence occupies the southern two-thirds of the site under lease, for the purposes military training. The Commandant at Fremington Camp is responsible for day-to-day management of the training estate, with professional advice from the Defence Estates and its private sector partner, Landmarc Support Services.
3. English Nature is the Government's statutory advisor on nature conservation. It provides advice and support to managers of special wildlife sites, including Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Areas of Conservation (SAC).
4. The exceptional wildlife and geological interest of Braunton Burrows is protected as a SSSI under national law and as a SAC under European legislation. They also form the core area of a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.
5. Petalwort is a tiny liverwort, found at only 17 sites in the UK. It receives special protection at both a UK and European level. Between the 1960's and late 1990's petalwort declined by at least 90% at Braunton Burrows.
6. Water germander is a flowering plant found at just three sites in the UK. It declined by approximately 78% at Braunton Burrows between 1982 and the late 1990's.
7. Amber sand-bowl snail is considered a rarity throughout Britain and Europe. Within the UK, away from Braunton Burrows it is known only from a handful of sites in Cumbria.

For more information and digital images contact James Diamond on 01392 889771 or james.diamond@english-nature.org.uk