

Report on a visit to Doveside, Wombwell, 14 June 2017

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Doveside is a small area on the north bank of the River Dove at Darfield, just north of Wombwell Ings, central grid reference SE412038. It is owned by Barnsley MBC and is unmanaged as a nature reserve.

I visited on 14 June (and also 15 June) 2017 in connection with proposals for wetland habitat improvements linked to the 'Wings across the Ings' project at Broomhill. This short report presents a summary of habitats and species noted on the field visit. A full list of species is attached.

Habitats

Access from the eastern end is down a lane flanked by some splendid mature Italian Poplars *Populus x canadensis* which then enters into a mature woodland area with occasional grassy glades. This woodland apparently does not comprise part of the Doveside scheme, but is a diverse mix of mature deciduous secondary woodland.

The main site comprises a rich mixture of meadow, open water, swamp, fen, reedbed, wet woodland and inundation communities.

Meadow communities are largely neutral grassland (approximating to MG5) with a diverse range of characteristic species. Of more interest in the eastern meadow are patches of Great Burnet *Sanguisorba major*, with some Meadow Foxtail, indicating a remnant fragment of MG4 floodplain meadow.

The **open waters** comprise two large ponds and a small pond in the north-east corner. The larger ponds have some large demersal fish in them (Carp spp.) which unfortunately seem to have stirred all the sediment up such that there appear to be very few aquatic plants apparent (White water-lily in the western pond looks like an introduced ornamental, and some fragments of *Ceratophyllum* and *Elodea* there also). A notable feature were large numbers of Swan Mussels albeit only empty shells could be seen – further investigation of an extant population would be desirable. It is likely that the fish have been introduced along with the lilies.

The **swamp, fen and reedbed** communities are extensive, luxuriant and diverse around the main ponds. There are large populations of many marginal plants such as Water Mint, Water Forget-me-not, Gipsywort, patches of Common Reed, Bulrush, Common Spikerush. Of particular note are some areas of fen in both the west and east meadows and which form part of an interesting cline from meadow to fen, to swamp and open water, and which are dominated by Brown Sedge, Common Sedge, Water forget-me-not *M. cespitosa*, and Creeping Bent.

Wet woodland comprises scattered bushes of Grey Willow with a large stand of Sallow in the middle. There is also a notable line of hedge and mature trees on the riverside comprising Crack Willow and Aspen.

Some **inundation communities** are found as patches in the meadow areas and support plants such as Marsh Foxtail, Marsh Cudweed, Silverweed and Flote-grass.

Species

Some notable plants in a Barnsley context include White Briony (in the wood), Brown Sedge, Water Forget-me-not *Myosotis cespitosa*, Marsh Cudweed, Great Burnet.

Despite the short visit, notable Odonata included Banded Demoiselle and Broad-bodied Chases, with some commoner butterflies, and of the birds Willow Tit, Kingfisher and a range of warblers including Reed, Lesser Whitethroat and Common Whitethroat carrying food.

Evaluation

I had not visited the site before and was pleasantly surprised. There is a good range of habitats in a small area with a diverse range of species (almost 100 plant species on the short visit) including some uncommon and restricted species. The quality of the swamp, fen and inundation communities is excellent with a wide range of species, and abundant populations of some, and there are excellent examples of ecological clines from grassland through to fen, swamp and open water. The remnant MG4 grassland is notable. Some notable vertebrates were seen including Willow Tit and Banded Demoiselle (although this species is now found widely along the River Dove).

The main negatives were a significant population of *Crassula helmsii*, and the open waters being churned up by introduced Carp.

The proposed scheme will increase the open water wetland extent as well as connect the site to the river and will be a positive measure. Care should be taken not to damage the MG4 and Brown Sedge communities. Removal of the introduced fish would enable a more diverse aquatic flora and fauna to develop.

Further monitoring and survey work should be undertaken on other faunal groups and aquatics, including confirming whether the Swan Mussel population is extant, as well as keeping an eye on the *Crassula*.