

Meres and Mosses of the Marches Nature Improvement Area

Year 2 Summary of Progress

Objective 1: *Bring core areas into favourable condition through active management:*

In year 2 we have worked on 11 core sites including 6 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), 3 Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), 1 RAMSAR site, 2 National Nature Reserves (NNR) and 1 Local Nature Reserve (LNR) with works incorporating targeted vegetation management, fencing and other infrastructure to allow conservation grazing, improvement of hydrological regimes and design, access works to allow sites management and creation of linear habitat to improve water quality and water vole habitat. Exact habitat figures will follow in May 2014.

Objective 2: *Improve the management of buffers and develop a network of corridors and stepping stones linking core sites:*

In year 2 we have worked on 6 sites to improve buffers and connectivity with work including more fencing for grazing, wetland design (for works to be delivered in year 3), installation of coir rolls to improve connectivity within fragmented water vole habitats, installation of woody debris to improve stream diversity and hedge planting alongside a watercourse. Exact habitat figures will follow in May 2014.

Objective 3: *Reduce diffuse pollution through working on nutrient management with farmers:*

In year 2, we have engaged with 15 farmers over the project area delivering advice on nutrient management and associated habitat creation. In addition, we have run (or helped to run with partners) 1 event on these topics engaging an estimated 30 farmers. We have also identified 2 of our targeted 3 exemplar farms ready to work them up into case studies and centres for delivering advice and training in year 3. The project has also been key in supporting Shropshire Wildlife Trust's application to host the River Perry (initially) and now wider Middle Severn catchments).

Objective 4: *Increase public awareness of the range of values within the meres and mosses:*

In year 2 we have worked on access improvements at 6 sites to enabled the public to gain a better hands-on understanding of the Meres & Mosses landscape.

We have run 12 training events attracting around 230 participants covering topics such as specific plant and animal species and species group identification, canoeing, angling and geocaching. In addition, we have run, helped to run or attended 25 public engagement events this year engaging directly with around 3,500 people. These have included agricultural shows, food and heritage festivals, open days and our own Merefest at Cholmondeley Castle which attracted an incredible 1,350 people in September 2013.

We have completed works at the Wood Lane Learning Centre and initiated works at Bickley Hall Farm Learning Centre which will be completed in year 3.

Objective 5: *Ensure lessons learnt are disseminated and applied to the wider meres and mosses and beyond:*

In year 2 we have significantly developed our social media presence including persuading partners to help deliver each other's messages by retweeting and reposting to reach as wide an audience as possible. Year 3 will see a much needed revamp of the website.

We played a key part in running the annual Meres and Mosses Forum which attracted more than 70 participants from the statutory and academic sectors and included some landowners for the first time.

Activity was reported to both Shropshire and Cheshire Local Nature Partnerships and relationships have been established with 2 other NIAs (Birmingham and the Black Country and Humberhead Levels) to facilitate best practice in both directions.

Additional information:

We have employed a new member of the team in a Survey & Monitoring Officer role including to take on the Monitoring & Evaluation aspect of the NIA delivery.

We have begun the process of post-core funding sustainability by setting up a Strategic Steering Group to take forward this vision via 3 themes: business, farming and community.