

COUNTY: SHROPSHIRE **SITE NAME:** BROWNHEATH MOSS

DISTRICT: NORTH SHROPSHIRE **SITE REF:** 15 WZC

Status: Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended.

Local Planning Authority: Shropshire County Council, North Shropshire District Council

National Grid Reference: SJ 460300 **Area:** 5.2 (ha.) 12.8 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 126 **1:10,000:** SJ 42 NE
SJ 43 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): – **Date of Last Revision:** –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1987 **Date of Last Revision:** –

Other Information:

A new site. Part of the site is registered as common land.

Description:

The Meres & Mosses of the north west Midlands form a nationally important series of open water and peatland sites. These have developed in natural depressions in the glacial drift left by the ice sheets which covered the Cheshire-Shropshire plain some 15,000 years ago. The majority lie in Cheshire and north Shropshire, with a small number of outlying sites in adjacent parts of Staffordshire and Clwyd.

The origin of most of the hollows can be accounted for by glaciation but a small number have been formed at least in part by more recent subsidence resulting from the removal in solution of underlying salt deposits.

There are more than 60 open water bodies known as 'meres' or 'pools' and a smaller number of peatland sites or mires known as 'mosses'. They range in depth from about one metre to 27 metres and have areas varying between less than a hectare to 70 hectares.

Although the majority of the meres are nutrient rich (eutrophic) the water chemistry is very variable reflecting the heterogeneous nature of the surrounding drift deposits. Associated fringing habitats such as reedswamp, fen, carr and damp pasture add to the value of the meres. The development of these habitats is associated with peat accumulation which in some cases has led to the complete infilling of the basin. During this process the nutrient status of the peat surface changes and typically becomes nutrient poor (oligotrophic) and acidic thus allowing species such as the bog mosses *Sphagnum* spp. to colonise it. The resulting peat bogs are the 'mosses'. In a few cases colonisation of the water surface by floating vegetation has resulted in the formation of a quaking bog known as a 'schwingmoor'.

Brownheath Moss is unlike the other Shropshire and Cheshire mosses in having fen and carr rather than acidic bog vegetation. It forms part of the series of sites representing succession from open water to carr and peat bog, and is complementary to Sweat Mere, Hencott Pool and Shrawardine Pool.

Much of the site consists of carr dominated by alder *Alnus glutinosus*. Willow carr, consisting of *Salix cinerea* and *S. fragilis*, is less common. Beneath the trees are areas of sedges interspersed with patches of bare, peaty mud. In this community the nationally rare elongated sedge *Carex elongata* occurs along with lesser pond-sedge *C.*

acutiformis, tufted sedge *C. elata*, cyperus sedge *C. pseudocyperus* and remote sedge *C. remota*.

In the centre of the site there is an area of open fen, in which a mosaic of short and tall communities occur. In some places the tall sedges found in the alder carr dominate, but elsewhere greater reedmace *Typha latifolia*, yellow iris *Iris pseudacorus*, common cottongrass *Eriophorum angustifolium*, soft rush *Juncus effusus*, branched bur-reed *Sparganium erectum* and, less frequently, bladder sedge *Carex vesicaria* are locally dominant. Short fen communities with creeping bent *Agrostis stolonifera*, common sedge *Carex nigra*, white sedge *C. curta*, marsh cinquefoil *Potentilla palustris*, bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata* and skullcap *Scutellaria galericulata* occur between the stands of tall fen vegetation. In places the short fen has declined in recent years because of fluctuations in the water table and has been partly replaced by bare mud and shallow water. As a consequence, species which colonise bare mud such as nodding bur-marigold *Bidens cernua*, blinks *Montia fontana* and marsh cudweed *Gnaphalium uliginosum* have become more abundant.