

CWT Statement of March 11th in response to events on March 10th although not forwarded until evening of March 12th

Habitat Management at Red Rocks

Red Rocks is an 11 hectare Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI - [more info](#)) adjacent to the Dee estuary. It is designated for its rare habitats including reedbeds, sand dune systems (including brackish dune slacks) and a highly diverse flora and fauna including a number of local and national rarities. The dune habitats present are the only remaining example on the Wirral peninsula.

Cheshire Wildlife Trust as the appointed manager, are legally responsible for ensuring the site is in 'favourable condition' – as determined by Natural England (formerly English Nature). The site is currently considered to be in 'unfavourable' condition. To bring the site into 'favourable' condition, Natural England have prescribed management measures which we are currently undertaking.

What is being done at Red Rocks?

The management work at Red Rocks, as agreed with and funded by, Natural England (the government's official conservation body), is intended to enhance the features for which the SSSI is designated. This includes the sand dunes and their associated flora, and the amphibians, notably natterjack toads, in the open brackish slacks (small pools within the dune system). The site remains the only known location for natterjack toads in Cheshire & Wirral. The aim is to increase the overall area of dune habitat.

As managers of the SSSI, the Trust has an obligation to maintain the site in 'favourable condition', which is presently not the case, due to encroachment of non-characteristic and invasive species. The habitat works taking place are integral to achieving 'favourable condition' for the site. If the Trust, as managers of the site, fails to meet these obligations we may be penalised.

Why are you removing trees, scrub and ivy?

The sand dune system at Red Rocks would not naturally include species such as ivy...

NOT TRUE: The area covered by Ivy is on a dune which has naturally reached the woodland climax stage, so is now soil rich in humus. Since the building of houses nearby in 1920s this area no longer sees any sand blow and therefore would not be expected to be yellow sand dune. Eradicating the Ivy will create ideal conditions for invasive plants.

.... and rose.

NOT TRUE: Burnet Rose is a native sand dune specialist and has been found in these sand dunes for at least 80 years, mentioned in citation for SSSI.

These species, along with the scrub that is present, change the dynamics of the system by influencing aspects such as soil chemistry, sand accretion, water retention and the general site ecology.

A small number of semi-mature poplar trees....

NOT TRUE: Trees cut down were MATURE and were present when the SSSI was notified in 1979, historical records indicate Poplars here since at least the 1950s. Counting of the tree rings of the

stumps confirm their age. This appears to be a deliberately misleading statement as readers will assume 'semi-mature' trees are young and will have grown since SSSI notified in 1979.

...have been removed as part of the restoration of open dune habitat during February 2014, within the accepted period for tree removal prior to the bird breeding season (beginning 1 March annually).

NOT TRUE: Some trees were still standing on March 2nd, they had been all felled by March 5th.

The area affected by tree, scrub and ivy removal represents less than 5% of the 11 hectare SSSI. Whilst a small proportion of the wider site, the resulting restored habitat will be a significant addition to the dune system.

MISLEADING STATEMENT: The area occupied by the poplar trees has been measured at less than 2% of the SAND DUNE area – is that significant?

What about migrant birds?

The site is noted for its passage migrant birds and 'rarities', however these species typically do not breed at the site but remain for short periods of time (often a few hours) before moving to more suitable breeding habitat or to continue on their migration.

Question for CWT/NE: where exactly do these passage migrants and 'rarities' go when they "remain for short periods of time"? Would it be the Poplar trees by any chance?

The reedbed habitat remains unaffected by these works.

NOT TRUE: Work has been carried out within the reed beds including cutting the reeds and leaving them to rot within the reed bed, affecting both the reed bed and the quality of the water.

What about breeding birds?

We have been notified (as of 10 March 2014) that there may be birds nesting within the existing area of ground ivy where management work was due to take place. Since all nesting birds are protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981), works will be suspended in this area, until either the presence of nesting birds can be verified, or until after the end of the breeding season.

TRUE: But should a Wildlife Trust with their Reserves Manager present really have to be told birds might be nesting on March 10th in ideal nesting habitat? Sort of behaviour you would expect from a greedy developer.

NOTE: No mention of Amber and Red listed Birds of Conservation Concern known to breed on the site.

COMMENTS IN RED BY Richard Smith