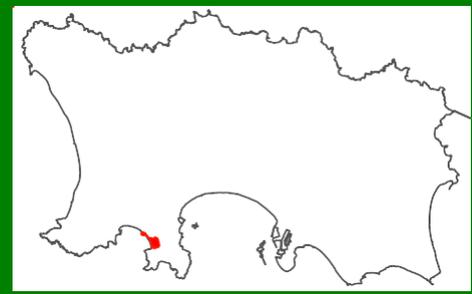


Ouaisné

Site of Special (Ecological) Interest



Introduction

Despite its small size Ouaisné Common punches well above its weight in terms of wildlife interest and nature conservation value. Covering just 11 hectares and penned in by the turquoise waters of St Brelade's Bay to the west, a housing estate to the east and the rocky headland of the sister nature reserve of Portelet Common SSI to the south, Ouaisné is a wonderful island refuge of intrigue and interest.

Ouaisné is nestled into the south west corner of the Jersey National Park, contributing to the area's natural character and charm. Approximately half of the site is in public ownership with the remaining area being either common land or in private ownership.



Yellow Horned Poppy

The range of habitats within the site, including wet dune slacks and areas of bog, is reflected in the diversity of plant and animal species found there; many of which are nationally and locally rare.

Crucial to the conservation of a number of the Island's rarest plants and animals, the site's exceptional biological diversity places Ouaisné among Jersey's most prized reserves.

History

One of the most striking historical features at Ouaisné is the German anti-tank wall which encloses Ouaisné Bay beach along its entire length and was built as a defence against tanks being landed.

The anti-tank wall extends from the slipway to the rocky headland which divides Ouaisné Bay with St Brelade's Bay known as Strongpoint Le Grouin.

Strongpoint Le Grouin is of historical interest due to its range of reinforced concrete structures which are evident around the headland. There are various gun emplacements or casemates to be found on the headland, a 19th century granite sentry post, plus a range of mortar and machine gun emplacements.



Green Lizard

Another historic feature is Ouaisné Tower (St Brelade's No.1) which can be seen standing sentinel over the common. This important example of Jersey's unique form of coastal defence tower is located on privately-owned land. The design was developed by Sir Henry Seymour Conway and is one of 23 Conway towers built in the Island between 1778 and 1801.

Up until the 17th century grazing livestock was the primary land use where residents of the local settlement would have put their sheep, horses and cattle. The common also provided tenants with bracken and gorse which they harvested for use as animal bedding and fuel.

At this time the dunes along the southernmost edge would have been considerably more mobile, with new sand being

deposited during southerly winds. This changed, however, when the anti-tank wall was built between 1940 and 1945. The loss of natural dune forming processes has increased the need for direct management to conserve the special ecological qualities attributed to Ouaisné.

Management

The management objectives for Ouaisné Common target the reduction of overall gorse and scrub cover and encourage the transition to grassland. This process is quite finely balanced with the requirements of the variety of rare plants and animals which depend on the area for their breeding and feeding requirements.

- 1) Controlling gorse - Much of the site is covered with gorse and because gorse tends to spread into adjacent habitats this needs to be controlled. A cyclical cutting of gorse both ensures it doesn't spread and also maintains a varied age structure. When the gorse reaches maturity (10 – 15 years old) it becomes less dense and doesn't offer the protection birds need from the wind.
- 2) Scrub control - In addition to gorse management, due to the dunes' established state, without intervention the site would develop into scrub and woodland. To preserve the variety of habitats at Ouaisné the scrub must be controlled. This was achieved by livestock grazing in the past. Over the past couple of years sheep have been lightly grazing the grasslands near the main pond at intervals to replicate this historical management.
- 3) Freshwater habitats - Management of the site's freshwater habitats is important for a host of different animals and plants. Much of this work involves the control of invasive non-native species which have no real predators or natural controls in Jersey. Currently this list includes the New Zealand Pygmy Weed and Water Fern both which inundate and smother our more desirable native wildlife.
- 4) Agile frog conservation - A large amount of conservation work at Ouaisné targets its best known resident, the Agile Frog. To sustain a breeding population, ponds need to be deep enough to retain water between the months of January and June to allow full metamorphosis from egg, through the tadpole and froglet stages until it becomes a fully grown, air breathing frog. Adjoining habitats need to provide sufficient food and cover for the newly-emerged frogs



Sparrowhawk

Wildlife

For a long time the Agile Frog has been the flagship conservation story for Jersey, attracting global recognition and acclaim due to its success. The species recovery project is a partnership between the Department of the Environment and Durrell and aims to restore the Island's population of its only native frog. The Grass Snake, another of Jersey's rarest animals, differs from the Grass Snakes found on the continent in that our snake is missing the yellow collar around the neck. Add the Slow Worm, Palmate Newt and Common Toad, which are also found at Ouaisné, to the list, and it almost makes a full house for Jersey's native reptiles and amphibians, missing only the Wall Lizard.

The rich tapestry of different habitats create suitable conditions for a host of invertebrates. There is a particularly rich population of beetles, 15 per cent of which are classified as rare or uncommon in Britain. Also, this diverse habitat provides a home to the 163 recorded plant species at Ouaisné.



Lesser skullcap

Amongst the rather special wetland loving plants which grow at Ouaisné are Brown Galingale and Creeping Willow, both of which are only found in a handful of locations in the UK and only at Ouaisné here in Jersey,

The white flower of Eyebright can be seen growing amongst the grasslands, a flower with many herbal and medicinal qualities associated to it. Lesser Skullcap, a diminutive flower named after its resemblance to medieval helmets is associated closely with the wetlands at Ouaisné. On the seashore the beautiful Yellow-Horned Poppy can be seen with its thick hairy leaves; an adaptation to help cope with the salt-laden conditions it has to cope with.

The Ant Lion, a delicate lacewing resembling a damselfly, lays its eggs in the sand where the larvae hatch, and then construct a conical hole where they lay in wait at its base for unsuspecting insects to fall into their trap. Once an ant has slid down into the pit it struggles to climb the steep sandy side and the ant lion grabs it with its strong spiny jaws. The Wasp Spider is a very exotic looking creature which, as a species, has spread from the Mediterranean region all the way across to Jersey and has recently colonised the south coast of England. Other singular invertebrates commonly found at Ouaisné include the Field Cricket and the Southern Emerald Damselfly both of which are uncommon in Jersey and the latter is also rare in the UK.

Both Jersey's resident species of shrew can be found at Ouaisné, the Lesser-White Tooth Shrew doesn't have the red-tipped teeth found in other shrews, and which is caused by iron deposition. The Crowned Shrew is found across Continental Europe.

You are likely to be rewarded with sightings of Sparrowhawks and Buzzards flying over the site hunting, and later in the evening, Long-Eared Bats pursuing insects above the grasslands.

Ouaisné Common is well worth a trip and offers exceptional wildlife watching experiences. A warm summer day on the reserve is guaranteed to be rewarding and you will encounter wonderful surprises on every visit. One of my personal highlights on such a day is the heady coconut smell of the gorse flowers accompanied by the short bursts of 'popping' from the gorse seed pods firing the seed away from the parent plant.



Agile Frog

Visiting

Ouaisné is tucked into the southern end of St Brelade's Bay, at the base of the steep slopes leading up to Portelet Common.

Bus route 12 and 14 provide a frequent service to St Brelade's Bay. From here you have the option of walking along the promenade, over Strongpoint Le Grouin and on to Ouaisné Common.

If travelling by car or bicycle the car park at Ouaisné has bicycle racks and public toilets available.



Grass Snake

Photo credits

Anne Haden: Yellow Horned-poppy, Lesser skullcap

David Tipping: Green Lizard

Mick Dryden: Sparrowhawk

John Pinel: Agile Frog

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Biodiversity