

HABITAT ACTION PLAN FOR REEDBED

LEAD AGENCY: Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Westleigh Mews
Wakefield Road
Denby Dale
Huddersfield
West Yorkshire
HD8 8QD

MOST RECENT UPDATE: May 1998

CURRENT STATUS

Reedbeds are composed largely of common reed, and are often associated with areas of open water, ditches, and other wetland habitats. Reedbeds can be wet or dry at their base but the water table generally needs to be at or near ground level for most of the year. They provide important habitats for a wide range of species.

Nationally reedbeds have suffered huge declines in postwar years as a result of flood protection schemes, land drainage, agricultural intensification and abstraction. Due to loss of water and lack of management, many of the remaining reedbeds have also declined substantially in terms of habitat quality.

A national survey of UK reedbeds in 1993 estimated some 5,000 ha nationwide, with only 53 sites greater than 20 ha in size. This resource is concentrated mainly in coastal areas, and large inland reedbeds are extremely rare.

In Nottinghamshire, it is not clear what the distribution and extent of reedbed ever were. Before the intense land drainage, flood protection and agricultural intensification schemes of the 20th century, the immense floodplain of the River Trent, along with those of its key tributaries are likely to have been characterised by significant areas of wet fen, swamp and reedbed. However, it is now a very scarce resource in the County. A 1979 national survey identified only one reedbed site over 2 ha within Nottinghamshire, at West Burton (2.4 ha). In addition to this site, the 1993 survey identified a further 4 sites (all SSSIs and totalling about 44 ha) that contained an area of reedbed alongside other habitat types.

THREATS

The main factors currently affecting Nottinghamshire's reedbeds are:

- Lack of knowledge about extent and quality of resource.
- Small size and fragmented nature of the overall reedbed resource and most reedbed sites.

- Insufficient water supply to reedbed sites due to flood protection schemes, land drainage and abstraction, leading to the drying out of reedbeds and eventual succession to scrub.
- Poor water quality at some sites due to pollution of water courses from industry, domestic sewage and agricultural run-off.
- Lack of appreciation of the wildlife and economic benefits (eg. water purification, thatching) of reedbeds.

CURRENT INITIATIVES - EXAMPLES

- The Environment Agency are incorporating reedbed protection, management and creation into Local Environment Agency Plans (LEAPs).
- The Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food have been encouraged to include reedbed as one of the wetland habitats/features to be targeted through Countryside Stewardship in the County.
- A 'Reedbed Management Handbook', produced by a partnership of organisations including the RSPB and English Nature has been promoted to a variety of audiences in the County, including key decision makers and land use advisers.
- Plans are under discussion to prepare a 'strategy' for the Trent Valley floodplain, with reedbed as a target habitat for management, restoration and creation.
- Notts Wildlife Trust and RSPB are involved in nature reserve management and wetland restoration projects, including reedbed creation, in the Trent Valley floodplain, at Attenborough Gravel Pits, Besthorpe, Langford Lowfields and land in the Idle Valley.
- Many private landowners manage areas of reedbed, or potential reedbed sites, and have a vital part to play in its conservation.

Targets

The following targets were agreed by the HAP target review group.

Falling within the UK Broad Habitat of Fens, Marsh and Swamp, indicating vegetation that is ground water fed; and permanently, seasonally or periodically waterlogged peat, peaty or mineral soils where grasses do not predominate. However Reedbeds are a UK Priority Habitat, classified as wetlands dominated by stands of the common reed *Phragmites australis*, wherein the water table is at or above ground level for most of the year. They tend to incorporate areas of open water and ditches, and small areas of wet grassland and carr woodland may be associated with them. Reedbeds can

be wet or dry at their base but the water table generally needs to be at or near ground level for most of the year.

Target Type	Target Text	Units	2005 Baseline	2010 Target	2015 Target
Maintain Extent	Maintain the extent of all existing reedbeds.	Ha	10	10	210
Achieve Condition	Maintain and improve by management existing reedbeds.	Ha	6 (60% of existing resource in favourable condition)	7 (70% of resource in favourable condition)	9 (90% of 2005 baseline resource)
Restoration	Improve the condition of relict habitat so that it qualifies as reedbeds.	Ha		200	200
Expansion	Encourage the re-establishment and increase the area of reedbeds.	Ha			

The 2005 baseline resource was derived from a desktop aerial photograph survey by English Nature, based on a list of sites from the NBGRC. The sites were listed as:

Site	Grid Ref.
Kings Mill	513593
Attenborough	5254
Mill Lake Swamp	548473
West Burton	803857

A further assumption was made on the amount of resource not covered within the desktop survey; these may include Moor Bridge Pond in the City of around 1.3ha, and 0.5ha at Hollinwell Golf Course.

The reed bed sites, and subsequent condition of them, are under threat due to falling water levels in some areas of the County, for example the West Burton reed beds have no supply of water and are drying out. This makes it a potentially expensive exercise to restore the existing small areas of habitat, and far better to create larger areas of new reed bed in more suitable conditions.

Expansion and Restoration targets were combined and based on an assumption of planned restoration projects and objective targets. Restoration projects include:

- Gunthorpe restoration, 10.3ha
- Slaynes Lane restoration, Tarmac, 23ha
- Foxholes Farm restoration, 8ha
- Cromwell extension, 2ha
- Langford Lowfields (RSPB/EA) restoration of 32ha
- Beckingham
- Wide Area Project (Besthorpe, Burton, Holmes) 200ha by 2015, 300 by 2020

This gave an overall target for 2020 of 500ha.

PROPOSED ACTION

Policy and legislation

1. Ensure the incorporation of relevant (inter-)national law, policies and guidance into all plans and policies relating to the protection, enhancement and management of ditch habitat.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

2. Through planning control or other land use consultation processes, allow no further loss of areas of ditch habitat and seek opportunities to enhance existing areas and create new areas through approved development.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

3. Ensure agri-environment, forestry and other funding schemes include appropriate management options and design measures to suit local nature conservation needs.

ACTION: Government Agencies.

Site safeguard and management

4. Review the extent of SSSI coverage of reed bed habitat and consider notifying further sites as necessary.

ACTION: Government Agencies.

5. Designate SINC's and declare Local Nature Reserves on appropriate areas of habitat or instigate other appropriate measures for their protection.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

6. Promote the uptake of positive management with owners of SSSIs, LNRs, SINC's and any other areas of ditch habitat.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

7. Carry out appropriate habitat management on sites controlled by BAP partners.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

8. Ensure sites containing ditch habitat have appropriate management plans that are working towards improving site management and condition

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

9. Acquire land to ensure good habitat management or to create habitat.

ACTION: NGO's.

Advisory

10. Provide formal or informal training in management techniques for ditch habitat to land managers, site wardens, volunteers, etc.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

11. Establish demonstration sites or projects to demonstrate/publicise good habitat management techniques.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

Future research and monitoring

12. Establish and maintain a monitoring programme (a site register) to determine progress towards county HAP targets.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

13. Ensure that areas of ditch habitat are periodically resurveyed to establish extent and condition. Update resulting habitat inventory every 5 years and revise targets and HAPs if necessary.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

Communications and publicity

14. Improve public awareness and appreciation of ditch habitat by providing appropriate interpretation, education and access (where appropriate).

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

15. Improve awareness of the value of, and appropriate management techniques for ditch habitat among site owners and occupiers.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

What You Can Do

- Use water wisely. A reduction in demand would help prevent the loss of habitats and species to over-abstraction.
- Join in a practical reedbed management event with BTCV or the Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust.

Species List

The following are examples of species of conservation concern (Appendix A) which are likely to benefit from this action plan:

- Bearded tit
- Bittern
- Black-necked grebe
- Fieldfare
- Grey heron
- Jack snipe
- Kingfisher
- Marsh harrier
- Redshank
- Reed bunting
- Short eared owl
- Water rail
- Common hawk dragonfly
- Black-tailed skimmer
- Obscure wainscot moth
- Brown-veined wainscot moth
- Silky wainscot moth
- Sea club rush
- Cyperus sedge