

Reedbeds

Our objective for this habitat is:

to manage the existing resource and increase the habitat by working with mineral extraction companies.



Introduction

Reedbeds are wetlands dominated by stands of common reed with water levels above or at ground level for most of the year. They often incorporate areas of open water and ditches, and small areas of wet grassland and carr woodland may also be present. Reedbeds are dynamic ecosystems and over time will succeed to carr woodland. As both reedbed and wet woodland are UKBAP priorities, then this natural process is to be encouraged for reedbeds that are replaceable. However, some sites may need to be held back from succession through management practices.

Reed swamp is permanently waterlogged with a summer surface level of around 20cm and is likely to contain pure strands of common reed. In contrast, reed fen has a water level at or below the surface in summer and is more botanically diverse.

Reedbeds are amongst the most important habitats for birds in the UK, including five nationally rare Red Data Book (RDB) birds (Bittern, Marsh harrier, Cetti's warbler, Bearded tit and Savi's warbler). Reedbeds also provide roosting and feeding sites for Swallows, Pied wagtails and Starlings and are used as roost sites for several raptor species in winter.

The invertebrate interest of reedbeds is also high. Over 700 species of invertebrate have been recorded from reed-dominated plant communities, including 23 Red Data Book species.

Reedbeds act as important cover for shoals of young fish, where they contribute to the food web. For example, European eels are an important food source for both Otter and Bittern.

The mammals found in reedbeds are also associated with a range of other aquatic habitats. This includes some rare and declining species such as the Otter and Water vole. Other species include the Harvest mouse and the Water shrew.

In recent years the value of reedbeds has been recognised by the water treatment industry for their ability to act as a natural filtration system for waste water. Reedbeds also have uses for flood defence purposes and aquifer recharge. They may also form an important intermediary stage (valuable as transitory habitat in its own right) in the creation of other BAP habitats such as Peat based fen and Wet woodland.

National status

The UK has approximately 5,000 ha of reedbed, not including those found along drainage ditches. Few large sites (over 20 ha) occur (UK BAP). Reedbeds are a scarce habitat in the UK.

Regional status

The Regional Audit (Selman) gives 400ha of reedbed in the Yorkshire and the Humber region, including four over 20ha in size. The RSPB is leading on the drive to create a national network of large reedbeds, which includes the Humber estuary, Leighton Moss and Teesside. The recently planted reedbed at Nosterfield in neighbouring Hambleton district will add to this network and sites in Harrogate district, although small, form important stepping stones for the spread of reedbed specialist animals.

Local status

The Regional Audit gives a total of 4ha for Harrogate district (Selman). However, the Harrogate Audit (based on Phase 1 and Phase 2 habitat surveys) gives a total of 8ha. Several small to medium reedbeds exist in the Harrogate district on the following sites:

- Bishop Monkton Ings - two small areas of reed fen community within the SSSI and one area outside the SSSI.
- Nunwick - good strong medium-sized beds.
- Littlethorpe brick pits - small reedbeds in old brick pits.
- Hay-a-Park SSSI - a former sand and gravel quarry in private ownership comprising approximately 45ha in total, of which a small proportion is reedbed.
- Staveley Gravel Pits Nature Reserve - situated just north of Staveley village and owned by the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust. The site has an area of reedbed which has colonised one of the lagoons.
- Allerton Park - areas of reedbed in private ownership.
- Newby Hall - reedbed established 10 - 15 years ago.
- Aldborough - large areas of reedbed in private ownership.
- Ousegill Beck - an area of wetlands between Great and Little Ouseburn and the River Ure. Tall herb fen rather than reedbed.

- Small, linear reedbeds occur along some ditches and Ripon Canal.

Larger reedbed areas are currently being created on several quarry sites within the Ure Valley (see 'Current local action' below).

Legal status

None for reedbeds in the district.

Local priority species:

- **Bittern**
- **Marsh harrier**
- **Reed bunting**
- **Otter** (see SAP)
- **Water vole** (see SAP)

Status of priority species

Bittern - (UKBAP) vagrant, one or two records involving birds dispersing for the winter. Reedbed creation provides the opportunity to develop "stepping stones" between populations on the Humber Estuary and those on the Lancashire coast and new habitat on Teesside.

Reed bunting - (UKBAP) widespread, but declining, resident breeder and passage migrant, with probably 50-100 pairs.

Marsh harrier - regular passage migrant in the district and potential breeder.

Requirements

- Water level management to keep habitat in a favourable condition.
- Retention of common reed plants during ditch clearance work.
- Retention of a ground layer of reed leaf litter.
- Reedbeds forming part of a mosaic of wetland habitats.

Threats

- Lack of appropriate management resulting in vegetation change.
- Loss through excessive water abstraction, land drainage and conversion to agriculture.
- Local reedbed habitat is small and fragmented and has critically low populations of several dependent species.
- Pollution including an increase in silt content and nutrient content.
- Loss of linear reedbeds through inappropriate ditch maintenance.

Current local action

- North Yorkshire County Council, Lower Ure Conservation Trust, the Swale and Ure Washlands Project, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, Natural England and the Environment Agency (EA).
- The EA is actively working with mineral companies on habitat creation schemes within the district.
- Reedbed creation is in progress through restoration plans for several active gravel quarries in the district.
- Marfield Quarry - a large, privately owned site adjacent to Marfield Nature Reserve and Marfield Fen SSSI. Approximately 2ha of reedbed will be created.
- Ripon Quarry - a Hanson operated site on the banks of the River Ure and adjacent to High Batts SSSI, where 10 ha of reedbed are being created.
- Ripon City Quarry - a Brown and Potter operated site adjacent to the River Ure and Ripon Canal. Here 7-10ha of reedbed will be created - aftercare by Yorkshire Wildlife Trust.

Opportunities

- Identify other opportunities for creating new reedbeds, especially reed fen e.g. through the restoration of sand and gravel sites and as part of flood defence works, balancing ponds and Sustainable Drainage Schemes (SuDS).
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- Environment Agency flood alleviation measures, highways balancing ponds and SuDS associated with development control could include reedbeds.
- Potential funding through the Environmental Stewardship Scheme (ESS).
- Conservation of linear reedbeds along ditch network.

LINKS WITH OTHER HDBAP PLANS:

Standing water HAP

Fen HAP

Water vole SAP

Otter SAP

UKBAP Links:

UKHAP definition <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-5706>

UKBAP: Bittern SAP - http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/_speciespages/596.pdf

UKBAP: Water vole SAP - http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/_speciespages/596.pdf