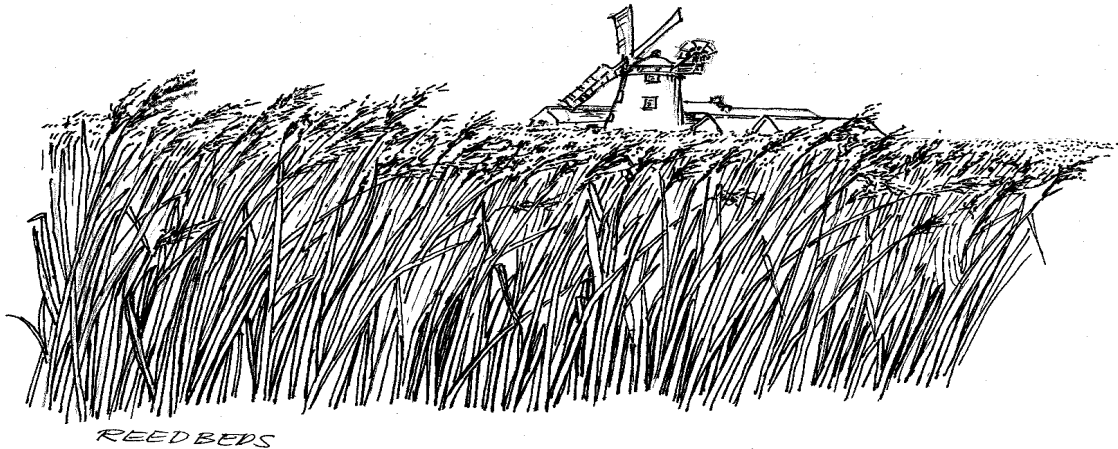


Reedbeds



1 Definition

Reedbeds are a type of fen community dominated by reeds that primarily occur in the coastal regions of Suffolk. They provide breeding habitats for many rare and migratory birds and invertebrates, and important wintering habitats for birds from elsewhere in the UK. East Anglia contains the majority of the reedbeds that remain in the UK. The three largest reedbeds in England are all on the Suffolk coast.

Reedbeds are characterised by a dominance of Reeds *Phragmites australis* and occur in a wide range of permanently and periodically waterlogged habitats. Smaller stands occur around lakes and ponds, in estuaries and on saltmarsh, and along dykes and canals. They tend to incorporate areas of open water and ditches, and small areas of wet grassland and carr woodland may be associated with them.

There are strong links between this plan and that of bittern, water vole, and white-mantled wainscot. Most sites are a mix of reedbed, fen, eutrophic open water, and wet woodland. Sea-level rise issues that are also featured in plans for the coastal habitats affect many key reedbeds.

2 Current status

2.1 National

There are about 5000 ha of reedbeds in the UK, but of the 900 or so sites contributing to this total, only about 50 are greater than 20 ha, and these make a large contribution to the total area.

Reedbeds are amongst the most important habitats for birds in the UK. They support a distinctive breeding bird assemblage including six nationally rare Red Data Birds; the Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*, Marsh Harrier, *Circus aeruginosus*, Crane *Grus grus*, Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*, Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides* and Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus*. Five GB Red Data Book invertebrates are also closely associated with reedbeds including Red Leopard Moth *Phragmataecia castanaea* and a rove beetle *Lathrobium rufipenne*.

2.2 Local

The RSPB Reedbed Inventory suggests over 840 ha of reedbeds in Suffolk - almost 15% of the UK resource. RSPB are in the process of creating 147 ha of reedbed habitat at Lakenheath and SWT have created 36ha of reedbed at Hen reedbed reserve. However, the definition of reedbed used for this inventory was wider than that proposed here. There are five key sites in Suffolk that are over 20ha, totalling 430ha (Benacre Broad, Easton Broad, Minsmere, Shottisham & Ramsholt and Walberswick). This is 51% of the total area of reedbed in Suffolk.

Some 56 species of conservation concern (which meet the criteria for the UK Biodiversity Action Plan) in Suffolk depend fully or partly on reedbeds and associated fens. However further research is necessary to fully identify the status of many species.

3 Current factors affecting reedbeds in Suffolk

- The three largest reedbeds in Suffolk are threatened by coastal erosion and increasingly frequent saline incursion. The Suffolk CHaMP predicts that 445 hectares (over half of Suffolk's reedbed, and 72% of that within reach of the sea) will be lost in the next 30-100 years. At Benacre Broad, this has already led to a substantial reduction in the size and quality of the reedbed.
- Lack of biological information, particularly concerning reedbed invertebrates, hinders adoption of appropriate management Sites or parts thereof are still being lost to agricultural improvement, particularly the more vulnerable County Wildlife Sites. Current payment rates for established agri-environment and other grant schemes usually underestimate the expense of managing fen sites.
- Lack of appropriate management of some existing reedbeds leading to dehydration, scrub encroachment, and loss of open water (which is a vital component of the reedbed ecosystem for many of its key species). In particular, the wetter parts of reedbed systems are quickly lost if not actively managed.
- Lack of hydrological information which leads to inappropriate water level management as well as impacts from water abstraction and fluvial flooding which both threaten key species either through direct losses (desiccation and drowning), or by impairing management operations.
- Threat to species within some reedbeds from both drying out and fluvial flooding, either through direct losses or by impairing management operations.

4 Current Action

4.1 Legal Status

- All but two of the 12 largest reedbeds in Suffolk are designated as SSSIs and are also protected through such international designations as SPA and Ramsar sites. Eight of these sites are also designated as SACs. The two sites not recognised as SSSIs have a local designation as County Wildlife Sites.
- The Suffolk ESAs currently provide the principle mechanism for encouraging the management of reedbeds. Countryside Stewardship is able to support reedbed outside the ESA areas.
- The Environment Agency, Water Companies, Inland Drainage boards and Local Authorities have a statutory duty to further conservation where consistent with purposes of enactment relating to their functions.
- The Environment Agency is currently reviewing all consents that potentially impact on any of the European designated sites as a result of the Habitats Directive.
- The Environment Agency has written Water Level Management Plans for all SSSI where they are the drainage authority.

4.2 Management, research and guidance

- English Nature has management agreements with landowners of most of the SSSI sites.
- Minsmere, Walberswick and Lakenheath will benefit from a second three-year EU-funded LIFE project for reedbed management for Bitterns.
- RSPB have created 200 ha of new reedbed on ex-arable land at Lakenheath and Suffolk Wildlife Trust have also created several ha of new reedbed on the Hen river near Southwold over the last 5 years.
- All reedbeds that are not designated as SSSIs are County Wildlife Sites and management advice is given for these sites by Suffolk Wildlife Trust.
- RSPB/EN/Broads Authority/British Reed grower`s Association published a leaflet *Reedbed Management for Bitterns* and the management guide *Reedbed Management for Commercial and Wildlife Interests Handbook* to encourage the management and creation of reedbeds.
- All partners of the Wetland Working Group can provide advice to a range of reedbed owners on appropriate management, rehabilitation, extension and creation.

5 Action Plan Objectives and Targets

- 1 *Maintain existing overall area and quality as a minimum. This will require the creation of at least 445 hectares in the next 20 years to replace any losses through natural coastal processes, and should be as near as possible to existing sites on areas of low current nature conservation interest.*
- 2 *Enhance reedbed habitat and also manage for key reedbed species ensuring all main reedbeds contain habitat at all stages of the hydrosere, and have sufficient reed/open water interface*
- 3 *Develop new reedbeds away from the coast, particularly broad reed-dominated pool margins. Investigate post extraction management of gravel workings and flood-plain restoration schemes.*
- 5 *Ensure newly created reedbeds are targetted to areas of most benefit eg; linking separate blocks of habitat such as between Suffolk coast and reedbeds on the Broads and also mid Suffolk reedbeds to link with large reedbed creation projects on the edge of the Fens.*

6 Reedbeds: Proposed Action with Lead Agencies

Action	Date	Partners
POLICY AND LEGISLATION		
Ensure compliance with the Habitats Directive for designated reedbeds in all strategic plans, development plans and policy documents.	2004 2005 2006 2007	EN, EA, SWT, RSPB, BA, LAs, SCHU, Defra
Include reedbed targets in relevant strategic plans, management plans and policy documents.	2004 2005 2006 2007	EA, EN, SCHU, LAs
SITE SAFEGUARD AND MANAGEMENT		
Consider Waveney Ronds, Shottisham and Ramsholt, and Falkenham Creek reedbeds for SSSI designation, and consider other sites upon completion of reedbed audit.	2004 2005 2006 2007	EN, SBRC
Improve water quality for all key reedbeds, by reviewing all discharge consents and abstraction licences impacting upon SPA reedbeds by 2006.	2004 2005 2006	EA
Promote reedbed after-use for any mineral-extraction site in Suffolk County minerals plan.	2004 2005 2006 2007	SCC & Aggregate companies
Ensure all of Suffolk's ESAs offer effective incentives for reedbed management & creation.	2004 2005 2006 2007	Defra
Extend WLMP process to include non-SSSI key reedbed sites by 2005.	2004 2005	EA, IDBs
Ensure favourable condition of 90% of reedbeds using English Nature's methodology, particularly to safeguard against both drying out and excessive flooding particularly during the nesting season.	2004 2005 2006 2007	RSPB, EN, SWT, NT, SBRC, EA, BA, Defra
Identify sites above 10 ha and prioritise them for management.	2004 2005 2006 2007	BAP Wetland Working Group

RESEARCH AND MONITORING		
Commission research into ecology of key reedbed dependent species, particularly invertebrates and their habitat requirements.	2004 2005 2006 2007	BAP Wetland Working Group, Defra
Undertake strategic identification of feasible re-creation sites to complement Lifescapes Study area.	2004 2005 2006 2007	SBRC, EN, EA, RSPB, SWT, NT
Standardise monitoring of abiotic factors and establish guidance on water quality for reedbeds to ensure habitat quality. Identify gaps in this data and commission research.	2004 2005 2006 2007	EA, EN, SWT, RSPB, NT, BA
ADVISORY		
Actively seek to promote the creation of reedbed as a water treatment mechanism through consultation in planning process and general information dissemination.	2004 2005 2006 2007	EA, Water Companies
Advise landowners and mineral extraction companies about creation of reedbeds on existing agricultural land and mineral workings.	2004 2005 2006 2007	RSPB, SCC, SWT, Defra, EN, EA
COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLICITY		
Raise public awareness of the importance of Suffolk's reedbeds, the threat of coastal erosion and flooding to them and the need to create new reedbeds in advance of predicted losses.	2003 2004 2005 2006 2007	EA, EN, RSPB, SWT, BA, NT, BA, SCHU