



# Reedbeds

## Local Biodiversity Action Plan

### Ecology

#### What is a reedbed?

Reedbeds are wetland areas dominated by stands of common reed (*Phragmites australis*), where the water table of the area is at or above ground level for most of the year. Reedbeds tend to incorporate areas of open water and ditches although they can also be associated with small areas of wet grassland and Carr woodland.



Reedbeds are defined by Wheeler (1992) as areas where the vegetation consists of greater than 75% common reed (*Phragmites australis*). They may be brackish and tidal, but the majority are freshwater and either riverine or in waterlogged depressions.

#### Why are reedbeds important?

Reedbeds are amongst the most important habitats for birds in the UK. They support a distinctive breeding bird assemblage including 6 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*, provide roosting and feeding sites for migratory species (including the globally threatened aquatic warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola*) and are used as roost sites for several raptor species in winter.

Five GB Red Data Book invertebrates are also closely associated with reedbeds including red leopard moth *Phragmataecia castanaea* and a rove beetle *Lathrobium rufipenne*.

### Current status

The largest area of reedbed in the UK is the tidal Tay Estuary, Scotland (410ha) while the largest inland reedbed is Walberswick NNR (300ha). A 1979 RSPB survey (Everret, 1989) showed that the



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most extensive reedbeds were in East Anglia with other important sites being on Anglesey and on the English south coast. However, most sites were fragmented. An updated survey carried out by RSPB in 1993 showed that of 926 sites in the UK most were fragmented into areas of less than 1ha (Hawke, 1996). In the 1996 survey Cheshire is recorded as having only 3 reedbeds greater than 10ha. The largest inland site is that of Woolston Eyes (12.6ha). In total only 18 of the sites the RSPB surveyed have an area greater than 1ha. While Cheshire has never been noted for extensive reedbeds due to its topography, the total area covered by this habitat appears to be much lower than the region could potentially hold.

Of these 18 sites with an area greater than 1ha, 15 have SSSI status and so are managed by an association between individual landowners and English Nature. In addition, the Dee Estuary and a smaller area of reedbed (Frodsham Marsh) have held international and European status, being designated as RAMSAR sites since December 1995, and Special Protection Areas under the 1979 EC Habitats Directive, respectively. Bound by the EC Directive the government is required to take special measures to conserve the habitat of rare, vulnerable and/or regularly migrating species.

## Threats

- \* Loss of area by excessive water extraction and, in the past, land drainage and conversion to intensive agriculture.
- \* Lack of or inappropriate management of existing reedbeds leading to drying, scrub encroachment and succession to woodland.
- \* Pollution of freshwater supplies to the reedbed: siltation may lead to drying; toxic chemicals may lead to loss of fish and amphibian prey for key species; accumulation of poisons in the food chain and eutrophication may cause reed death.
- \* Inappropriate management.

## How are we helping to conserve reedbeds in the Cheshire region?

- \* EN Notification of sites as SSSIs with established management agreements with landowners.
- \* EN provides advice to landowners on appropriate management, rehabilitation, extension and creation.
- \* EN/EA-led Heritage Lottery Fund bid for wetlands (including fens, reedbeds and grazing marsh) to assist in purchase, management and creation projects throughout the country.
- \* RSPB have applied for EU Life funding for reedbeds/bitterns which includes reedbed creation opportunities in the Mersey Valley and Cheshire meres.



## Objectives, targets and actions

Objectives, targets and actions to help conserve reedbeds in the Cheshire region can be found on the [Biodiversity Action Reporting System \(BARS\)](#) along with full details of our progress so far.

## How to find out more about reedbeds

[RSPB Reedbed Habitat Information](#)

Reedbeds for Bitterns Project - [www.bitterns.org.uk](http://www.bitterns.org.uk)

[UK BAP Definition](#)

## Contact details

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## References and Glossary

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