



Bedfordshire and Luton Habitat Action Plan: Reedbed

Updated March 2008



Reedbed

National lead organisation(s):
Natural England

County lead organisation(s):
Environment Agency

Reedbeds are wetlands dominated by stands of common reed *Phragmites australis* wherein the water table is at or above ground level for most of the year.

Current status

National status

The reedbeds in the UK are of geographical importance in a global context. It is a nationally scarce habitat supporting characteristic communities. The area of reedbed has declined 5 and 10% between 1979 and 1993 due to drainage and lack of management. Reedbeds can be found scattered across the UK although most are concentrated in southeast England. The UK has approximately 5,000 ha of reedbed in total. Of the 900 or so sites contributing to this total only 50 are greater than 20 ha in size. Dominated by common reed *Phragmites australis*, reedbeds support a distinctive breeding bird assemblage including 6 nationally rare Red Data Book birds: bittern, marsh harrier, crane, Cetti's warbler, Savi's warbler and bearded tit. Reedbeds also provide roosting and feeding sites for migratory birds and have five Red Data Book invertebrates closely associated with them.

Local status

Reedbed in Bedfordshire can be found in ditches, along the margins of rivers, around ponds, lakes and the numerous flooded brick and gravel pits. Most areas of reedbed are very small and the river margin reedbeds may cumulatively be the largest area of reed in the county. However there are only about 21.5 ha of discrete reedbed in the county; 20 ha of this was recently created at the Marston Vale Forest Centre.

Current factors affecting reedbed

- Fragmentation of riparian habitats across catchments and habitat fragmentation between water body and surrounding habitat
- Poor in-channel habitat diversity and structure as a result of engineering and management practices on all types of watercourse
- Neglect/non-management of some watercourses and wetlands
- Development pressures in general and in particular on the floodplain





- Sewage treatments works discharge

Current action

Management, research and guidance

The Marston Vale Trust – the charity responsible for delivering the Forest of Marston Vale – manages a 20 ha reedbed originally created in 1999.

The Wildlife Trust, Greensand Trust and Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity offer advice on a wide range of wetland management issues and are working to facilitate greater understanding and dialogue among a wide range of wetland users.

The Environment Agency (EA) operational maintenance regime encourages the development of reed and other marginal vegetation fringes along rivers. This is achieved by leaving strips of uncut vegetation along banks or cutting alternate banks.

Natural England, RSPB and the minerals industry have produced guides to best practice in the field of mineral site restoration to wetland habitat.

Action plan objectives and targets

Objectives

Maintain and where possible expand the range of reedbed in Bedfordshire and Luton

Maintain and where possible improve the condition of reedbed in Bedfordshire and Luton

Targets

- A. Maintain the 2007 extent (22.3 ha) and condition of reedbed in Bedfordshire and Luton
- B. By 2015 achieve favourable condition of 22.2 ha of reedbed in Bedfordshire by implementing positive management regimes.
- C. Create by 2030 a reedbed of at least 20 ha on an appropriate area of low biodiversity value



Proposed action

Abbreviations

AWS	Anglian Water Services	FMV	Forest of Marston Vale
BBC	Bedford Borough Council	FWAG	Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group
BCC	Bedfordshire County Council	GST	The Greensand Trust
BRCC	Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity	IDB	Bedford Group of Internal Drainage Boards
BRMC	Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre	NE	Natural England
EA	Environment Agency	WT	Wildlife Trust

Action	Implemented by
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Site safeguard and management

1. Continue to implement and keep up to date the management plan for the Marston Vale reedbed (20 ha)	FMV
2. Produce by 2009 and plan to implement a management plan for the Chalton Sewage Treatment Plant lagoons (0.4 ha) and Houghton Regis Quarry (1 ha).	AWS and ????
3. By 2020 seek an opportunity to create one reedbed of at least 20 ha in an area of appropriate low biodiversity value (e.g., as part of a restoration project), with a view to creating the reedbed by 2030	All

Future research and monitoring

4. Produce by 2010 a digitised map of reedbed in the county	BRMC
5. Produce by 2008 a standard method/record sheet for reedbed monitoring	BRCC, GST
6. Establish and implement by 2008 a rolling monitoring programme to assess the condition of each reedbed (Marston Vale (20 ha), Chalton STP (0.4 ha), Sandy Smith Nature Reserve (0.8 ha), Houghton Regis Quarry (1 ha) and Churchways Quarry (0.1 ha)) once every five years	BRCC, FMV, GST, WT, AWS





Monitoring the Action Plan

The Reedbed action plan will be reviewed every 5 years.

Complementary plans

A national action plan exists for Reedbed.

Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire, Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes have also written action plans for reedbed.

This action plan links to other Bedfordshire and Luton habitat action plans, in particular those for floodplain grazing marsh, rivers, otter and water vole.

Acknowledgements

The Bedfordshire Waterways and Wetlands Working Group has compiled this action plan. For more information please contact the Biodiversity Partnership Coordinator; details are available at www.bedslife.org.uk. Members of the working group include Environment Agency, Bedfordshire County Council, Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity, The Greensand Trust, Bedford Group of Internal Drainage Boards, Natural England and the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Peterborough.

References

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