



Bedfordshire
Cambridgeshire
Northamptonshire
Peterborough

Lowland Meadows

and their management

Protecting wildlife
close to home

What are lowland meadows?

Lowland meadows and pastures are species-rich grasslands with a near neutral pH, usually occurring below 250m in altitude. They include most forms of unimproved neutral grassland across the enclosed lowland landscapes of the UK. These grasslands are characterised by low nutrient inputs and are traditionally managed by low intensity grazing or a summer hay cut followed by aftermath grazing.

Why are they important?

Unimproved meadows and pastures are typically species-rich, and are associated with some scarce and declining plants such as greater burnet, cowslip, dyer's greenweed, meadow saxifrage, green-winged orchid and adder's tongue fern. They can also support many species of fungi, in particular the waxcaps which can only be found in old, unimproved meadows. Characteristic invertebrates include the marbled white butterfly and meadow ant. In addition lowland meadows and pastures provide feeding and nesting sites for a number of bird species including skylark, lapwing, grey partridge and meadow pipit. Curlew and

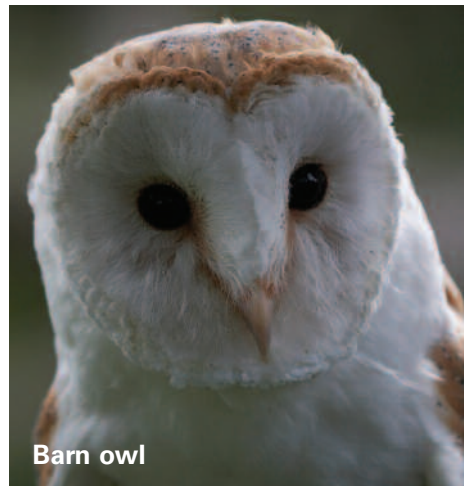
redshank, which are declining nationally may also breed in wet meadows, particularly on areas of floodplain. Lowland meadows and pastures are important feeding areas for barn owls.

What factors affect lowland meadows?

Lowland meadows are dependent on farming and are affected by changes in farming methods and policies, including both agricultural intensification and neglect. Key threats to grassland habitats include: drainage, ploughing, fertiliser application and re-seeding, fragmentation, the practice of cropping silage and both overgrazing and under-grazing.



Green winged orchid



Barn owl



Marbled white butterfly on field scabious

Best management practices for lowland meadows

- Continue traditional practices. If a meadow has been subject to a long-term hay cutting regime, it is important to continue the practice, as any species remaining will be tolerant of such pressures, and the floral diversity should be conserved.
- Sites which are unsuitable for grazing due to their size or location may be managed by cutting. However, mowing tends to produce a sward of uniform height and an entire site should not be cut all at once. Cutting on a rotational basis or varying the cutting height and frequency across a site to provide a patchwork of different sward heights will create a varied structure which benefits a variety of invertebrates.
- Semi-natural grasslands should be protected from herbicides, pesticides and fungicides. Nutrient inputs should also be avoided or kept to a minimum, as the addition of artificial fertilisers impoverishes the floral diversity. Similarly, livestock should not be given supplementary feed whilst on unimproved pastures as this will also increase the nutrient input.
- Scrub should be prevented from invading areas of open pasture, but some scattered scrub should be allowed to remain as it supports its own invertebrate fauna; older examples in particular can be important for their dead wood habitat.
- Some meadows will be eligible for conservation support through Environmental Stewardship schemes. This could include grants for haymaking, reducing livestock numbers, putting in fences to allow grazing to take place and allowing land to flood.

GrazeBeds

GrazeBeds website links landowners and graziers

This website acts as a match making service to link available stock to land in Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire.

If you would like to view or register your land or animals on the website for FREE then visit

www.grazebeds.org.uk or contact Laura Downton at the Wildlife Trust.

Local Seed Initiative

The Wildlife Trust Local Seed Initiative is a partnership with Emorsgate Wild Seeds, local farmers, landowners and agricultural contractors working to restore species-rich grassland. The project relies upon using seed from existing species-rich meadows to diversify meadows that need restoration. If you think your site may be suitable as a donor site or have grassland in need of restoration please contact Christa Perry at the Wildlife Trust.

County Wildlife Sites

County Wildlife Sites (CWS) are areas of land important for their wildlife. Found on public and private land they play a vital role in the conservation of the UK's natural heritage.



Lowland meadow CWS

Contact Details

For further information about lowland meadow management and County Wildlife Sites contact your nearest Wildlife Sites Officer.

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