



**GLNP**  
GREATER LINCOLNSHIRE  
NATURE PARTNERSHIP

# Lowland meadows

## *A guide to management*



# Lowland meadows: A guide to management

The key features of lowland meadows are that they are found on neutral soils with low nutrient inputs (unimproved) and benefit from continued management resulting in a wide range of flowering plants. They include grazed pasture and hay meadows but examples are also often seen along road verges, in churchyards, cemeteries and parks.

## Why are they important?

**Lowland meadows were once abundant as part of mixed farming systems but have declined in both number and wildlife value as a result of changes to agricultural practices.**

Published figures for this decline vary significantly, but current estimates suggest the extent of lowland meadow in England is 36,129 hectares.<sup>1</sup>

In 2016, GLNP habitat data suggests lowland meadow makes up 898 hectares of Greater Lincolnshire's farmed landscape.<sup>2</sup>

Lowland meadows can vary quite considerably in appearance from site to site but some characteristic species include crested dog's-tail, sweet vernal-grass, oxeye daisy, yellow rattle and common knapweed as well as various orchids.

They provide feeding and nesting habitat for farmland and grassland birds such as the barn owl, lapwing, snipe, quail, yellow wagtail, skylark and grey partridge and are also important feeding grounds for bats and other mammals such as brown hare.

Decline in extent and wildlife value of lowland meadows is largely the result of changes in management practices in some cases due to issues



*Skylark © Amy Lewis*

around the continued economic viability of hay crop removal. Changes to farming systems have seen many grasslands undergo agricultural improvement such as drainage, ploughing, reseeded and the application of herbicides and artificial fertilisers which reduce farmland biodiversity.

Other factors include overgrazing, leading to excessive poaching of the ground which causes a reduction in sward diversity, or a lack of management resulting in lowland meadows reverting to scrub.

<sup>1</sup> Natural England, Extent and condition of priority habitats, April 2015

<sup>2</sup> For calculations contact the GLNP



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## Managing your meadow

The selection of your land as a Local Wildlife Site is recognition of the management that has taken place to date in helping to provide a rich habitat for flowering plants and other species. It does not affect how you choose to manage your land in the future, however the GLNP is keen to support landowners who wish to maintain and improve the wildlife value of their site.

There are a number of good practice management techniques for lowland meadows, however the methods you choose will depend on various factors such as the size of your landholding and the time and resources you have available to you.

A key consideration is that wherever possible nutrient levels should be kept low as this helps to maintain a wide range of flowering plants.



*Green-winged orchid among buttercups © Robert Enderby*

Application of fertilisers should be avoided as it encourages the growth of highly competitive coarse grasses, lowering overall species diversity.

Where circumstances allow it is also preferable to avoid giving livestock supplementary feed while aftermath grazing as this can also lead to nutrient enrichment.

Recommended management practice would be for a hay crop to be cut and removed between July and September with autumn aftermath grazing until the ground becomes too damp – usually around early November. This helps to control coarse grasses and maintain species diversity while creating pockets of bare soil. Such conditions are beneficial for seed germination and encourage certain specialist invertebrates.

## Top management tips

- July to September hay crop cut and removed
- Aftermath grazing
- Keep nutrient levels low i.e. avoid application of artificial fertilisers

Grazing may not always be a viable option, and in these circumstances meadows can be maintained through cutting and removal alone. It is worth noting however that mowing tends to cut grass to a uniform height which is less beneficial to invertebrate species and so in these circumstances efforts could be made to vary the cutting height across the site. In small spaces where there is limited access, such as churchyards, a traditional technique such as scything might be appropriate.





# Further information



*Oxeye daisy in High Toynton churchyard© Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust*

A list of good practice links on managing lowland meadows for wildlife is available on our website: [www.glnp.org.uk/your-land/habitat-management/lowland-meadows](http://www.glnp.org.uk/your-land/habitat-management/lowland-meadows)

Funding to support management work may be available depending on individual circumstances. A list of both current national and local grant schemes is available on the GLNP website: [www.glnp.org.uk/your-land/funding](http://www.glnp.org.uk/your-land/funding)

If you are planning to change, or introduce, management on a site then you may need to consider whether protected species such as bats, reptiles or breeding birds use the site. For more information on this visit: [www.gov.uk/wildlife-licences](http://www.gov.uk/wildlife-licences)

The Lincolnshire Environmental Records Centre may also be able to provide useful species data for your site: [www.glnp.org.uk/partnership/lerc](http://www.glnp.org.uk/partnership/lerc)

This leaflet is intended as a general overview only - different sites will have different requirements. It is advisable to obtain bespoke/professional advice before any work is undertaken. This guide should not supersede management plans linked to ongoing grant schemes.

## *Achieving more for nature*

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*Front cover photo: Yellow rattle meadow © Lee Schofield*