

# Reedbeds: A guide to management

The key features of reedbeds are that they are dominated by large stands of common reed, where the water table is at or above ground level for most of the year. They are a transitional habitat that supports a diversity of invertebrates throughout the year, and provide crucial nesting opportunities for some of our nationally rare birds.

## Why are they important?

**The majority of reedbeds are small and scattered and have declined in both number and wildlife value as a result of the large scale drainage of wetlands.**

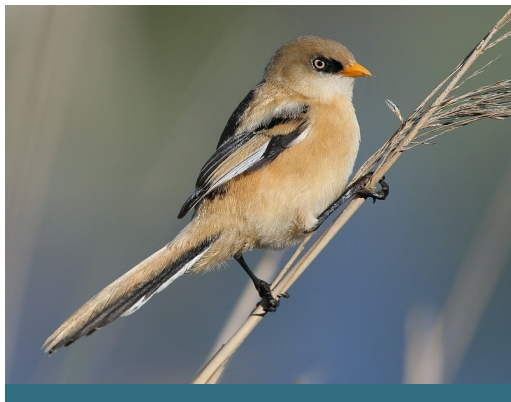
Published figures for this decline vary significantly, but current estimates suggest the extent of reedbeds in England is 7,020 hectares.<sup>1</sup>

In 2017, GLNP habitat data includes 186 hectares of reedbeds amongst Greater Lincolnshire's farmed landscape.<sup>2</sup>

Reedbeds are by nature a changing habitat, they are the step between open water and wet ground, and woodland. As a result they offer immense value to a wide range of wildlife throughout this transition, but it also means that they are easily lost if unmanaged.

They are an important habitat for the success of many species of birds, being the principle breeding and nesting place for the nationally rare bittern, Cetti's warbler, and bearded tit which is completely dependent upon this habitat. More commonly the songs of reed and sedge warblers can be enjoyed resonating from the stands of reed.

Although dominated in coverage by common reed, reedbeds often have a hidden floral diversity of submerged and emergent wetland plants.



*Bearded Tit © Dean Eades*

This diversity can include obvious towering species such as bulrush and yellow iris, but more hidden away are species such as water mint, gypsywort, water forget-me-nots and brooklime. At first glance the wealth and importance of these habitats is therefore often underestimated.

The drainage of our wetlands and fens to create agriculturally viable land has been the most influential factor contributing to the decline in the extent of reedbeds. Historically the use of thatch in building has provided some security for this habitat, however this industry has dwindled.

Reedbeds can also provide value in water treatment processes. They buffer watercourses through the filtration of nutrient and pollutant run off.



<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 reedbeds

**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 reedbeds, 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 for management to maintain the dominance of common reed, this should include diversity in the age of the reed, as well as areas that host greater species and structural diversity.

To ensure the dominance of common reed, reedbeds should be cut in the winter months. Recommended practice is for a four year cutting cycle, allowing long enough for the reed to develop to its peak growth, whilst ensuring that there are areas of younger reed.

To encourage a greater diversity of plants reed can be cut in the summer as this slows its growth. This diversity is of huge value to maintain in localised areas of the reedbed, particularly around the fringes. But managing the whole reedbed like this will eventually lead to its decline and care should be taken to avoid disturbing nesting birds.

Cuttings should be removed to prevent the build up of litter and the subsequent drying out of the

reedbed, but they can handily be used to create habitat piles on the fringes. These are particularly good for hibernating invertebrates and excellent for nesting grass snakes.

As well as removing cuttings a general tidying of the reedbed litter is beneficial. However leaving some areas of build up will create higher layers of wetted compost which aren't permanently inundated. In localised areas this will provide the space for many ground dwelling insects to thrive and will add to the structural diversity.

### Top management tips:

- Winter cutting ensures common reed's dominance
- Rotational cutting will produce diversity of reed development
- Keep control of scrub encroachment as required

Small areas of scrub such as old stands of alder are of ecological benefit however encroachment will need to be managed. The best method of achieving this is to pull or dig out bushes in wetter soils as this has the added benefit of creating pools within the reedbeds.

Management aims to slow the transition to woodland, whilst promoting structural diversity, but will not stop it. Periodic drying out and cutting/ grazing before re-flooding will create temporary highly productive wet grassland that can be left to develop back into reedbed. Performed in sections this can ensure their long term sustainability.



# Further information



*Reedbeds at Far Ings, onlooking the Humber Bridge © Barrie Wilkinson*

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

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.

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*Front cover photo: Common reed © Robert Enderby*