

# County Wildlife Sites

## Survey Report for Gavray Drive

Area: ca. 14 ha

Parish: Bicester and Ambrosden

Visit details: 21 June 2002 for 5 hours (Camilla Lambrick), 24 June 3 hours (Mike Rogers) and 26 June 6 hours (Camilla Lambrick and Mike Rogers).

Grid ref: SP 595226

District: Cherwell

Photos taken: 6

### Summary

Gavray Drive consists of a mosaic of small damp fields with ponds, divided by thick hedges with old trees. Most of the fields are probably former hay meadows on ridge and furrow and have a sward mostly dominated by tufted hair-grass. Great burnet is abundant in one field, and scattered in five others. Common marsh bedstraw, devil's-bit scabious, bugle, greater bird's-foot trefoil, common knapweed and short-fruited willowherb are occasional, while betony and pepper saxifrage are rare. There is a very good range of rushes and sedges (10 species - glaucous sedge, common sedge, carnation sedge, brown sedge, hairy sedge, false fox sedge, spiked sedge, pendulous sedge, slender tufted sedge and oval sedge). Grasses include meadow barley, yellow oat-grass, sweet vernal grass, meadow foxtail and red fescue. In the drier areas, slightly acid conditions are indicated by frequent tormentil and lesser stitchwort. The ponds contain greater reedmace, gypsywort, marsh foxtail, sharp-flowered rush and soft rush. One of the fields appears to be an old pasture, with ragged robin and common spotted orchid. The hedges between the fields are very thick and include oak, grey willow, field maple, honeysuckle, dogwood, crack willow and white willow; they are probably post-medieval as they dissect the ridge and furrow area.

Many birds are using the area, including three to four pairs of reed bunting, plus willow warbler, garden warbler, blackcap, whitethroat, lesser whitethroat, chiffchaff, bullfinch, song thrush, yellowhammer and sedge warbler. Butterflies include meadow brown, large skipper, ringlet, common blue, small heath and a large colony of marbled white.

Not included in the County Wildlife Site is a reverted arable field (to the west). While the flower-rich neglected land to the south is not as rich in uncommon species, it houses a large population of marbled whites and serves as a buffer between the richer areas and Gavray Drive.

### Description by Field

4. The western-most field is dominated by coarse grasses (couch grass, perennial rye grass) with docks. It is probably recently reverted arable land and should not be included in the County Wildlife Site.

13 is a long narrow field with a recently dug drainage ditch along the northern side. It may have originally been a pasture. It has a variety of damp, slightly acid-requiring species such as tormentil, lesser stitchwort, slender tufted sedge, bugle, ragged robin, dropwort, water forget-me-not, common spotted orchid and rushes such as compact rush and soft rush.

10. This field lies on ridge and furrow, and is dominated by tufted hair-grass with meadow barley, yellow oat, red fescue and Yorkshire fog. There is a substantial patch of devil's-bit scabious and betony.

12. This is the richest field, with a large area dominated by great burnet as well as patches of devil's-bit scabious, greater bird's-foot trefoil and common marsh bedstraw.

14 (marked as 9 on the Scott Wilson map) lies on ridge and furrow, and contains great burnet, lady's bedstraw, bird's-foot trefoil, sorrel and the meadow form of common knapweed.

15 (also marked as 9 on the Scott Wilson map) This species-poor field lies on ridge and furrow and is dominated by Yorkshire fog and creeping bent grass, with some field buttercup. The pond contains tufted water forget-me-not.

16, 17 and 18 are all species-poor fields over ridge and furrow, with the following different species:

16 contains meadow fescue, lesser stitchwort and yellow oat.

17 has sweet vernal grass and great burnet.

18 contains spiked sedge, meadow barley, tormentil and great burnet.

7 and 8 are very rank, with a dense growth of tall oat-grass, hawthorn and bramble. This forms a thick boundary along Gavray Drive.

19 appears to have had the top soil stripped and heaped, and the remaining surface has been channelled, sometimes deeply, creating wet areas with greater reedmace, marsh foxtail, cuckooflower, glaucous sedge, pendulous sedge, soft rush, compact rush, hard rush, greater bird's-foot trefoil, and common marsh bedstraw. The area is flower-rich, with a large population of marbled whites and large skippers using flowers such as marsh thistle, hairy St. John's-wort, common knapweed, common bird's-foot trefoil and oxeye daisy. The disturbed conditions allow such annuals as slender tare to flourish.

11 is a rough area of bushes and tall vegetation.

The fields east of the road have a similar suite of species and also include carnation sedge.

20. This field has a varied sward with meadow foxtail, meadow fescue, sweet vernal grass and oval sedge in the drier areas. The damper furrows contain sharp-flowered rush, compact rush and false fox sedge. Herbs include occasional great burnet, greater bird's-foot trefoil, cuckooflower, marsh thistle and lesser stitchwort, with a little bugle and water figwort. Devil's-bit scabious is present under the hoarding near the road. The pond in the northeast corner is about 4 m across; it is quite shaded by grey willow and has dense soft rush, reed canary grass and water forget-me-not round the edges, with greater reed mace and starwort in the water.

21. The next field to the east is dominated in the furrows by tufted hair-grass with occasional compact rush and sharp-flowered rush; meadowsweet, wild angelica and tufted vetch are rare. On the ridges are areas of silverweed, hairy sedge and Yorkshire fog, with a little bird's-foot trefoil, sorrel, meadow vetchling, cinquefoil and lesser cat's-tail. Along the northern side are areas of devil's-bit scabious, creeping jenny, common spotted orchid, bugle, brown sedge and carnation sedge. Marsh foxtail and lesser stitchwort are found in the north-east corner. The land at the north-west corner is drier, with abundant tormentil. There is also some scattered scrub in this field.



22. This field is slightly drier than 20 and 21, with more Yorkshire fog, meadow foxtail, sweet vernal grass and hairy sedge, as well as many of the other species mentioned above. Species found here but not in the other fields east of the road include spiked sedge and meadow barley. The field has abundant young scrub and invading aspen on the east side. It has probably been unmanaged for several years. The seasonal pond in the east of this field is overgrown with great hairy willowherb and grasses.

23. This field has a tall dense growth of grass, but does contain patches of betony, great burnet and brown sedge. The pond is covered by a fallen crack willow.

The hedges across the entire site are mostly tall and thick hawthorn with bramble, blackthorn and elder and occasional crack willow, field maple, oak, ash, dogwood and honeysuckle. The parish boundary by field 19 contains wood meadow grass, an ancient woodland indicator species. Water plantain is found in the stream. Between fields 10 and 13 there is a continuous double hedge (not shown on the Scott Wilson report) with one large collapsed crack willow pollard and mature oak, ash and crack willow.

Three of the four singing reed buntings were heard east of the road, and one was seen to fly across it towards the main part of the County Wildlife site (to the west). The areas to the west and east of the road are therefore being used by small birds as one complete unit. The eastern section provides a link to the wider countryside to the east, without which bird populations in the western part would become isolated.

## **Management**

The fields are unmanaged and have become too dense for many of the species to survive for long.

## **Assessment of the Survey**

The site was only visited in midsummer. Additionally, the tall growth makes some species difficult to locate.

