

Oxfordshire Wildlife Site Citation

SITE NAME: Gavray Drive Meadows

AREA: 15.6 ha

DISTRICT: Cherwell

EN NATURAL AREA: Thames and Avon Vales

VISIT DATES:

21 June 2002, 24 June 2002, 26 June 2002, 19 August 2002, 18 September 2002, 16 January 2003

Also: 5 visits, 26 April through 17 July 2002

SITE CODE: p52W01

GRID REF: SP595226

Photos: 8

SITE DESCRIPTION:

These meadows form a mosaic of small damp fields with ponds, divided by thick hedges with old trees. Most of the fields are probably former hay meadows over medieval ridge and furrow field patterns, and have a sward mostly dominated by tufted hair-grass with some meadow foxtail and meadow barley. However, fields 5 and 6 appear to be old pasture, with ragged robin, dropwort, devil's-bit scabious and common spotted orchid. Fields 7, 11 and 12 contain devil's-bit scabious and betony. Great burnet is frequent in fields 7 and 11, and scattered in fields 12, 14 and 16. Sneezewort and pepper saxifrage were only found in field 11. Common marsh bedstraw, bugle, greater bird's-foot trefoil, common knapweed and short-fruited willowherb are occasional throughout the fields. There is a very good range of rushes and sedges across the site, with nine species of sedge: glaucous, common, carnation, brown, hairy, false fox, spiked, slender tufted and oval. Grasses include yellow oat-grass, sweet vernal grass, tall fescue, meadow fescue and red fescue. In the drier areas, slightly acid conditions are indicated by frequent tormentil, lesser stitchwort and sweet vernal grass, especially in fields 5, 6, 14 and 15.

Most of the ponds in the western half of the site are shaded and/or only damp in summer. They have a species-poor vegetation of compact rush, plicate sweet-grass and tufted water-forget-me-not. CPM surveyed the ponds on the west side of the north-south road and reported great crested newt (a priority Biodiversity Action Plan species) in 3 ponds and a channel. Smooth newts were found in all ponds and the channel, and one palmate newt was recorded in field 9. The large water-filled pond in field 14 (on the eastern side of the road) contains greater reedmace, gypsywort, marsh foxtail, tufted water-forget-me-not, sharp-flowered rush and soft rush. The brook running along the western margin of the County Wildlife Site contains reed canary-grass, redshank, water chickweed and greater water plantain.

The hedges across the entire site are mostly tall and thick, and contain hawthorn with bramble, blackthorn and elder, as well as occasional crack willow, field maple, oak, ash, crab apple, English elm, dogwood, holly, wayfaring tree, guelder rose, buckthorn, hop and honeysuckle. They are probably post-medieval, as they dissect the ridge and furrow pattern that runs through most of the fields. The hedge that separates fields 5 and 6 from fields 7 and 12 is a double hedge, with black bryony, mature oak, ash and crack willow, including one large collapsed crack willow pollard. The hedge that runs along the eastern edge of fields 11 and 12 is also double. These double hedge lines include Midland hawthorn, wood meadow-grass, great hairy brome and three-nerved sandwort; all four are ancient woodland indicator species (characteristic of woodlands more than 400 years old). The gappy hedge line between fields 11 and 12 contains five large mature oaks. The hedges around fields 8 and 9 contain abundant English elm suckers, as well as hawthorn and bramble. The bullace plum (*Prunus domestica* ssp. *insititia*), a rare and declining species in the county, is found in the hedge between fields 8 and 9.

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Numerous birds are using the proposed County Wildlife Site, including reed bunting (which was seen flying across the road between fields 14 and 4), willow warbler, garden warbler, blackcap, whitethroat, lesser whitethroat, chiffchaff, bullfinch, linnet, song thrush, yellowhammer, sedge warbler, hobby and kestrel. Common pipistrelle, noctule, *Myotis sp.* and, possibly, serotine bats were recorded foraging over the site (CPM). Butterflies include large skipper, ringlet, common blue, small heath and marbled white. Twenty-six species of ground beetles were found in fields 5, 6, 11 and 12, including the nationally scarce *Bembidion gilvipes*.

UK PRIORITY BAP HABITATS: lowland meadows (hay meadow)

UK PRIORITY BAP SPECIES: Reed bunting (3 or 4 singing males), song thrush (2 or 3 singing males), bullfinch, linnet; great crested newt.

RED DATA BOOK SPECIES:

NATIONALLY SCARCE SPECIES: *Bembidion gilvipes* a ground beetle

OXFORDSHIRE BIODIVERSITY CHALLENGE SPECIES: Cuckooflower, devil's-bit scabious, great burnet, meadow barley, ragged robin. Song thrush, sedge warbler, linnet.

BIRDS OF CONSERVATION CONCERN:

Red list: Bullfinch, reed bunting, song thrush, yellowhammer, linnet.

Amber list: Dunnock, willow warbler.

TYPICAL SPECIES: Great burnet, greater bird's-foot trefoil, betony, cuckooflower, devil's-bit scabious, sneezewort, pepper saxifrage, brown sedge, carnation sedge, common sedge and meadow barley. Midland hawthorn, bullace plum, black bryony, honeysuckle, wood meadow-grass, three-nerved sandwort. Sedge warbler, chiffchaff, willow warbler, whitethroat, lesser whitethroat, blackcap, yellowhammer, linnet, kestrel. Marbled white butterfly.

CURRENT MANAGEMENT: Unmanaged for at least one season.

IDEAL MANAGEMENT: Fields 7, 11, 12, 14 and 16 should be cut for hay (as indicated by the presence of great burnet). Although fields 8, 9, 15 and 17 do not contain these notable hay meadow species, the current species list indicates their former management as hay meadows, and so this management could be re-instated in some sections, leaving other areas tall for invertebrates and birds (e.g. cut rotationally over several years). Fields 5 and 6 appear likely to have been a permanent pasture and therefore should be grazed. The tall herb flora in field 4 provides important cover and nectar for invertebrates, along with a critical winter seed supply for birds. This field requires only occasional scrub clearance to prevent eventual dominance by grey willow. The silted up and shaded ponds in fields 5, 7, 8 and 9 should be carefully restored. The hedgerows require some management in the long term, but should be cut sensitively to maintain their current thick cover for both breeding and wintering songbirds.