

PRIORITY HABITAT FACTSHEET



*Cattle grazing at Butley marshes
Yellow wagtail, Fen Raft Spider (both Neil Rolph)*

Coastal and Floodplain Grazing Marshes

Wet pastures or meadows on the coast or in river valley floodplains, which lie at, or below, sea level and may be enclosed by seawalls. Periodically inundated or bounded by ditches with high water levels and may have water-filled hollows or ponds with emergent swamp communities. Almost all are grazed primarily by cattle and some are cut for hay or silage.

IMPORTANCE FOR WILDLIFE

The mosaic of habitats supports a wide range of plants, invertebrates, birds and mammals. They are particularly good for breeding waders and support internationally important flocks of wintering birds. In coastal areas, the dyke systems provide a brackish habitat for estuarine species. The seasonal inundation gives the vegetation a distinct composition. Many grazing marshes have dyke systems rich in flora and fauna supporting a variety of marginal and aquatic plant species and invertebrates.



IMPORTANT ASSOCIATED SPECIES

Birds

Common Starling *Turdus philomelos*
Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*
Common Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*
Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*
Skylark *Alauda arvensis*
Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*
Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*
Barn owl *Tyto alba**

Mammals

Water Vole *Arvicola amphibius*
Barbastelle Bat *Barbastella barbastellus*
Noctule Bat *Nyctalus noctula*
Serotine Bat *Eptesicus serotinus*

Bees and Wasps

Moss Carder Bee *Bombus muscorum*
Fen Mason-wasp *Odynerus simillimus*

Butterflies

Wall *Lasiommata megera*

Beetles

Zircon Reed Beetle *Donacia aquatica*

Dragonflies

Norfolk Hawker *Aeshna isosceles*

Molluscs

Little whirlpool Ram's-horn Snail *Anisus vorticulus*
Depressed River Mussel *Pseudanodonta complanata*
Shining Ram's-horn Snail *Segmentina nitida*
Large-mouthed Valve Snail *Valvata macrostoma*
Desmoulin's whorl Snail *Vertigo moulinsiana*
Narrow-mouth whorl Snail *Vertigo angustior*
Swollen Spire Snail *Mercuria similis*

Spiders

Fen Raft Spider *Dolomedes plantarius*

Plants

Tassel Stonewort *Tolypella intricata*
Flat Sedge *Blysmus compressus*
Slender Hare's-ear *Bupleurum tenuissimum*
Divided Sedge *Carex divisa*
Sea Barley *Hordeum marinum*
Tubular Water-dropwort *Oenanthe fistulosa*
Borrer's Saltmarsh-grass *Puccinellia fasciculata*
Greater Water-parsnip *Sium latifolium*
Marsh Stitchwort *Stellaria palustris*
Native Black Poplar *Populus nigra* spp *betulifolia**

*Suffolk Priority species



Images: Top – Barn Owl (Stephen Reeve). Bottom, left to right – Black-Tailed Godwit (Edwyn Anderton), Norfolk Hawker (Gary Last), Water Vole (Margaret Holland), Wall Brown (Chris Upson).

FACTORS AFFECTING HABITAT IN SUFFOLK

- Changes to salinity levels can alter species composition. This may be caused by sea-level rise and increasing numbers of storm surge events. Brackish transition communities can be valuable e.g. Minsmere South Levels.
- Impacts of drought and excessive groundwater abstraction.
- Agricultural intensification including over-grazing and spray drift from surrounding agricultural land.
- Inappropriate dyke management i.e. excessive dredging and maintaining low water levels instead of allowing natural rise and fall.
- Alien invasive species such as Floating Water Pennywort, Parrot's Feather and *Crassula helmsii* choke waterways and outcompete native species. American Mink feed on water voles and other native species.



HABITAT MANAGEMENT ADVICE

- Maintain habitat diversity to include bare ground, patchy scrub, varying grass heights and temporary pools.
- Manage saline incursion and flooding where possible.
- Maintain light grazing, preferably with cattle over the autumn, winter and spring months.
- Manage drainage ditches for invertebrates using a rotational management plan and clearing only one side of a ditch at a time.
- Maintain a high water level in ditches throughout the year if possible.
- Encourage diverse marginal vegetation through mild poaching by cattle (don't fence off all the dykes).
- Create varied ditch profiles to create diverse habitats; slopes of less than 35° provide optimum conditions.
- Maintain water quality by reducing any nutrient input from fertiliser or livestock feed and preventing any pesticide residues entering the water.
- Maintain a stable salinity in brackish ditches and waterbodies i.e. do not flush with fresh water.
- Maintain an open landscape with occasional hedges, trees and bushes by preventing the incursion of scrub.
- Ensure bird roosts are not disturbed e.g. by walkers or their dogs.

Grazing at Boyton Marshes (Emma Aldous).



VISION FOR SUFFOLK

1. Improve knowledge of the extent and quality of coastal and floodplain grazing marsh.
2. Maintain the existing extent of coastal and floodplain grazing marsh to ensure no net loss.
3. Encourage the restoration and improvement of degraded coastal and floodplain grazing marsh.
4. Re-create coastal and floodplain grazing marsh as opportunities arise.



WHERE TO FIND FURTHER INFORMATION

Buglife – advice on managing BAP habitats

- <https://www.buglife.org.uk/resources/habitat-management/coastal-and-floodplain-grazing-marsh/>

Buglife – Notable invertebrates associated with coastal and floodplain grazing marsh (pdf)

- <https://cdn.buglife.org.uk/2019/07/0620Notable20invertebrates20associated20with20coastal20and20floodpl.pdf>

JNCC Habitat Description (pdf)

- <https://data.jncc.gov.uk/data/82b0af67-d19a-4a89-b987-9dba73be1272/UKBAP-BAPHabitats-07-CoastFloodGrazingMarsh.pdf>

MAGIC website – interactive mapping information including designations • <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/>

Making Space for Nature, a Review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network 16 Sep 2010.

- Chaired by Professor Sir John Lawton CBE FRS. Defra website (pdf) • <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20130402151656/http://archive.defra.gov.uk/environment/biodiversity/documents/201009space-for-nature.pdf>

Natural Environment White Paper June 2011 – *The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature* (pdf)

- https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/228842/8082.pdf

Suffolk Wildlife Trust Habitats Explorer •

- <https://www.suffolkwildlifetrust.org/habitats/grassland/coastal-and-floodplain-grazing-marsh>

CONTACT

Emma Aldous, Communications Officer, Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service
emma.aldous@suffolk.gov.uk
www.suffolkbis.org.uk

