



Reedbed Habitat Action Plan

1. Introduction

Reedbeds were listed as a priority UK BAP habitat and subsequently in Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006. They are an important habitat for several Red Data Book bird and invertebrate species. Wetland habitats in general have been seriously compromised by human activity with many drained to improve the land for agriculture.

2. Current Status

2.1 Description of habitat

Reedbeds are wetlands dominated by, but not necessarily composed purely of, stands of the common reed (*Phragmites australis*). The habitat includes areas of reed that are both wet and dry at their base but where the water table is at or above ground level for much of the year. Wet reedbeds generally have more importance for biodiversity priority species. Ideally wet reedbeds should grade into dry reedbeds, tall fen and then willow scrub.

Three National Vegetation Classification (NVC) communities of reedbed, reedmace and other emergent swamp occur in Worcestershire. These are described in the table below. Of the three, S4 is the most frequent in the county.

NVC Code	Community Description
S4	<i>Phragmites australis</i> swamp and reed-beds Dominated by dense stands of common reed, generally with few other species present. Sometimes willow invasion.
S13	<i>Typha angustifolia</i> swamp This is dominated by lesser reedmace which prefers more basic water around pools with silty substrate.
S26	<i>Phragmites australis-Urtica dioica</i> tall-herb fen Common reed and nettle are normally dominant on relatively dry soil conditions. Other tall species can be dominant in patches. Goosegrass often common.

Reedbeds are very important habitats for birds in the UK. They support a distinctive breeding bird assemblage including six species which are largely, or totally, restricted to this habitat during the breeding season: bittern (*Botaurus stellaris*), marsh harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*), crane (*Grus grus*), Cetti's warbler (*Cettia cetti*), Savi's Warbler (*Locustella luscinioides*) and bearded tit (*Panurus biarmicus*). In Worcestershire reedbeds are used by bittern, Cetti's warbler and marsh harrier at various times of year as well as providing important roosting opportunities for migratory species such as swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) and sand martin (*Riparia riparia*). Five Red Data Book invertebrates are closely associated with reedbeds.

2.2 Distribution and extent

There are around 5000 ha of reedbed in the UK, but of the 900 or so sites contributing to this total only about 50 are greater than 20 ha, and these make a large contribution to the total area (Natural England and RSPB, 2014). Reedbeds

are not common or extensive in Worcestershire, although they do have a county-wide distribution. Reedbeds usually have to be looked for rather than providing a characteristic feature of the landscape. In Worcestershire they are mainly found as narrow fringes along rivers, canals and ditches rather than extensive areas.

Existing knowledge of reedbeds across the county estimates the bulk of the total resource at around 26 ha on over 20 sites. The largest areas are in the order of 5 ha at Hewell Park Lake SSSI and along the Droitwich Canal. Small pockets of reedbed in ponds and fringe habitats probably go undetected and will not be included in this estimate.

2.3 Protection of the habitat

Legal protection can be granted through the designation of a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Most of the more significant reedbeds in the UK are notified as SSSI and many are notified as Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention and as Special Protection Areas (SPA) under the EC Birds Directive.

Reedbeds are listed under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006.

Sites not meriting SSSI status can be listed as a Local Wildlife Site (LWS). Although not a statutory designation LWS status does confer some protection through the planning system.

2.4 Summary of important sites

Hewell Park Lake SSSI lies within 93 ha of Grade II listed Historic Park and Garden in what is now the grounds of HMP Hewell Grange near Redditch. The SSSI is owned and managed by HM Prison Service. A shallow artificial lake of around 10

The northern and eastern margins of the Lake support extensive beds of common reed, great reedmace (*Typha latifolia*) and bulrush (*Schoenoplectus lacustris*). The marginal vegetation provides a valuable ornithological habitat, with breeding reed warbler, great crested grebe, tufted duck (*Aythya fuligula*) and pochard (*Aythya ferina*). Westwood Great Pool is also one of the most important sites for over-wintering waterfowl in Worcestershire.

Oakley Pool SSSI consists of open water surrounded by reedswamp, fen and grassland. The pool appears to have been formed by subsidence following brine extraction and is thought to be still extending due to continued subsidence. The marginal vegetation includes common reed, meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*), great reedmace, greater and lesser pond sedge (*Carex riparia* and *C. acutiformis*) and great willow-herb (*Epilobium hirsutum*). Submerged plants include the locally uncommon soft hornwort (*Ceratophyllum submersum*). The reedswamp provides habitat for a large breeding colony of reed warbler. The margins of the pool also

The isolation of sites leaving populations of species within them vulnerable with limited colonisation potential.

4. Current Action

4.1 Local protection

About 16% of the reedbed sites in Worcestershire, covering about 30% of our reedbed resource, are notified as SSSI, the largest being Hewell Park Lake.

Many other reedbeds are listed as LWS, which gives some protection within the planning system.

4.2 Site management and programmes of action

Hewell Park Lake SSSI became the property of HM Prison Service in 1946. Since that time the Prison Service has worked with the Hereford and Worcester Gardens Trust and other partners to restore some of the original landscape features of the site. The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) undertook a Phase 1 habitat

The Offerton Lane Local Nature Reserve in Worcester includes two areas of SuDS wetland created to receive rainwater run-off from the adjacent industrial estate.

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