



Rushton Grange Meadow

A Local Wildlife Site (LWS)

Grid Reference: XXXXXXX

Size: 2.28ha

Site K167

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Rushton Grange Meadow

Introduction

This meadow contains an interesting mix of species rich meadow and wet grassland habitats, adjacent to the River Ise. A footpath crosses the centre of the site from north to south where it crosses the Ise by the way of a footbridge.

The northern slopes of the site have a rich meadow flora, with frequent lady's bedstraw, knapweed, great burnet, and lesser stitchwort. False oat-grass and tufted hair grass are the dominant grasses and there are frequent more open patches with dead thatch on the ground. The rest of the meadow was interesting mix of meadow and wet grassland species, with sorrel, birds-foot-trefoil, meadow cranesbill and meadow vetchling all frequent. At the eastern end the herb content is particularly high, with frequent tufted vetch to the southeast corner.



Meadow Cranesbill

An old course of the River Ise can be seen meandering across the site. This is now detached from the main river but can be identified by a change in vegetation formed by a band of abundant reed sweet-grass, sedges and tufted hair-grass. Either side of the channel is a species rich wet grassland vegetation, that dries out away from the channel.

The site obviously regularly floods and retains wetness for the majority of the year, as indicated by abundant meadowsweet, great burnet and tufted hair grass. There is occasional dock and creeping thistle across the north of the site, and occasional hawthorn scrub along the banks of the Ise.

In the north of the site there is a filled in pond to the west of the footpath, which is now dominated by sedges and reed sweet-grass. There is a nettle bed to the east of the pond site and frequent creeping thistle in this area.

Interesting species

Other plants of interest included salad burnet, dropwort and marsh-bedstraw. There were masses of butterflies across the site including meadow brown,

ringlet, small tortoiseshell and green-veined white. Banded demoiselle and swallows were also recorded over the grassland and there was much birdsong, in particular yellowhammer, from the surrounding thick hawthorn hedgerow.

Meadows

The site forms a lowland meadow habitat, and is the target for our new *Inspiring Meadows* project. Flower-rich lowland meadows have suffered a 97% national decline in the last 70 years, and are Northamptonshire's most threatened wildlife habitat. They are important habitats for a wild variety of plants as well as other species such as butterflies, bumblebees and hares.

The *Inspiring Meadows* project is working to restore priority meadow sites across the County through offering surveys and management advice as well as funding practical work. The project will help meet targets set out in the Northamptonshire Biodiversity Action Plan.

Rushton Grange Meadow is one of 750 Local Wildlife sites in Northamptonshire that are recognised to be important for wildlife within the county. By maintaining a LWS network the Wildlife Trust aims to encourage and support landowners in managing their land in a way that will be sympathetic to wildlife without compromising their own aspirations for the sites. Local Wildlife Sites have no statutory designation and therefore have no associated obligations. LWS recognition does not confer any new rights of access.

Recommendations for management



Small tortoiseshell

Species rich grassland relies on management to stop it becoming overgrown with scrub or coarse grasses, whilst conversely over-management can lead to the loss of wildflowers. The site is currently unmanaged with the exception of the occasional topping. The site has some fencing but it isn't stock-proof and there is no access to water.

Ideally the site should be managed as a wet meadow with either a hay cut or through grazing. This will prevent the build-up of dead plant material that allows plants of drier conditions to invade and take over the site to the detriment of the wildflowers. A hay cut and removal of arisings could be

difficult due to the location and topography of the site, therefore cattle grazing is the preferred option. Cattle should graze the site when it is dry, probably between April and September. Ideally they would be removed in the summer when plants are flowering or otherwise grazing should be undertaken at a low intensity. Native cattle that will tackle the build-up of thatch and thicker wetland vegetation would be preferable.

The pond should be restored, to provide an additional habitat for the site. Funding may be available from pondlife for this.

Some scrub clearance along the river bank could encourage marginal vegetation and improve the habitat for water voles for which there are historical records in the area.

Suggested Management Priorities

Habitat	What	Why	When
Species rich grassland	Annual grazing regime. Preferably native cattle.	Maintain species rich grassland	April - October
	Either 2-3 cattle from spring – autumn or 3-4 cattle should they be removed over the summer months	Prevent Coarser grass species dominating	April – May & September - October
Pond	Restoration of former pond	Create additional habitat on site	Autumn
River	Targeted scrub clearance along river bank	Encourage marginal vegetation	September - March

For further advice on managing this site or for additional information on Local Wildlife Sites see www.northamptonshirebiodiversity.org or contact Matt Johnson.



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