

Welcome to Upwood Meadows

We hope you enjoy your visit.

How to find the reserve

Upwood Meadows is situated West of Upwood Village, near Ramsey, and signposted with Wildlife Trust signs. Access is via a farm track which leads to a small car park situated at the reserve entrance. Please ensure that you do not leave valuables in your vehicle.

Paths are grassy so can be muddy and occasionally flood in wet weather. Please stay on the paths and keep dogs on a lead. Livestock may be present at certain times of the year.

OS Explorer 227 grid reference TL 251 825

More information

Your local Wildlife Trust protects the special wildlife and habitats of Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire. We are a charity dependent on voluntary contributions.



Devils bit scabious

To contact us about this reserve or about how you can support us please write to:
The Wildlife Trust,
The Manor House,
Broad Street,
Cambourne,
CB23 6DH.

To join the Wildlife Trust please contact the Membership Manager at The Wildlife Trust, The Manor House, Broad Street, Cambourne, CB23 6DH.

Tel: **01954 713500**
E-mail: **cambridgeshire@wildlifebcn.org**
Website: **www.wildlifebcn.org**

This reserve is supported by:



Green-winged orchid



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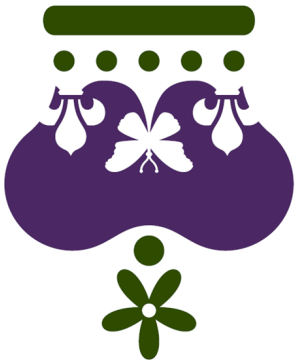


Photos: Gregory Belcher Illustrations: Mike Langman

A Coronation Meadow

In the past 75 years a shocking 97% of wildflower meadows have been lost from the British countryside. In an effort to stop this decline and in celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Coronation, HRH The Prince of Wales has called for the creation at least one new wildflower meadow in every county.

The Coronation Meadows Project, led by a team of experts from the charity Plant Life, in partnership the Wildlife Trusts and the Rare Breeds Survival Trust, aims to safeguard these delicate habitats for future generations. To achieve this ambitious goal one surviving flagship wildflower meadow - a Coronation Meadow - is identified in each county. These sites will then be used as 'donor' meadows providing seed for the creation of new meadows at sites within the same county. Upwood Meadows is one such Coronation Meadow, celebrated for its remarkable floristic diversity.



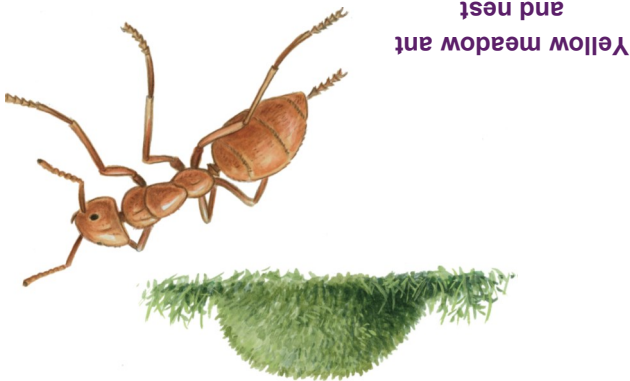
Helen's Close is the first meadow you reach from the road reserve entrance and is the least diverse of the three owing to past improvement with fertiliser and herbicide. Since the Wildlife Trust took over management of the site in 1977 this meadow has shown some signs of recovery hosting colourful displays of cuckoo flower and meadow buttercup in the spring.

The second meadow, Little Bentley, has also been improved with fertiliser in the past, but is recovering well with the best displays of wildflowers in the north-east corner. It is hoped that through gradual re-colonisation from neighbouring Bentley meadow, the diversity of wildflowers in this meadow will eventually recover.

Last is Bentley meadow, the richest of the three. Defined by ancient ridge and furrow, formed by medieval ploughing, Bentley meadow has been left undisturbed for many centuries. Yellow ant hills that dot the landscape and along with the ridge and furrow formation, create distinct wet and dry microhabitats across the meadow. This unusual arrangement of wet and dry grassland leads to a mosaic of specially adapted plant species that rarely coexist.



Fieldfare



Yellow meadow ant and nest

Designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest and as a National Nature Reserve, Upwood Meadows is an exceptional example of ancient lowland grassland, supporting over 200 plant species. In light of such outstanding floristic diversity in 1977 the Wildlife Trust purchased the site to protect this rare and important habitat.

The Meadows

The nature reserve spans 15 acres and consists of three fields separated by a network of ancient hedgerows. The history of Upwood Meadows is uncertain, but it is believed that its lowland location and tendency to flood meant it was only used as agricultural land by the poorest of residents. What is certain, is that all three fields were once ploughed using ancient ridge and furrow techniques. In Helen's Close and Little Bentley the ridge and furrow formation has been partly destroyed following further cultivation. Whilst Bentley meadow has been left undisturbed for many centuries, preserving this ancient feature.

What to look for on our reserve

Wildlife

Upwood Meadows supports a huge variety of wildlife throughout the seasons. Famed for its floristic diversity, the site also attracts many representatives of the animal kingdom.

Flora

It is the combination of abundant wildflowers, mature hedgerows and veteran trees that make this site so special. Throughout the spring and summer months the species rich grasslands are awash with colour. Visit in early spring to admire bright blooms of yellow cowslips before thousands of elegant green winged orchids come into bloom from mid-late May.



Cowslips

A rainbow of colour explodes in summer. A diverse sea of green grasses is interrupted by splashes of purple, red and blue as saw-wort, great burnet and devils-bit scabious come into flower, providing excellent nectar sources for many insect pollinators such as bees and butterflies. Nestled amongst these conspicuous displays you may find the subtle but aptly named adder's tongue fern, an indicator of the ancient status of these meadows.

Species rich ancient hedgerows, made up of thorny species such as hawthorn, blackthorn and bramble, provide shelter along the grassland margins. Well managed, these scrubby borders can support an abundance of wildlife, providing food in the form of nectar, berries and seeds as well as shelter and nesting sites for invertebrates, birds and mammals.



Adder's-tongue fern

Commanding veteran trees of oak and ash can be found along the hedgerows. Several hundred years old, these trees are of high conservation value. Oak trees are known to provide habitat to more species than any other tree in the UK, including insects, birds, mammals and fungi.



Common blue butterfly

Fauna

The rich floral diversity at Upwood attracts an abundance of animals to the meadows. The nectar rich flowers provide ample food for many breeding insect species. Whilst the grass sward provides the perfect place for moths and butterflies to lay their eggs where their caterpillars will thrive.

In the spring, the scrub is alive with song as birds such as the blackcap and whitethroat compete for nesting sites. Visit in early summer for a chance to see the elusive turtle dove.



Whitethroat

Upwood meadows is an important breeding ground for this red listed bird, which has experienced population declines in recent years. Listen out for its gentle purr in amongst the scrub on calm days. In the winter, visiting migrants such as the redwing and fieldfare feast on winter berries.

Historic ponds can be found in each of the meadows. Originally used to water livestock, they are now home to breeding populations of the nationally rare great crested newt. Keep your eyes peeled in the spring and summer months as these impressive beasts emerge from the ponds to feed on the insect rich grasslands.



Great crested newt

How the Trust cares for the reserve

Traditional management of these species rich grasslands is essential if their floral diversity is to be maintained. Here at Upwood, we work with local graziers to implement traditional livestock grazing regimes from late April through to November. This helps to reduce competitive grasses and maintain the low soil nutrient levels needed for many wildflowers to flourish. Livestock also help to achieve a range of sward heights which promotes a range of microhabitats across the site. This diversity in habitat structure fulfils the lifecycle needs of many insect species, in particular grassland butterfly species that thrive here in the meadows.



If the hedgerows that border the grasslands were left unchecked the wildflower meadows would convert to scrub. To prevent this the Wildlife Trust periodically cuts back the hedgerow in a manner that is sympathetic to species that use this habitat. Invasive weeds such as ragwort and creeping thistle are also controlled to protect the floral diversity of the site.

