



# County Wildlife Sites in the Broads Survey Project

Report of PHASE 1 (2009/10)



*Andrina Walmsley  
Norfolk Wildlife Trust  
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### 1. Introduction

This is a brief summary of the activities which have taken place during Phase 1 of this project, established in 2009, to designate a suite of County Wildlife Sites (CWS) within the Broads Authority Executive Area and the larger Broads BAP area in Norfolk.

While most areas of Norfolk are well-represented within the CWS system, there are a few 'gaps'. Most notable of these is the Norfolk Broads where, until 2009, there were just 22 CWS, with a combined area of approximately 260 ha. This represents less than 2% of all the CWS in Norfolk, both by number and area. By contrast, SSSIs in the Norfolk Broads cover an area of almost 7500ha.

To address this issue, the project was set up to identify, survey and notify as CWS semi-natural sites within the Norfolk Broads which meet the relevant CWS selection criteria. Funding for Phase 1 of the project was provided by the Broads Authority and the Norfolk Biodiversity Partnership.

### 2. County Wildlife Sites

County Wildlife Sites (CWS) are non-statutory sites designated primarily for their botanical value. They represent a significant proportion of the best semi-natural habitats in Norfolk, and form an important component of the county's ecological network, often buffering and sometimes linking more fragile sites.

Unlike the SSSI system, under which only a limited number of 'representative' sites are notified, the CWS designation can be assigned to any site which meets the relevant selection criteria. These are habitat-based, and are designed around widely-accepted attributes, adapted from those used in the assessment of SSSIs (ie Ratcliffe (1977), Nature Conservancy Council (1989), The Wildlife Trusts (1997) and other publications) (see Appendix 1).

There are currently 1279 CWS in Norfolk, covering approximately 15,000 ha. This represents 3% of the total CWS resource in England. The majority of CWS contain habitats and species that are priorities under the UK and Local BAP, and are a key means of delivering BAP targets in Norfolk.

While not legally protected, CWS are recognised by planning authorities in their local development plans. The presence of CWS may also significantly influence the outcome of planning applications where these are likely to impact negatively on or damage a notified site.

CWS have also recently gained new importance with the introduction of National Indicator 197 (or NI 197), the only government indicator to address biodiversity directly. As one of the 35 indicators in the Norfolk Local Area Agreement, NI 197 has for the first time elevated CWS in Norfolk to the ranks of other high priority concerns such as health, transport and education.

The CWS system in Norfolk is currently managed by a partnership of Norfolk Wildlife Trust, Norfolk County Council, Natural England and the Broads Authority (as of 2010).

### 3. Project Objectives

The primary objective of this project is to notify as CWS all sites within the Broads which meet the relevant CWS selection criteria and for which landowner permission can be obtained.

The project was initially designed to cover only fen meadow and woodland sites within the six Broads valleys (Waveney, Yare, Bure, Muckfleet, Ant and Thurne), for which brief survey data already exist. However, it is likely that it will be extended to include grazing marsh and reedbed; and potentially a range of other habitats.

The core project has been divided into three phases:

*Phase 1 (2009 – 2010)*

- Identification of potential fen meadow and woodland sites using previous survey data
- Summer survey of fen meadow sites within the Waveney valley
- Notification of sites meeting CWS criteria
- Initial discussions by CWS Steering Group re development of Grazing Marsh selection criteria

*Phase 2 (2010 – 2011)*

- Spring survey of woodland sites within the Waveney, Yare and Bure valleys
- Summer surveys of fen meadow sites within the Yare, Ant and Muckfleet valleys
- Identification (and survey, if necessary) of reedbeds meeting the relevant CWS criteria throughout the Norfolk Broads valleys
- Notification of sites meeting CWS criteria

*Phase 3 (2011 – 2012)*

- Spring survey of woodland sites within the Ant, Muckfleet and Thurne valleys
- Summer surveys of fen meadow sites within the Bure and Thurne valleys
- subject to funding and suitable selection criteria being available, designation of areas of grazing marsh within the Broads

## 4. Phase 1: Activities and Progress

### a. Surveys

#### *Scoping*

All fen meadow and woodland sites of potential CWS quality are in the process of being identified using data collected during the Fen Meadow Phase 1 (2004) and Woodland (2008) surveys commissioned by the Broads Authority (BA).

The sites are distributed through the six main river valleys of the Broads: Bure, Muckfleet, Waveney, Thurne, Ant and Yare.

Once identified, areas of interest are digitally mapped and listed by valley. While this work is not yet complete, the number of sites identified so far is as follows:

Valley	Fen Meadow	Woodland
Waveney	10	21
Yare	incomplete	31
Bure	incomplete	incomplete
Muckfleet	4	Data awaited*
Ant	14	Data awaited**
Thurne	5	Data awaited**

\* Original surveys not yet available \*\* Original surveys not yet carried out

All surveys throughout the course of the project will be subject to landowner permission, so the number of surveys undertaken will be lower than the number of sites identified. To help with workload planning, sites have been prioritised (Priority 1 and 2) where possible, to ensure that the best sites are not overlooked and enable lower quality sites to be dropped if necessary.

#### *Data protection*

Data protection issues mean that landowner data held by the Broads Authority cannot be released to Norfolk Wildlife Trust without written consent, so the following approach has been adopted:

- BA makes initial written approach to landowner requesting permission
- landowner invited to contact NWT if they require further information or wish to discuss
- notification letter for all newly designated sites sent out by BA
- landowner asked in notification letter to confirm willingness for their contact details to be passed to NWT (both for inclusion on CWS database and to allow them to benefit from free land management advice from NWT)

#### *Surveys and Results*

During Summer 2009, fen meadow surveys were undertaken at six sites (ie all those for which landowner permission was obtained) in the Waveney valley. As a result, the following five new CWS with a total area of 37.3 ha have been designated:

- CWS 2180 Aldeby Hall Marshes (4.3 ha)
- CWS 2181 Meadows near Boon's Plantation (4.8 ha)
- CWS 2182 Marsh Farm Meadows (5.1 ha)
- CWS 2183 Wheatacre Marshes (16.3 ha)
- CWS 2184 Bremar Pony Stud (6.8 ha)

#### **b. Designation of Grazing Marsh as CWS**

To date, no CWS selection criteria for Grazing Marsh exist, although it is a BAP Habitat and the development of appropriate CWS criteria is included within the BAP actions.

The development of criteria for this habitat has been considered by the CWS Steering Group in the past, but rejected because it was believed that other criteria (ie Grassland and Standing Water) should be adequate for sites of sufficient quality. Historically, the main objection to designating grazing marsh has been that the primary interest in this habitat is the quality of the dykes rather than the diversity of the grassland. It might therefore be necessary to designate large areas of potentially very species-poor or improved grassland in order to capture a relatively small area of high quality aquatic habitat (ie the dyke network).

The Steering Group discussed this issue again at its meeting in November 2009 and decided to undertake a visit to a grazing marsh in Spring 2010 in order to re-evaluate the position.

In the event that it is decided to designate grazing marsh, this activity will be undertaken if possible during Phase 3 of the Broads Project, with ESA Tier 2 and 3 grazing marshes assessed for potential inclusion as CWS. Initial assessments would be based on existing Broads Authority, Natural England (NE) and Broadland Environmental Surveys Ltd (BESL) survey data, and new surveys undertaken only as necessary for areas which appear to be of CWS quality. This element of the project will depend on funding being available.

## **5. Preparation for Phases 2**

### **a. Phase 2**

#### *Surveys*

Preparation is well under way for survey work to be undertaken during Phase 2, assuming that funding is made available. The work involves woodland surveys in three valleys (Waveney, Yare and Bure); and fen meadow surveys in three valleys (Yare, Ant and Muckfleet). Permission letters for woodland surveys will be issued by the Broads Authority in mid-February, with surveys planned to start in early April and early June respectively.

Because of the likely volume of work, two surveyors will be used to ensure that spring surveys do not overrun and delay the start of summer survey work.

#### *Scoping*

Phase 1 (March 2010) will see the completion of site identification for remaining survey work for fen meadow and woodland.

#### *Designation of Reedbed*

During Phase 2, reedbed sites which appear to meet the relevant CWS selection criteria (see Appendix 2) will also be identified. Any surveys required will be held over until Phase 3, unless funding is available during the course of Phase 2.

## **Attributes of habitats taken into account when identifying County Wildlife Sites in Norfolk**

The attributes taken into account in identifying CWSs are described in general terms below. They are defined in more detail in the County Wildlife Site Handbook.

The first five attributes are of primary importance, the remaining three are of secondary importance.

**Naturalness** This assesses the closeness of a habitat to its form unmodified by human influence. In Norfolk, as elsewhere in Britain, all terrestrial habitats are modified to varying extents. In many cases, therefore, this characteristic seeks to relate a site to its state under traditional management.

**Diversity** Most sites will show diversity in vegetation communities and in complement of species. Many will be species-rich in county terms.

**Size** The importance and value of a site generally increases with its size. It is generally agreed that each habitat has a size below which its nature conservation value may not be sustainable.

**Rarity** The decline and thus increasing rarity of Norfolk's semi-natural habitats is a basic presumption of the CWS designation. The presence of rare or scarce species may warrant CWS status.

**Typicalness** This criterion is important when including intrinsically species-poor habitats in Norfolk, such as acidic oak-birch woodlands, which need to be included in the CWS system as characteristic and important habitats of the County.

**Fragility** All sites are sensitive to environmental change. Some sites may be particularly susceptible, and as a consequence may be particularly rare and therefore important, but also difficult to safeguard.

**Potential Value** Some sites with remnants of former habitats or those with a predictable course of natural succession will often show a substantial increase in their nature conservation interest, the former through positive management and the latter through non-intervention.

### **Intrinsic Appeal**

Some sites may have considerable and widely perceived intrinsic appeal; others may be important for informal recreation.

## Criteria for the Selection of County Wildlife Sites in Norfolk (2010)

Sites of CWS status will contain habitats of the type and quality indicated below.

### SWAMP AND FEN

1.	Single species swamp.	
2.	Tall fen with typical species, and not dominated by those indicative of drying.	
3.	A significant population or combination of rare or scarce plants species, or those identified as priorities under Biodiversity Action Plans..	See attached species lists for details of rare and scarce species.
4.	At least 0.5 ha unless part of or adjacent to a habitat of CWS quality.	
5.	Presence of rare or scarce fauna	

Qualification: A site must normally have attribute 4 combined with any of 1 or 2 or 5.