



## Contacts

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*Derbyshire Wildlife Trust is a registered charity with more than 10,000 members supporting its work to protect the county's wildlife.*

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[www.derbyshirewildlifetrust.org.uk](http://www.derbyshirewildlifetrust.org.uk)

### RSPB

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### DEFRA

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[www.rspb.org.uk](http://www.rspb.org.uk)

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## Further Information

Hawke & Jose (1996) *Reedbed Management for Commercial and Wildlife Interests*. RSPB, Sandy.

Agate & Brooks (2001-2003) *Waterways and Wetland: a practical handbook*. BTCV.

Available online at <http://handbooks.btcv.org.uk/handbooks/index>

Andrews & Rebane (1997) *Farming and Wildlife. A practical management handbook*. RSPB, Sandy

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## Derbyshire Wildlife Trust



Extensive reedbeds, large waterlogged stands of *Phragmites* reeds were once found across river floodplains and on low-lying coastal marshes.

Since the end of World War II, almost half of British reedbeds have been lost, and remaining areas are now mostly fragmented into small blocks and threatened by neglect and lack of management, as well as the potential effects of global climate change, such as sea level rise and future summer water shortages. Reedbed is now one of the most threatened habitats in the UK.

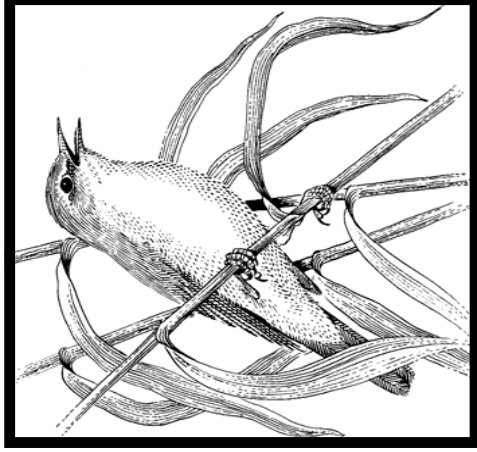
## reedbeds



# reeds and reedbeds

## *The importance of reedbeds*

Reedbeds are home to many animals and plants which rely on reeds and the conditions that reedbeds provide for some or all of their life cycle. Several species of birds are particularly dependent on reedbeds for their survival in the UK, from the rare and elusive bittern to more widespread and familiar birds such as reed warbler, sedge warbler, reed bunting and water rail.



At least 700 species of invertebrates have been found to be associated with reedbeds, of which 40 species of insect are entirely dependent on *Phragmites*. Reedbed specialists include the handsome swallowtail butterfly, now restricted to the Broads of East Anglia, as well as more widespread species including wainscot moths and reed beetles.

Even in areas where reed dominates, there are always other plants to be found. Common species in the wettest areas include reedmace, yellow iris and bur-reed, while drier areas of reedbeds may also support hemp agrimony, greater willowherb and bittersweet, while scrub species such as willows, alder and alder buckthorn may invade the edges.

## *Reedbed management*

Without management, a reedbed will gradually dry out, becoming colonised by tall herbs such as greater willowherb and stinging nettle as the reed litter builds up and eventually developing into scrub and damp woodland.

Traditionally, many reedbeds were managed for roofing thatch or for hay for grazing animals. As well as producing a useful crop, reed cutting reduces the rate of litter accumulation, stimulates the growth of new buds and controls the spread of reeds into open water.

Management of reedbeds for wildlife should consist of a combination of 'traditional' reed cutting together with control of water levels, with the timing of each phase of management determined by the species present in the reedbed and the desired end result. Winter cutting with spring flooding will encourage *Phragmites* itself, while summer cutting with winter flooding will benefit a more varied community of fen plants.

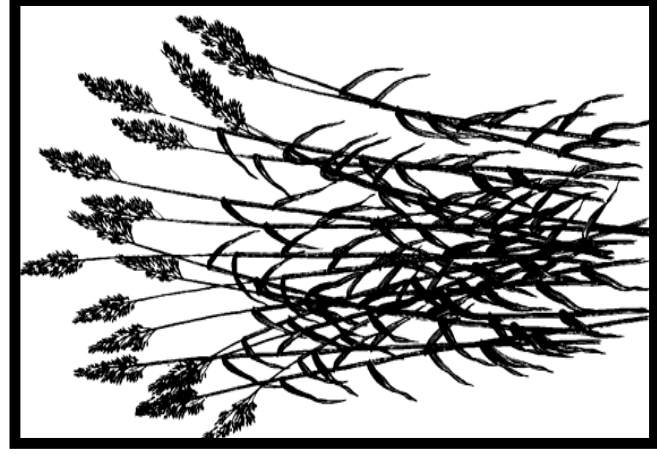
## *Creating new reedbeds*

For large scale reedbed creation to be successful, the chosen site should possess the following characteristics:

- A reliable water supply, sufficient to maintain a flow and up to 30 centimetres surface depth in summer
- Some control of water levels, such as sluices, ditches and bunds
- No potential to flood neighbouring land
- A level or very shallow gradient
- Existing reedbeds nearby to help establish reed across the new site
- Good access for management

Reed may colonise a newly created wetland site naturally, if there are other reedbeds nearby, or it may be necessary to introduce them. This can be done using seed, young plants, cuttings or rhizomes. Whichever method is chosen, the reed should be sourced from reedbeds as near to the new site as possible.

For detailed advice on land forming and water control for reedbed creation, see the 'Further information' list on the back page of this factsheet.



Line drawings © English Nature

Large reedbeds tend to support more species and are more likely to attract bittern or marsh harrier, but a network of smaller reedbeds or swamps, interconnected by ditches and drains will provide valuable habitat for many wetland species.

Small reedbeds can be fairly easily created by transplanting *Phragmites* rhizomes in the winter to a shallow scrape on land that remains waterlogged throughout the year.

Space the clumps about 1 metre apart and just above the water table in damp ground at the margins. Once established, *Phragmites* will quickly spread and may become invasive, at which point management may become necessary.